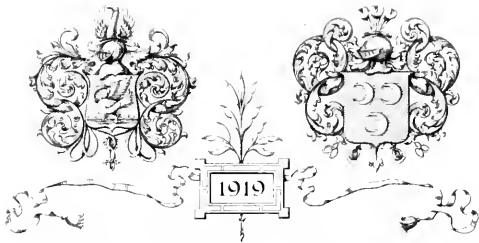


NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 06828160 3



GANSEVOORT-LANSING
COLLECTION

*given to the New York Public Library
Astor Lenox and Tilden Foundations*

BY VICTOR HUGO PALTSITS

under the terms of the last will and testament of

CATHERINE GANSEVOORT LANSING

*granddaughter of
General Peter Gansevoort, junior
and widow of the
Honorable Abraham Lansing
of Albany, New York*

Blair
212

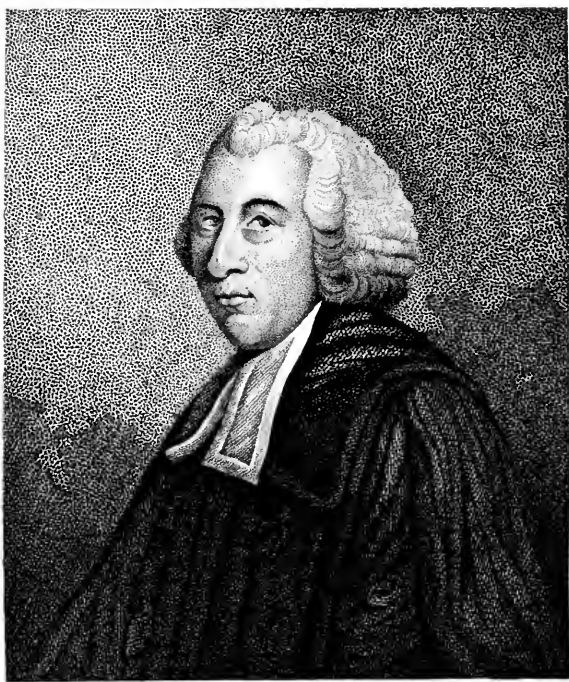


7.0

GANSEVOORT - LANSING
COLLECTION

B. 17
212

LIBRARY
- ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS



HUGH BLAIR. D.D.

Published by Hickman & Hazard

Gansevoort.

SERMONS,

BY

HUGH BLAIR, D. D. F. R. S. ED.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH, AND PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND
BELLES LETRES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

SECOND COMPLETE AMERICAN EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

PHILADELPHIA:

HICKMAN & HAZZARD, NO. 121, CHESNUT-STREET

1822.

Handwritten scribbles at the top of the page.

T

STORIA

Small handwritten mark or characters.

Faint handwritten notes or scribbles at the bottom left corner.

CONTENTS OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

A. SHORT Account of the Life and Character of Dr. Hugh Blair, PAGE 9

SERMON I.

On the Union of Piety and Morality.

ACTS, x. 4. Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God, - - - 21

SERMON II.

On the Influence of Religion upon Adversity.

PSALM xxvii. 5. In the time of trouble, he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock, - - - 30

SERMON III.

On the Influence of Religion upon Prosperity.

PSALM i. 3. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper, 42

SERMON IV.

On our Imperfect Knowledge of a Future State.

1 CORINTH. xiii. 12. For now we see through a glass, darkly, 52

SERMON V.

On the Death of Christ.

[Preached at the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

JOHN, xvii. 1. Jesus lift up his eyes to Heaven, and said, Father! the hour is come, - - - 63

SERMON VI.

On Gentleness.

JAMES, iii. 17. The wisdom that is from above, is gentle— 74

SERMON VII.

On the Disorders of the Passions.

ESTHER, v. 13. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate, PAGE 84

SERMON VIII.

On our Ignorance of Good and Evil in this Life.

ECCLESIASTES, vi. 12. Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow? - - - - - 95

SERMON IX.

On Religious Retirement.

PSALM iv. 4. Commune with your own heart, upon your bed, and be still, - - - - - 106

SERMON X.

On Devotion.

ACTS, x. 2. Cornelius—A devout man— - - - - 117

SERMON XI.

On the Duties of the Young.

TITUS, ii. 6. Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded, 132

SERMON XII.

On the Duties and Consolations of the Aged.

PROVERBS, xvi. 31. The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness, - - - 145

SERMON XIII.

On the Power of Conscience.

GENESIS, xlii. 21, 22. And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us; and we would not hear: Therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold also his blood is required, - - - 157

SERMON XIV.

On the Mixture of Joy and Fear in Religion.

PSALM ii. 11. Rejoice with trembling, - - - 170

SERMON XV.

On the Motives to Constancy in Virtue.

GAL. vi. 9. And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not, - PAGE 180

SERMON XVI.

On the Importance of Order in Conduct.

1 CORINTH. xiv. 40. Let all things be done—in order, 192

SERMON XVII.

On the Government of the Heart.

PROVERBS, iv. 23. Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life, - - - 202

SERMON XVIII.

The same Subject continued.

PROVERBS, iv. 23. Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life, - - - 211

SERMON XIX.

On the Unchangeableness of the Divine Nature.

JAMES, i. 17. Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, - - 222

SERMON XX.

On the Compassion of Christ.

[Preached at the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

HEBREWS, iv. 15. We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, - - 234

SERMON XXI.

On the Love of Praise.

JOHN, xii. 43. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, - - - 245

SERMON XXII.

On the proper Estimate of Human Life.

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 8. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity, - - - 256

SERMON XXIII.

On Death.

PSALM xxiii. 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me, - PAGE 269

SERMON XXIV.

On the Happiness of a Future State.

[Preached at the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

REV. vii. 9. After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, 282

SERMON XXV.

On Candour.

1 CORINTH. xiii. 5. Charity—thinketh no evil, - 294

SERMON XXVI.

On the Character of Joseph.

GENESIS, xlv. 5. 8. Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God, - - - 306

SERMON XXVII.

On the Character of Hazael.

2 KINGS, viii. 12, 13. And Hazael said, why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel. Their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But, what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria. - 316

SERMON XXVIII.

On the Benefits to be derived from the House of Mourning.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 2, 3, 4. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the

heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth, - - - - - PAGE 328

SERMON XXIX.

On the Divine government of the Passions of Men.

PSALM lxxvi. 10. Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain, - 339

SERMON XXX.

On the Importance of Religious Knowledge to Mankind.

[Preached before the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian knowledge.]

ISAIAH, xi. 9. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea, - - 351

SERMON XXXI.

On the True Honour of Man.

PROVERBS, iv. 8. Exalt her and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour, - - - 363

SERMON XXXII.

On Sensibility.

ROMANS, xii. 15. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep, - - - 371

SERMON XXXIII.

On the Improvement of Time.

GENESIS, xlvii. 8. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? - - - 379

SERMON XXXIV.

On the Duties belonging to Middle Age.

1 CORINTH. xiii. 11. —When I became a man I put away childish things, - - - 387

SERMON XXXV.

On Death.

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 5. —Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets, - - 396

SERMON XXXVI.

On the Progress of Vice.

- I CORINTH. xv. 33. Be not deceived; Evil communications
corrupt good manners, - - - PAGE 404

SERMON XXXVII.

On Fortitude.

- PSALM xxvii. 3. Though an host should encamp against me, my
heart shall not fear. - - - 412

SERMON XXXVIII.

On Envy.

- I CORINTH. xiii. 4. Charity envieth not, - 420

SERMON XXXIX.

On Idleness.

- MATTHEW, xx. 6. —Why stand ye here all the day idle? 429

SERMON XL.

On the Sense of the Divine Presence.

- PSALM lxxiii. 23. —I am continually with thee— 438

SERMON XLI.

On Patience.

- LUKE, xxi. 19. In your patience possess ye your souls, 447

A

SHORT ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

DR. HUGH BLAIR.

DR. HUGH BLAIR was born in Edinburgh, on the 7th day of April, 1718. His father, John Blair, a respectable merchant in that city, was a descendant of the ancient family of Blair in Ayrshire, and grandson of the famous Mr, Robert Blair, Minister of St. Andrew's, Chaplain to Charles I. and one of the most zealous and distinguished clergymen of the period in which he lived. This worthy man, though firmly attached to the cause of freedom, and to the Presbyterian form of church government, and though actively engaged in all the measures adopted for their support; yet, by his steady, temperate conduct, commanded the respect even of his opponents. In preference to all the other ecclesiastical leaders of the covenanting party, he was selected by the king himself to fill an office which, from the circumstances of the time, gave frequent access to the Royal Person; "because," said his Majesty, "that man is pious, prudent, learned, and of a meek and moderate calm temper."—His talents seem to have descended as an inheritance to his posterity. For, of the two sons who survived him, David, the eldest, was a clergyman of eminence in Edinburgh, father to Mr. Robert Blair, Minister of Athelstonford, the celebrated author of the poem entitled *The Grave*; and grandfather to his Majesty's Solicitor General for Scotland, whose masculine eloquence and profound knowledge of law, have, in the public estimation, placed him indisputably at the head of the Scottish bar. From his youngest son Hugh, who engaged in business as a merchant, and had the honour to fill a high station in the magistracy of Edinburgh, sprung the learned clergyman, who is the subject of this narrative.

The views of Dr. Blair, from his earliest youth, were turned towards the Church, and his education received a suitable direction. After the usual grammatical course at school, he entered the Humanity Class in the University of Edinburgh, in October 1730, and spent eleven years at that celebrated seminary, assiduously employed in the literary and scientific studies prescribed by the Church of Scotland, to all who are to become candidates for her licence to preach the Gospel. During this important period, he was distinguished among his companions both for diligence and proficiency; and obtained from the Professors under whom he studied, repeated testimonies of approbation. One of them deserves to be mentioned particularly, because, in his own opinion, it determined the bent of his genius towards polite literature. An essay, Περὶ τῆς καλῆς, or, *On the Beautiful*, written by him when a student of logic in the usual course of academical exercises, had the good fortune to attract the notice of Professor Stevenson, and, with circumstances honourable to the author, was appointed to be read in public at the conclusion of the Session. This mark of distinction made a deep impression on his mind; and the essay which merited it, he ever after recollected with partial affection, and preserved to the day of his death as the first earnest of his fame.

At this time, Dr. Blair commenced a method of study, which contributed much to the accuracy and extent of his knowledge, and which he continued to practise occasionally, even after his reputation was fully established. It consisted in making abstracts of the most important works which he read, and in digesting them according to the train of his own thoughts. History, in particular, he resolved to study in this manner; and, in concert with some of his youthful associates, he constructed a very comprehensive scheme of chronological tables, for receiving into its proper place every important fact that should occur. The scheme devised by this young student for his own private use was afterwards improved, filled up, and given to the public by his learned friend Dr. John Blair, Prebendary of Westminster, in his valuable work, "The Chronology and History of the "World."

In the year 1739, Dr. Blair took his degree of A. M. On that occasion he printed and defended a thesis. *De Fundamentis et Obligatione Legis Naturæ*, which contains a short, but masterly discussion of this important subject, and exhibits in elegant Latin, an outline of the moral principles, which have been since more fully unfolded and illustrated in his sermons.

The University of Edinburgh, about this period, numbered among her pupils many young men who were soon to make a distinguished figure in the civil, the ecclesiastical, and the literary history of their country. With most of them Dr. Blair entered

into habits of intimate connection, which no future competition or jealousy occurred to interrupt, which held them united through life in their views of public good, and which had the most beneficial influence on their own improvement, on the progress of elegance and taste among their contemporaries, and on the general interests of the community to which they belonged.

On the completion of this academical course, he underwent the customary trials before the Presbytery of Edinburgh, and received from that venerable body a licence to preach the Gospel, on the 21st of October 1741. His public life now commenced with very favourable prospects. The reputation which he brought from the University was fully justified by his first appearances in the pulpit; and, in a few months, the fame of his eloquence procured for him a presentation to the parish of Colessie in Fife, where he was ordained to the office of the holy ministry, on the 23d of September 1742. But he was not permitted to remain long in this rural retreat. A vacancy in the second charge of the Canongate of Edinburgh furnished to his friends an opportunity of recalling him to a station more suited to his talents. And though one of the most popular and eloquent clergymen in the Church was placed in competition with him, a great majority of the electors decided in favour of this young orator, and restored him in July 1743 to the bounds of his native city.

In this station Dr. Blair continued eleven years, discharging with great fidelity and success the various duties of the pastoral office. His discourses from the pulpit in particular attracted universal admiration. They were composed with uncommon care; and occupying a middle place between the dry metaphysical discussion of one class of preachers, and the loose incoherent declamation of another, they blended together in the happiest manner, the light of argument with the warmth of exhortation, and exhibited captivating specimens of what had hitherto been rarely heard in Scotland, the polished, well compacted, and regular didactic oration.

In consequence of a call from the Town-Council and General Session of Edinburgh, he was translated from the Canongate to Lady Yester's, one of the city churches, on the 11th of October 1754: and on the 15th day of June 1758, he was promoted to the High Church of Edinburgh, the most important ecclesiastical charge in the kingdom. To this charge he was raised at the request of the Lords of Council and Session, and of the other distinguished official characters who have their seats in that church. And the uniform prudence, ability, and success, which, for a period of more than forty years, accompanied all his ministerial labours in that conspicuous and difficult station, sufficiently evince the wisdom of their choice.

Hitherto his attention seems to have been devoted almost exclusively to the attainment of professional excellence; and to the regular discharge of his parochial duties. No production of his pen had yet been given to the world by himself, except two sermons preached on particular occasions, some translations, in verse, of passages of Scripture for the Psalmody of the Church, and a few articles in the Edinburgh Review; a publication begun in 1755, and conducted for a short time by some of the ablest men in the kingdom. But standing as he now did at the head of his profession, and released by the labour of former years from the drudgery of weekly preparation for the pulpit, he began to think seriously on a plan for teaching to others that art, which had contributed so much to the establishment of his own fame. With this view, he communicated to his friends a scheme of Lectures on Composition; and, having obtained the approbation of the University, he began to read them in the College on the 11th of December 1759. To this undertaking he brought all the qualifications requisite for executing it well; and along with them a weight of reputation, which could not fail to give effect to the lessons he should deliver. For besides the testimony given to his talents by his successive promotions in the church, the University of St. Andrew's, moved chiefly by the merit of his eloquence, had in June 1757, conferred on him the degree of D. D. a literary honour which, at that time was very rare in Scotland. Accordingly his first Course of Lectures was well attended, and received with great applause. The patrons of the University, convinced that they would form a valuable addition to the system of education, agreed in the following summer to institute a rhetorical class, under his direction, as a permanent part of their academical establishment: and on the 7th of April 1762, His Majesty was graciously pleased "To erect and endow a Professorship of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh, and to appoint Dr. Blair, in consideration of his approved qualifications, Regius Professor thereof with a salary of 70*l*." These Lectures he published in 1783, when he retired from the labours of the office; and the general voice of the public has pronounced them to be a most judicious, elegant, and comprehensive system of rules for forming the style and cultivating the taste of youth.

About the time in which he was occupied in laying the foundations of this useful institution, he had an opportunity of conferring another important obligation on the literary world, by the part which he acted in rescuing from oblivion the poems of Ossian. It was by the solicitation of Dr. Blair and Mr. John Home that Mr. Macpherson was induced to publish his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*: and their patronage was of essential service in procuring the subscription which enabled him to un-

undertake his tour through the Highlands for collecting the materials of Fingal, and of those other delightful productions which bear the name of Ossian. To these productions Dr. Blair applied the test of genuine criticism, and soon after their publication gave an estimate of their merits in a *Dissertation* which, for beauty of language, delicacy of taste, and acuteness of critical investigation, has few parallels. It was printed in 1763, and spread the reputation of its author throughout Europe.

The great objects of his literary ambition being now attained, his talents were for many years consecrated solely to the important and peculiar employments of his station. It was not till the year 1777, that he could be induced to favour the world with a volume of the Sermons which had so long furnished instruction and delight to his own congregation. But this volume being well received, the public approbation encouraged him to proceed: three other volumes followed at different intervals; and all of them experienced a degree of success of which few publications can boast. They circulated rapidly and widely wherever the English tongue extends; they were soon translated into almost all the languages of Europe; and his present Majesty, with that wise attention to the interests of religion and literature which distinguishes his reign, was graciously pleased to judge them worthy of a public reward. By a royal mandate to the Exchequer of Scotland, dated July 25th, 1780, a pension of 200*l.* a year was conferred on their author, which continued unaltered till his death.

The motives which gave rise to the present volume* are sufficiently explained by himself in his Address to the Reader. The Sermons which it contains were composed at very different periods of his life; but they were all written out anew in his own hand, and in many parts re-composed, during the course of last summer, after he had completed his eighty-second year. They were delivered to the publishers about six weeks before his death, in the form and order in which they now appear. And it may gratify his readers to know that the last of them which he composed, though not the last in the order adopted for publication, was the Sermon on *A Life of Dissipation and Pleasure*—a sermon written with great dignity and eloquence, and which should be regarded as his solemn parting admonition to a class of men, whose conduct is highly important to the community, and whose reformation and virtue he had long laboured most zealously to promote.

* These sermons were published by the Author at different times—the volume referred to above, which is the 5th of the London Copy, commences in this Edition with the Sermon on *Hopes and Disappointments*.

The Sermons which he has given to the world are universally admitted to be models in their kind; and they will long remain durable monuments of the piety, the genius, and sound judgment of their author. But they formed only a small part of the discourses he prepared for the pulpit. The remainder modesty led him to think unfit for the press; and influenced by an excusable solicitude for his reputation, he left behind him an explicit injunction that his numerous manuscripts should be destroyed. The greatness of their number was creditable to his professional character, and exhibited a convincing proof that his fame as a public teacher had been honourably purchased, by the most unwearied application to the private and unseen labours of his office. It rested on the uniform intrinsic excellence of his Discourses, in point of matter and composition, rather than on foreign attractions, for his delivery, though distinct, serious, and impressive, was not remarkably distinguished by that magic charm of voice and action which captivates the senses and imagination, and which, in the estimation of superficial hearers, constitutes the chief merit of a preacher.

In that department of his professional duty, which regarded the government of the church, Dr. Blair was steadily attached to the cause of moderation. From diffidence, and perhaps from a certain degree of inaptitude for extemporaneous speaking, he took a less public part in the contests of ecclesiastical politics than some of his contemporaries; and from the same causes, he never would consent to become Moderator of the General assembly of the Church of Scotland. But his influence among his brethren was extensive: his opinion, guided by that sound uprightness of judgment, which formed the predominant feature of his intellectual character, had been always held in high respect by the friends with whom he acted; and, for many of the last years of his life, it was received by them almost as a law. The great leading principle in which they cordially concurred with him, and which directed all their measures, was to preserve the church, on the one side, from a slavish, corrupting dependence on the civil power; and, on the other, from a greater infusion of democratical influence than is compatible with good order, and the established constitution of the country.

The reputation which he acquired in the discharge of his public duties, was well sustained by the great respectability of his private character. Deriving from family associations a strong sense of clerical decorum, feeling on his heart deep impressions of religious and moral obligation, and guided in his intercourse with the world, by the same correct and delicate taste which appeared in his writings, he was eminently distinguished through life by the prudence, purity, and dignified propriety of his con-

duct. His mind, by constitution and culture, was admirably formed for enjoying happiness. Well-balanced in itself by the nice proportion and adjustment of its faculties, it did not incline him to any of those eccentricities, either of opinion or of action, which are too often the lot of genius:—free from all tincture of envy, it delighted cordially in the prosperity and fame of his companions; sensible to the estimation in which he himself was held, it disposed him to dwell at times on the thought of his success with a satisfaction which he did not affect to conceal: inaccessible alike to gloomy and to peevish impressions, it was always master of its own movements, and ready, in an uncommon degree, to take an active and pleasing interest in every thing, whether important or trifling, that happened to become for the moment the object of his attention. This habit of mind, tempered with the most unsuspecting simplicity, and united to eminent talents and inflexible integrity, while it secured to the last his own relish of life, was wonderfully calculated to endear him to his friends, and to render him an invaluable member of any society to which he belonged. Accordingly there have been few men more universally respected by those who knew him, more sincerely esteemed in the circle of his acquaintance, or more tenderly beloved by those who enjoyed the blessings of his private and domestic connection.

In April 1748, he married his cousin Catharine Bannatine, daughter of the Reverend James Bannatine, one of the ministers of Edinburgh. By her he had a son who died in infancy, and a daughter, who lived to her twenty-first year, the pride of her parents, and adorned with all the accomplishments that became her age and sex. Mrs. Blair herself, a woman of great good sense and spirit, was also taken from him a few years before his death, after she had shared with the tenderest affection in all his fortunes, and contributed near half a century to his happiness and comfort.

Dr. Blair had been naturally of a feeble constitution of body; but as he grew up, his constitution acquired greater firmness and vigour. Though liable to occasional attacks from some of the sharpest and most painful diseases that afflict the human frame, he enjoyed a state of general good health; and, through habitual cheerfulness, temperance, and care, survived the usual term of human life.—For some years he had felt himself unequal to the fatigue of instructing his very large congregation from the pulpit: and, under the impression which this feeling produced, he has been heard at times to say with a sigh, “that he was left almost the “last of his contemporaries.” Yet he continued to the end in the regular discharge of all his other official duties, and particularly in giving advice to the afflicted, who, from different quarters of the kingdom, solicited his correspondence. His

last summer was devoted to the preparation of this volume of Sermons; and, in the course of it, he exhibited a vigour of understanding and capacity of exertion equal to that of his best days. He began the winter, pleased with himself on account of the completion of this work; and his friends were flattered with the hope that he might live to enjoy the accession of emolument and fame which he expected it would bring. But the seeds of a mortal disease were lurking unperceived within him. On the 24th of December 1800, he complained of a pain in his bowels, which, during that and the following day, gave him but little uneasiness; and he received as usual the visits of his friends. On the afternoon of the 26th, the symptoms became violent and alarming:—he felt that he was approaching the end of his appointed course: and retaining to the last moment the full possession of his mental faculties, he expired on the morning of the 27th, with the composure and hope which become a Christian pastor.

The lamentation for his death was universal and deep through the city which he had so long instructed and adorned. Its Magistrates, participating in the general grief, appointed his church to be put in mourning; and his colleague in it, the writer of this Narrative, who had often experienced the inestimable value of his counsel and friendship, delivered on the Sabbath after his funeral, a discourse to his congregation, with an extract from which this account shall be closed. It is inserted here at the particular request of that very respectable body of men who composed his Kirk Session, and who, by their public approbation of this tribute to his memory, are desirous of transmitting with his Sermons, to posterity, a memorial of the veneration and esteem with which his conduct had inspired them.—After exhorting to contemplate and follow the patriarchs and saints of former ages, *who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises*, the preacher thus proceeded:

“ In this competition for virtuous attainment, it may be often
 “ useful to bring down your eye, from contemplating the depart-
 “ ed worthies of distant times and countries, towards patterns of
 “ imitation that are endeared to you by more tender ties. If, in
 “ the relations of life, you have had a connection—if, in the cir-
 “ cle of your own family, you have had a father, a husband, or
 “ a brother, who discharged with exemplary fidelity the duties
 “ of his station, whom every tongue blessed as the friend of
 “ God and man, and who died as he lived, full of faith and
 “ hope, place him before you as the model of your conduct—
 “ conceive him bending from his seat in the skies, pleased with
 “ your attachment, deeply interested in your success, and cheer-
 “ ing you in your labours of love. His image will be as a guar-
 “ dian angel, to admonish you when dangers approach, to rouse

“within you every principle of virtuous exertion, and to inspire you with strength to overcome.

“Our hearts, christians, have been deeply pierced with the loss of a most valuable connection, of a venerable pastor, who watched long for our souls, and, with the most unwearied fidelity, pointed out to us the path of happiness. To you, and to the general interests of pure religion, he was attached by many powerful obligations. A native of this city, and descended from a family, which, in former times, had given several bright ornaments to the Church of Scotland, he felt the warmest tendencies of nature co-operating with the principles of duty, to call forth all his powers in the sacred service to which he was devoted. And by the blessing of God on his industry, he rose to an eminence in professional merit, which has reflected distinguished honour on the city, on the church, and on the country which produced him.

“It was the fortune of Dr. Blair to appear at a period when the literature of his country was just beginning to receive polish and an useful direction; and when it was emulously cultivated by a bright constellation of young men who are destined to carry it to high perfection. In concert with them he applied himself with diligence and assiduity to all those branches of study which could contribute to form him for the eloquence of the pulpit. This was the department in which he chose to excel; to which all the force of his genius was directed; and in which he soon felt that his efforts were to be successful. For from the very commencement of his theological studies, he gave presages of his future attainments; and, in the societies of his youthful companions, laid the foundations of that splendid reputation, which, through a long life of meritorious service continued to increase; and which has procured for him as a religious instructor, access to the understandings and the hearts of all the most cultivated inhabitants of the Christian world.

“To you, my brethern, who have long enjoyed the inestimable blessing of his immediate instruction, it will not be necessary to describe the qualities of that luminous, fascinating eloquence, with which he was accustomed to warm, and ravish, and amend your hearts. You may have heard others who equalled, or even excelled him in some of the requisites of pulpit oratory, in occasional profoundness of thought, in vivid flashes of imagination, or in pathetic addresses to the heart. But there never was a public teacher in whom all these requisites were combined in juster proportions, placed under the direction of a more exquisite sense of propriety, and employed with more uniform success to convey useful

“ and practical instruction. Standing on the foundation of the
 “ Apostles and Prophets, he exhibited the doctrines of Christ
 “ in their genuine purity, separated from the dross of supersti-
 “ tion, and traced with inimitable elegance, through all their
 “ beneficial influence on the consolation, on the order, and on
 “ the virtue of both public and private life. Hence, his dis-
 “ courses, uniting in the most perfect form the attractions of
 “ utility and beauty, gave a new and better tone to the style of
 “ instruction from the pulpit; and contributed in a remarkable
 “ degree to correct and refine the religious, the moral, and the
 “ literary taste of the times in which he lived.

“ The universal admiration which attended his ministerial la-
 “ hours, was some recompense to him for the exertions they had
 “ cost. But his chief recompense arose from the consciousness
 “ of having contributed so eminently to edify the Church of
 “ of Christ, and from the improving influence which his labours
 “ had shed on his own heart. For he was, at home and in him-
 “ self, the perfect image of that meekness, simplicity, gentle-
 “ ness, and contentment, which his writings recommend. He
 “ was long happy in his domestic relations; and though doom-
 “ ed at last to feel, through their loss in succession, the heavi-
 “ est strokes of affliction; yet his mind, fortified by religious
 “ habits, and buoyed up by his native tendency to contentment,
 “ sustained itself on God, and enabled him to persevere to the
 “ end in the active and cheerful discharge of the duties of his
 “ station; preparing for the world the blessings of elegant in-
 “ struction; tendering to the mourner the lessons of divine con-
 “ solation; guiding the young by his counsels; aiding the meri-
 “ torious with his influence, and supporting by his voice and by
 “ his conduct, the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of his
 “ Country.

“ With such dispositions and habits it was natural that he
 “ should enjoy a distinguished portion of felicity. And perhaps
 “ there never was a man who experienced more completely that
 “ *the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her*
 “ *paths are peace.* His Country was proud of his merits, and
 “ at different times conferred on him, through the hands of the
 “ Sovereign, the most honourable and substantial proofs of her
 “ approbation: foreign lands learned from him the way of sal-
 “ vation: he saw marks of deference and respect wherever he
 “ appeared: and he felt within himself the gratulations of a
 “ good conscience, and the hope of immortality. It was pecu-
 “ liarly delightful to see him in the latest period of his life, at
 “ the venerable age of eighty-two, looking back on almost three
 “ score years spent in the public service of his God, pleased
 “ with the recollections which it gave, possessing a mind still

“vigorous and clear, the delight of his friends, sensible to the
“attentions which they paid to him, burning with zeal for the
“good of the Church, and with all the ardour of youthful am-
“bition, preparing the materials of a new claim to the grati-
“tude and admiration of posterity. In this active state of pre-
“paration, with the lamp of life still clear and bright, he was
“found by the great Lord of all when he came to say, ‘It is
“enough;’ and, after a single night of pain, to call him gently to
“his rest.

“He has gone to give an account of his stewardship.—The
“Church mourns in him the loss of her brightest ornament. Let
“us submit to the stroke with resignation and reverence; and as
“the most acceptable proof of respect to his memory, let us learn
“to practise the lessons which he taught.”

J. FINLAYSON.

EDINBURGH,
March 13th, 1801.

SERMON 1.

ON THE UNION OF PIETY AND MORALITY.

Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.—ACTS, x. 4.

THE High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, dwelleth also with him that is of humble and contrite heart. In the midst of his glory, the Almighty is not inattentive to the meanest of his subjects. Neither obscurity of station, nor imperfection of knowledge, sinks those below his regard who worship and obey him. Every prayer which they send up from their secret retirements is listened to by him; and every work of charity which they perform, how unknown soever to the world, attracts his notice. The text presents a signal instance of this comfortable truth. In the city of Cæsarea, there dwelt a Roman centurion, a military officer of inferior rank, a Gentile, neither by birth nor religion entitled to the privileges of the Jewish nation. But he was a devout and benevolent man; who, according to his measure of religious knowledge, studied to perform his duty, *prayed to God always, and gave much alms to the people.* Such a character passed not unobserved by God. So highly was it honoured, that to this good centurion an Angel was sent from heaven, in order to direct him to the means of full instruction in the truth. The Angel accosts him with this salutation, *Cornelius, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

It is to the conjunction of *prayers and alms* that I purpose now to direct your thoughts, as describing the respectable and amiable character of a man, as forming the honour and the blessedness of a true Christian; piety, joined with charity, faith with good works, devotion with morality. These are things which God hath connected, and which it is impious in man to separate. It is only when they remain united, that they can come up as a grateful *memorial before God.* I shall first endeavour to show you, That alms, without prayers, or prayers without alms, morality without devotion, or devotion without morality, are extremely defective; and then shall point out the happy effects of their mutual union.

LET us begin with considering the case of alms without prayers; that is, of good works without piety, or a proper sense of God and religion. Examples of this are not uncommon in the world. With many, virtue is, or at least is pretended to be, a respectable and an honoured name, while piety sounds meanly, in their ears. They are men of the world, and they claim to be men of honour. They rest upon their humanity, their public spirit, their probity, and their truth. They arrogate to themselves all the manly and the active virtues. But devout affections, and religious duties, they treat with contempt, as founded on shadowy speculations, and fit to employ the attention only of weak and superstitious minds. Now, in opposition to such persons, I contend, that this neglect of piety argues depravity of heart; find that it infers an irregular discharge of the duties of morality.

FIRST, it argues internal depravity; for it discovers a cold and a hard heart. If there be any impression which man is formed by nature to receive, it is a sense of religion. As soon as his mind opens to observation and reflection, he discerns innumerable marks of his dependent state. He finds himself placed, by some superior power, in a vast world, where the wisdom and goodness of the Creator are conspicuous on every side. The magnificence, the beauty and order of nature, excite him to admire and adore. When he looks up to that omnipotent hand which operates throughout the universe, he is impressed with reverence. When he receives blessings which he cannot avoid ascribing to divine goodness, he is prompted to gratitude. The expressions of those affections, under the various forms of religious worship, are no other than native effusions of the human heart. Ignorance may mislead, and superstition may corrupt them; but their origin is derived from sentiments that are essential to man.

Cast your eyes over the whole earth. Explore the most remote quarters of the east or the west. You may discover tribes of men without policy, or laws, or cities, or any of the arts of life. But no where will you find them without some form of religion. In every region you behold the prostrate worshipper, the temple, the altar, and the offering. Wherever men have existed, they have been sensible that some acknowledgment was due, on their part, to the Sovereign of the world. If in their rudest and most ignorant state, this obligation has been left, what additional force must it acquire by the improvements of human knowledge, but especially by the great discoveries of the Christian revelation? Whatever either, from reverence or from gratitude, can excite men to the worship of God, is by this revelation placed in such a light, as one should think were sufficient to

overawe the most thoughtless, and to melt the most obdurate mind.

Canst thou, then, pretend to be a man of reason, nay a man of virtue, and yet continue regardless of one of the first and chief dictates of human nature? Where is thy sensibility to what is right and fit, if that loud voice which calls all nations throughout the earth to religious homage, has never been heard by thee? Or, if it has been heard, by what strange and false refinements hast thou stifled those natural sentiments which it tends to awaken? Calling thyself a son, a citizen, a friend; claiming to be faithful and affectionate in these relations; hast thou no sense of what thou owest to thy first Parent, thy highest Sovereign, thy greatest Benefactor? Can it be consistent with true virtue or honour, to value thyself upon thy regard to inferior obligations, and yet to violate that which is the most sacred and the most ancient of all? When simple instinct teaches the Tartar and the Indian, together with his aims and good works, to join his prayers to that Power whom he considers as the source of good, shall it be no reproach in the most enlightened state of human nature, and under the purest dispensation of religion, to have extinguished the sense of gratitude to Heaven, and to slight all acknowledgment of the great and the true God? What does such conduct imply, but either an entire want, or a wilful suppression, of some of the best and most generous affections belonging to human nature?—Surely, there must be an essential defect in that heart which remains cold and insensible, where it ought to be affected most warmly. Surely, such a degree of depravity must be lodged there, as is sufficient to taint all the other springs of pretended virtue.

BUT Besides this, I must contend, in the second place, That where religion is neglected, there can be no regular nor steady practice of the duties of morality. The character will be often inconsistent; and virtue, placed on a basis too narrow to support it, will be always loose and tottering. For such is the propensity of our nature to vice, so numerous are the temptations to a relaxed and immoral conduct, that stronger restraints than those of mere reason, are necessary to be imposed on man. The sense of right and wrong, the principle of honour, or the instinct of benevolence, are barriers too feeble to withstand the strength of passion. In the tranquil seasons of life, these natural principles may, perhaps, carry on the ordinary course of social duties with some regularity. But wait until some trying emergence come. Let the conflict of passions arise. Let the heart be either wounded by sore distress, or agitated by violent emotions; and you shall presently see, that virtue without religion is inadequate to the government of life. It is destitute of its proper guard, of its firmest support, of its chief encouragement. It will sink

under the weight of misfortune ; or will yield to the solicitation of guilt.

The great motives that produce constancy and firmness of action, must be of a palpable and striking kind. A divine Legislator, uttering his voice from heaven ; an omniscient Witness, beholding us in all our retreats ; an Almighty Governor, stretching forth his arm to punish or reward, disclosing the secrets of the invisible world, informing us of perpetual rest prepared hereafter, for the righteous, and of *indignation and wrath* awaiting the wicked : These are the considerations which overawe the world, which support integrity, and check guilt. They add to virtue that solemnity which should ever characterize it. To the admonitions of conscience they give the authority of a law. Cooperating with all the good dispositions of a pious man, they strengthen and insure their influence. On his alms you can have no certain dependence, who thinks not of God, nor has joined prayer to his charitable deeds. But when humanity is seconded by piety, the spring from which it flows, is rendered, of course, more regular and constant.—In short, withdraw religion, and you shake all the pillars of morality. In every heart you weaken the influence of virtue : And among the multitude, the bulk of mankind, you overthrow its power.

HAVING thus shown that morality, without devotion is both defective and unstable, I proceed to consider the other extreme, of prayers without alms, devotion without morality.

In every age the practice has prevailed, of substituting certain appearances of piety in the place of the great duties of humanity and mercy. Too many there have always been, who flatter themselves with the hope of obtaining the friendship of their Creator, though they neglect to do justice to their fellow-creatures. But such persons may be assured, that their supposed piety is altogether of a spurious kind. It is an invention of their own, unknown to reason, unknown to the word of God. In scripture we are ever directed to try our faith by our works, our love of God by our love of men. We are directed to consider piety as a principle which regenerates the heart, and forms it to goodness. We are taught that in vain we address any acts of homage to Christ, unless we *do the things which he saith* ; and that *love, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and temperance*, are not only the injunctions of his law, but the native *fruits of his spirit*.* If therefore, while piety seems ardent, morality shall decline, you have full reason to believe, that into that piety, some corrupting ingredients have entered. And if ever your regard to morality shall totally fail : if while you make many prayers, you give no alms ; if while you appear to be zealous for God, you are false

* Luke, v. 46. Gal. v. 22.

or unjust to men; if you are hard or contracted in heart, severe in your censures, and oppressive in your conduct; then conclude with certainty, that what you had termed piety was no more than an empty name. For as soon, according to the scripture similitude, will *bitter waters flow from a sweet fountain*, as such effects be produced by genuine piety.

What you have called by that name, resolves itself into one or other of three things. Either it is a hypocritical form of godliness, assumed in order to impose on the world; or, which is the most favourable supposition, it is a transient impression of seriousness, an accidental melting of the heart, which *passes away like the morning cloud and the early dew*; or, which I am afraid is too often the case, it is the deliberate refuge of a deluded and superstitious, but at the same time a corrupted mind. For all men, even the most depraved, are subject, more or less, to compunctions of conscience. It has never been in their power to withdraw totally beyond the reach of that warning voice, which tells them that something is necessary to be done, in order to make their peace with the Ruler of the world. But, backward at the same time to resign the gains of dishonesty, or the pleasures of vice; averse from submission to that sacred law, which enjoins righteousness in its whole extent, they have often attempted to make a sort of composition with Heaven; a composition, which though they dare not avow it in words, lurks in secret at the bottom of many a heart. If God will only dispense with some articles of obedience, they will repay him with abundant homage. If they fail in good practice, they will study to be sound in belief; and, by the number of their prayers, will atone, in some measure, for their deficiency in charitable deeds.

But the attempt is as vain as it is impious. From the simplest and plainest principles of reason it must appear that religious worship, disjoined from justice and virtue, can upon no account whatever find acceptance with the Supreme Being. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity even the solemn meetings.**—Cease foolish and impious man! cease to consider the Almighty as a weak or vain-glorious being, who is to be appeased by thy devout protestations, and thy humble words; or to be gratified by the parade and ostentation of external worship. What is all thy worship to him? *Will he eat the flesh of thy sacrifices, or drink the blood of offered goats?* Was worship required of thee, dost thou think, upon his account that thou mightest bring an increase to his glory and felicity by thy weak and insignificant

* Isaiah i. 11, 14.

praises? Sooner mightest thou increase the splendor of the sun by a lighted taper, or add to the thunder by thy voice. No: It is for the sake of man, not of God, that worship and prayers are required; not that God may be rendered more glorious, but that man may be made better; that he may be confirmed in a proper sense of his dependent state, and acquire those pious and virtuous dispositions in which his highest improvement consists.

Of all the principles in religion, one should take this to be the most evident; and yet frequent admonitions are needed, to renew the impression of it upon mankind. For what purpose did thy Creator place thee in this world, in the midst of human society, but that as a man among men thou mightest cultivate humanity; that each in his place might contribute to the general welfare; that as a spouse, a brother, a son, or a friend, thou mightest act thy part with an upright and a tender heart; and thus aspire to resemble Him who ever consults the good of his creatures, and whose *tender mercies are over all his works*? and darkest thou, who hast been sacrificing unsuspecting innocence to thy loose pleasures; thou, who hast been disturbing the repose of society by thine ambition or craft; thou who, to increase thy treasures, hast been making the widow and the orphan weep; darkest thou approach God with thy worship and thy prayers, and entertain the hope that he will look down upon thee in peace? Will the God of order and justice accept such poor compensation for his violated laws? Will the God of love regard the services of one who is an enemy to his creatures? Shall a corrupter of the society of men aspire to the habitations of pure and blessed spirits?—Believe it, *He that saith he loveth God, must love his brother also. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow*; And then, *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to thee; call upon him in the day of trouble and he will answer thee*. Thy prayers and thine aims shall then ascend in joint memorial before the Most High.

I HAVE now shown the evil of maiming and splitting religion; of dividing asunder two things, which though in theory they may be separated, yet in practice must always co-exist, if either of them be real; Devotion to God, and Charity to men. Let us consider next the happy effects of their union.

Their union forms the consistent, the graceful, the respectable character of the real Christian, the man of true worth. If you leave either of them out of your system, even though you excel in the other, you can stand trial only in one point of view. It is only on one side your character is fair; on the other, it will always be open to much reproach. And as you dishonour yourselves, so you do great injustice to religion. For, by dividing its parts from one another, you never fail to expose it to the censure

of the world : And perhaps, by this sort of partial and divided goodness, religion has suffered more in the esteem of mankind, than by open profligacy. The unbeliever will scoff at your piety, when he sees you negligent of moral duties. The bigot will decry all morality, when he sees you pretending to be a follower of virtue, though you be a despiser of God. Whereas, he who fears God, and is at the same just and benificent to men, exhibits religion to the world with full propriety. It shines in his conduct with its native splendour ; and its rays throw a glory round him. His character is above reproach. It is at once amiable and venerable. Malice itself is afraid to attack him ; and even the worst men respect and honour him in their hearts.

This too is the man whose life will be most peaceful and happy. He who fails materially either in piety or in virtue, is always obnoxious to the anguish of remorse. His partial goodness may flatter him in the day of superficial observation ; but when solitude or distress awakens the powers of reflection, he shall be made to feel that one part of duty performed, atones not for another which is neglected. In the midst of his prayers, the remembrance of injustice will upbraid him with hypocrisy ; and in the distribution of his alms, the prayers which the poor put up for him will make him blush for his neglect of God. Conscience will supply the place of the hand coming forth to write over against him on the wall, *Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.** Whereas, he who *holds both faith and a good conscience*, who attends equally to the discharge of his duty towards God and towards man, enjoys, as far as human imperfection allows, the sense of fairness and consistency in conduct, of integrity and soundness of heart.

The man of mere morality is a stranger to all the delicate and refined pleasures of devotion. In works of beneficence and mercy, he may enjoy satisfaction. But his satisfaction is destitute of that glow of affection, which enlivens the feelings of one who lifts his heart at the same time to the Father of the Universe, and considers himself as imitating God. The man again who rests solely in devotion, if that devotion open not his heart to humanity, not only remains a stranger to the pleasures of beneficence, but must often undergo the pain arising from bad passions. But when beneficence and devotion are united, they pour upon the man in whom they meet, the full pleasures of a good and pure heart. His alms connected him with men, his prayers with God. He looks without dismay on both worlds. All nature has to him a benign aspect. If engaged in active life, he is the friend of men ; and he is happy in the exertions of that friendship. If left in retirement, he walks among the works of

* Dan. v. 27.

nature as with God. Every object is enlivened to him by the sense of the Divine presence. Every where he traces the beneficent hand of the Author of nature; and every where, with glowing heart, he hears and answers his secret voice. When he looks up to heaven, he rejoices in the thought that there dwells that God whom he serves and honours; that Saviour in whom he trusts; that spirit of grace from whose inspiration his piety and his charity flow. When he looks around him on the world, he is soothed with the pleasing remembrance of good offices which he has done, or at least has studied to do, to many who dwell there. How comfortable the reflection, that him no poor man can upbraid for having withheld his due; him no unfortunate man can reproach for having seen and despised his sorrows; but that on his head are descending the prayers of the needy and the aged; and that the hands of those whom his protection has supported, or his bounty has fed, are lifted up in secret to bless him!

Life, passed under the influence of such dispositions, naturally leads to a happy end. It is not enough to say, that faith and piety, joined with active virtue, constitute the requisite preparation for heaven. They, in truth, begin the enjoyment of heaven. In every state of our existence, they form the chief ingredients of felicity. Hence, they are the great marks of Christian regeneration. They are the signature of that Holy Spirit, by which good men are said to be *sealed unto the day of redemption*. The text affords a striking proof of the estimation in which they are held by God, Amidst that infinite variety of human events which pass under his eye, the prayers and the alms of Cornelius attracted his particular notice. He remarked the amiable dispositions which rose in the heart of this good man. But he saw that they were yet imperfect, while he remained unenlightened by the principles of the Christian religion. In order to remove this obstruction to his rising graces, and to bring him to the full knowledge of that God whom he sought to honour, he was favoured with a supernatural message from heaven. While the princes of the earth were left to act by the councils of their own wisdom; while without interposition from above, generals conquered or fell, according to the vicissitude of human things; to this good Centurion an angel was commissioned from the throne of God.

What can I say more or higher in praise of this blessed character, than that it is what God delights to honour? Men single out, as the objects of distinction, the great, the brave, or the renowned. But he *who seeth not as man seeth*, passing by those qualities which often shine with false splendour to human observation, looks to the inward principles of action; to those principles which form the essence of a worthy character, and which, if called forth, would give birth to whatever is laudable

or excellent in conduct. Is there one, though in humble station, or obscure life, who *feareth God and worketh righteousness*; whose prayers and alms, proceeding in regular undiverted tenour, bespeak the upright, the tender, the devout heart? Those alms and prayers come up in memorial before that God who is *no respecter of persons*. The Almighty beholds him from his throne with complacency. Divine illumination is ready to instruct him. Angels minister to him. They now mark him out on earth as their future associate; and for him they make ready in paradise, *the white robes, the palms, and the sceptres* of the just.

To this honour, to this blessedness, let our hearts continually aspire; and throughout the whole of life, let those solemn and sacred words with which I conclude, sound in our ears, and be the great directory of our conduct:* *He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but—to do justly and love mercy—and to walk humbly with thy God?*

* Micah, vi. 8.

SERMON II.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION UPON ADVERSITY.

In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion ; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me ; he shall set me upon a rock.—PSALM XXVII. 5.

THE life of man has always been a very mixed state, full of uncertainty and vicissitude, of anxieties and fears. In every religious audience, there are many who fall under the denomination of the unfortunate ; and the rest are ignorant how soon they may be called to join them. For the prosperity of no man on earth is stable and assured. Dark clouds may soon gather over the heads of those whose sky is now most bright. In the midst of the deceitful calm which they enjoy, the storm that is to overwhelm them has perhaps already begun to ferment. *If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all ; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.**

Hence, to a thoughtful mind, no study can appear more important, than how to be suitably prepared for the misfortunes of life ; so as to contemplate them in prospect without dismay, and, if they must befall, to bear them without dejection. Throughout every age, the wisdom of the wise, the treasures of the rich, and the power of the mighty, have been employed, either in guarding their state against the approach of distress, or in rendering themselves less vulnerable by its attacks. Power has endeavoured to remove adversity to a distance ; Philosophy has studied when it drew nigh, to conquer it by patience ; and wealth has sought out every pleasure that can compensate or alleviate pain.

While the wisdom of the world is thus occupied, religion has been no less attentive to the same important object. It informs us in the text, of a *pavilion*, which God crects to shelter his servants *in the time of trouble* ; of a *secret place in his tabernacle*, into which he brings them ; of a *rock on which he sets them up* ; and elsewhere he tells us, of a *shield and a buckler* which he spreads before them, *to cover them from the terror by night, and*

* Eccles. xi. 8.

the arrow that flieth by day. Now of what nature are those instruments of defence which God is represented as providing with such solicitous care for those who fear him? Has he reared up any bulwarks, impregnable by misfortune, in order to separate the pious and virtuous from the rest of mankind, and to screen them from the common disasters of life? No; to those disasters we behold them liable no less than others. The defence which religion provides, is altogether of an internal kind. It is the heart, not the outward state, which it professes to guard. When the *time of trouble* comes, as come it must to all it places good men under *the pavilion* of the Almighty, by affording them that security and peace which arise from the belief of Divine protection. It brings them into the *secret of his tabernacle*, by opening to them sources of consolation which are hidden from others. By that strength of mind with which it endows them, *it sets them up upon a rock*, against which the tempest may violently beat, but which it cannot shake.

How far the comforts proceeding from religion merit those high titles under which they are here figuratively described, I shall in this discourse endeavour to show. I shall for this end compare together the situation of bad men, and that of the good, when both are suffering the misfortunes of life; and then make such improvement as the subject will naturally suggest.

I. RELIGION prepares the mind for encountering, with fortitude, the most severe shocks of adversity; whereas vice, by its natural influence on the temper, tends to produce dejection under the slightest trials. While worldly men enlarge their possessions, and extend their connexions, they imagine that they are strengthening themselves against all the possible vicissitudes of life. They say in their hearts, *My mountain stands strong, and I shall never be moved.* But so fatal is their delusion, that, instead of strengthening, they are weakening, that which can only support them when those vicissitudes come. It is their mind which must then support them; and their mind, by their sensual attachments, is corrupted and enfeebled. Addicted with intemperate fondness to the pleasures of the world, they incur two great and certain evils; they both exclude themselves from every resource except the world; and they increase their sensibility to every blow which comes upon them from that quarter.

They have neither principles nor temper which can stand the assault of trouble. They have no principles which lead them to look beyond the ordinary rotation of events; and therefore, when misfortunes involve them, the prospect must be comfortless on every side. Their crimes have disqualified them from looking up to the assistance of any higher power than their own ability, or for relying on any better guide than their own wisdom. And as from principle they can derive no support, so in a temper cor-

rupted by prosperity they find no relief. They have lost that moderation of mind which enables a wise man to accommodate himself to his situation. Long fed with false hopes, they are exasperated and stung by every disappointment. Luxurious and effeminate, they can bear no uneasiness. Proud and presumptuous, they can brook no opposition. By nourishing dispositions, which so little suit this uncertain state, they have infused a double portion of bitterness into the cup of woe; they have sharpened the edge of that sword which is lifted up to smite them. Strangers to all the temperate satisfactions of a good and a pure mind; strangers to every pleasure except what was seasoned by vice or vanity, their adversity is to the last degree disconsolate. Health and opulence were the two pillars on which they rested. Shake either of them; and their whole edifice of hope and comfort falls. Prostrate and forlorn, they are left on the ground, obliged to join with the man of Ephraim in his abject lamentation, *They have taken away my gods which I have made, and what have I more?**—Such are the causes to which we must ascribe the broken spirits, the peevish temper, and impatient passions, that so often attend the declining age, or fallen fortunes, of vicious men.

But how different is the condition of a truly good man in those trying situations of life! Religion had gradually prepared his mind for all the events of this inconstant state. It had instructed him in the nature of true happiness. It had early weaned him from the undue love of the world, by discovering to him its vanity, and by setting higher prospects in his view. Afflictions do not attack him by surprise, and therefore do not overwhelm him. He was equipped for the storm, as well as the calm, in this dubious navigation of life. Under those conditions, he knew himself to be brought hither, that he was not to retain always the enjoyment of what he loved: And therefore he is not overcome by disappointment, when that which is mortal, dies; when that which is mutable, begins to change; and when that which he knew to be transient, passes away.

All the principles which religion teaches, and all the habits which it forms, are favourable to strength of mind. It will be found, that whatever purifies, fortifies also the heart. In the course of living *righteously, soberly, and godly*, a good man acquires a steady and well governed spirit. Trained by Divine grace, to enjoy with moderation the advantages of the world, neither lifted up by success, nor enervated with sensuality, he meets the changes in his lot without unmanly dejection. He is inured to temperance and restraint. He has learned firmness and self-command. He is accustomed to look up to that Su-

* Judges, xviii 24.

preme Providence, which disposes of human affairs, not with reverence only, but with trust and hope.

The time of prosperity was to him not merely a season of barren joy, but productive of much useful improvement. He had cultivated his mind. He had stored it with useful knowledge, with good principles, and virtuous dispositions. These resources remain entire, when the days of trouble come. They remain with him in sickness, as in health; in poverty, as in the midst of riches; in his dark and solitary hours, no less than when surrounded with friends and gay society. From the glare of prosperity he can, without dejection, withdraw into the shade. Excluded from several advantages of the world, he may be obliged to retreat into a narrower circle, but within that circle he will find many comforts left. His chief pleasures were always of the calm, innocent, and temperate kind; and over these, the changes of the world have the least power. His mind is a kingdom to him; and he can still enjoy it. The world did not bestow upon him all his enjoyments; and therefore it is not in the power of the world, by its most cruel attacks, to carry them all away.

II. THE distresses of life are alleviated to good men, by reflections on their past conduct; while, by such reflections, they are highly aggravated to the bad. During the gay and active periods of life, sinners elude in some measure, the force of conscience. Carried round in the world of affairs and pleasures; intent on contrivance, or eager in pursuit; amused by hope, or elated by enjoyment; they are sheltered by that crowd of trifles which surrounds them, from serious thought. But conscience is too great a power to remain always suppressed. There is in every man's life, a period when he shall be made to stand forth as a real object to his own view: And when that period comes, woe to him who is galled by the sight! In the dark and solitary hour of distress, with a mind hurt and sore from some recent wound of fortune, how shall he bear to have his character for the first time disclosed to him, in that humiliating light under which guilt will necessarily present it? Then the recollection of the past becomes dreadful. It exhibits to him a life thrown away on vanities and follies, or consumed in flagitiousness and sin; no station properly supported; no material duties fulfilled. Crimes which once had been easily palliated, rise before him in their native deformity. The sense of guilt mixes itself with all that has befallen him. He beholds, or thinks that he beholds, the hand of the God whom he hath offended, openly stretched out against him.—At a season when a man stands most in need of support, how intolerable is the weight of this additional load, aggravating the depression of disease, disappointment, or old age! How miserable his state, who is condemned to endure

at once the pangs of guilt, and the vexations of calamity! *The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*

Whereas, he who is blessed with a clear conscience, enjoys in the worst conjunctures of human life, a peace, a dignity, an elevation of mind peculiar to virtue. The testimony of a good conscience is indeed to be always distinguished from that presumptuous boast of innocence, which every good Christian totally disclaims. The better he is, he will be the more humble, and sensible of his failings. But though he acknowledge that he can claim nothing from God upon the footing of desert, yet he can trust in his merciful acceptance through Jesus Christ, according to the terms of the gospel. He can hope that his *prayers and his alms have come up in memorial before God.*—The piety and virtue of his former life were as seeds sown in his prosperous state, of which he reaps the fruits in the season of adversity. The riches, the pleasures, and the friends of the world, may have made *wings to themselves, and flown away.*—But the improvement which he made of those advantages while they lasted, the temperate spirit with which he enjoyed them, the beneficent actions which he performed, and the good example which he set to others, remain behind. By the memory of these, he enjoys his prosperity a second time in reflection; and perhaps this second and reflected enjoyment is not inferior to the first. It arrives at a more critical and needful time. It affords him the high satisfaction of having extracted lasting pleasure from that which is short; and of having fixed that which by its nature was changing.—“If my race be now about to end, I have this comfort, that it has not been run in vain. *I have fought the good fight; I have kept the faith.* My mind has no load. Futurity has no terrors. I have endeavoured to do my duty, and to make my peace with God. I leave the rest to Heaven.” These are the reflections which *to the upright make light arise in darkness*; reflections which cheer the lonely house of virtuous poverty, and attend the conscientious sufferer into prison or exile; which soothe the complaints of grief, lighten the pressure of old age, and furnish to the bed of sickness, a cordial of more grateful relish, and more sovereign virtue, than any which the world can afford.

Look abroad into life, and you will find the general sense of mankind bearing witness to this important truth, that mind is superior to fortune; that what one feels within, is of much greater importance than all that befalls him without. Let a man be brought into some such severe and trying situation, as fixes the attention of the public on his behaviour. The first question which we put concerning him, is not, What does he suffer? but, How does he bear it? Has he a quiet mind? or, Does he appear to be unhapp-

py within? If we judge him to be composed and firm, resigned to Providence, and supported by conscious integrity, his character rises, and his misery lessens in our view. We esteem and admire, rather than pity him. Recollect what holy men have endured for the sake of conscience, and with what cheerfulness they have suffered. On the other hand, when conscience has concurred with outward misfortunes in distressing the guilty, think of the dreadful consequences which have ensued. How often, upon a reverse of fortune, after abused prosperity, have they madly hurried themselves over that precipice from which there is no return; and, in what nature most abhors, the voluntary extinction of life, have sought relief from that torment of reflection, which was become too great for them to bear?

Never then allow yourselves to imagine that misfortunes alone form the chief misery of man. None but the guilty are completely miserable. The misgiving and distrust, the accusations and reproaches of their minds, the sense of having drawn down upon their heads the evils which they suffer, and the terrifying expectation of more and worse evils to come; these are the essential ingredients of human misery. They not only whet the edge, but they envenom the darts of affliction, and add poison to the wound. Whereas, when misfortunes assail a good man, they carry no such fatal auxiliaries in their train. They may ruffle the surface of his soul; but there is a strength within, which resists their farther impression. The constitution of his mind is sound. The world can inflict upon no wounds, but what admit of cure.

III. ILL men, in the time of trouble, can look up to no protector; while good men commit themselves, with trust and hope, to the care of Heaven. The human mind, naturally feeble, is made to feel all its weakness by the pressure of adversity. Dejected with evils which overpower its strength, it relies no longer on itself. It casts every where around, a wishing, exploring eye, for some shelter to screen, some power to uphold it; and if, when abandoned by the world, it can find nothing to which it may fly in the room of the world, its state is truly forlorn. Now, whither should the ungodly, in this situation, turn for aid?—After having contended with the storms of adverse fortune till their spirits are exhausted, gladly would they retreat at last to the sanctuary of religion. But that sanctuary is shut against them; nay, it is environed with terrors. They behold there, not a Protector to whom they can fly, but a Judge whom they dread, and in those moments when they need his friendship the most, they are reduced to deprecate his wrath. If he once *called when they refused, and stretched out his hands when they would not regard*, how much reason have they to fear that he will leave them now *to eat the fruit of their own ways, and to be*

filled with their own devices ; that he will laugh at their calimity, and mock when their fear cometh ?

But of all the thoughts which can enter into the mind, in the season of distress, the belief of an interest in his favour who rules the world is the most soothing. Every form of religion has afforded to virtuous men some degree of this consolation.—But it was reserved for the Christian revelation, to carry it to its highest point. For it is the direct scope of that revelation, to accommodate itself to the circumstances of man, under two main views ; as guilty in the sight of God, and as struggling with the evils of the world. Under the former, it discovers to him a Mediator and an atonement ; under the latter it promises him the Spirit of grace and consolation. It is a system of complete relief, extended from our spiritual to our temporal distresses. The same hand which holds out forgiveness to the penitent, and assistance to the frail, dispenses comfort and hope to the afflicted.

It deserves your particular notice, in this view, that there is no character which God more frequently assumes to himself in the sacred writings, than that of the Patron of the distressed.—Compassion is that attribute of his nature which he has chosen to place in the greatest variety of lights, on purpose that he might accomodate his majesty to our weakness, and provide a cordial for human griefs. He is the hearer of all prayers ; but with particular attention he is represented as listening to the *cry of the poor*, and *regarding the prayer of the destitute*. All his creatures he governs with justice and wisdom ; but he takes to himself, in a special manner, the charge of *executing judgment for the oppressed*, of *protecting the stranger*, of *delivering him who hath no helper, from the hand of the spoiler*. *For the oppression of the poor, and for the sighing of the needy, will I arise, saith the Lord, to set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. He is the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widows, in his holy habitation. He raiseth them up that are bowed down. He dwelleth with the contrite. He healeth the broken in heart. For he knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust.**—If the wisdom of his providence saw it necessary to place so many of his creatures in an afflicted state, that state, however, he commiserates. He disdains not to point out himself as the refuge of the virtuous and pious ; and to invite them, amidst all their troubles, to pour out their hearts before him. Those circumstances which estrange others from them, interest him the more in their situation. The neglect or scorn of the world exposes them not to any contempt in his sight. No obscurity conceals them from his notice ; and though they should be for-

* Psalm ix. 8.—cii. 17.—cxlvi. 7.—lxxviii. 5.—cxlvii. 3.—ciii. 14, &c.

gotten by every friend on earth, they are remembered by the God of Heaven. That sigh, heaved from the afflicted bosom, which is heard by no human ear, is listened to by him; and that tear is remarked, which falls unnoticed or despised by the world.

Such views of the Supreme Being impart the most sensible consolation to every pious heart. They present his administration under an aspect so mild and benign, as in a great measure to disperse the gloom which hangs over human life. A good man acts with a vigour, and suffers with a patience more than human, when he believes himself countenanced by the Almighty. Injured or oppressed by the world, he looks up to a Judge who will vindicate his cause; he appeals to a Witness who knows his integrity; he commits himself to a Friend who will never forsake him. When tired with the vexations of life, devotion opens to him its quiet retreat, where the tumults of the world are hushed, and its cares are lost in happy oblivion; where *the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest*. There his mind regains its serenity; the agitation of passion is calmed; and a softening balm is infused into the wounds of the spirit. Disclosing to an invisible Friend, those secret griefs which he has no encouragement to make known to the world, his heart is lightened. He does not feel himself solitary or forsaken. He believes God to be present with him, and the Holy Ghost to be the inspirer of his consolations. From that *secret place of the Divine tabernacle*, into which the text represents him as admitted, he hears this voice issue, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee. Fear not; for I am with thee. Be not dismayed; for I am thy God*. And as he hears a voice which speaks to none but the pure in heart, so he beholds a hand which sinners cannot see. He beholds the hand of Providence conducting all the hidden springs and movements of the universe; and with a secret, but unerring operation, directing every event towards the happiness of the righteous. Those afflictions which appear to others the messengers of the wrath of Heaven, appear to him the ministers of sanctification and wisdom. Where they discern nothing but the horrors of the tempest which surrounds them, his more enlightened eye beholds the angel who rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm. Hence a *peace keeping the mind and heart*, which is no where to be found but under the *pavilion of the Almighty*.

IV. Good men are comforted under their troubles by the hope of Heaven; while bad men are not only deprived of this hope, but distressed with fears arising from a future state. The soul of man can never divest itself wholly of anxiety about its fate hereafter. There are hours when even to the prosperous, in the midst of their pleasures, eternity is an awful thought. But much

more when those pleasures, one after another, begin to withdraw ; when life alters its forms, and becomes dark and cheerless ; when its changes warn the most inconsiderate, that what is so mutable will soon pass entirely away ; then with pungent earnestness comes home that question to the heart, Into what world are we next to go ?—How miserable the man, who, under the distractions of calamity, hangs doubtful about an event which so nearly concerns him ; who, in the midst of doubts and anxieties, approaching to that awful boundary which separates this world from the next, shudders at the dark prospect before him ; wishing to exist after death, and yet afraid of that existence ; catching at every feeble hope which superstition can afford him, and trembling, in the same moment, from reflection upon his crimes.

But blessed be God who hath *brought life and immortality to light*, who hath not only brought them to light, but secured them to good men ; and, by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, hath *begotten them unto the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*. Justly is this hope styled in Scripture, *the anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast*. For what an anchor is to a ship in a dark night, on an unknown coast, and amidst a boisterous ocean, that is this hope to the soul, when distracted by the confusions of the world. In danger, it gives security ; amidst general fluctuation, it affords one fixed point of rest. It is indeed the most eminent of all the advantages which religion now confers. For, consider the mighty power of hope over the human mind. It is the universal comforter. It is the spring of all human activity. Upon futurity, men are constantly suspended. Animated by the prospect of some distant good, they toil and suffer through the whole course of life ; and it is not so much what they are at present, as what they hope to be in some after-time, that enlivens their motions, fixes attention, and stimulates industry. Now, if, in the common affairs of life, such is the energy of hope, even when its object is neither very considerable, nor very certain ; what effects may it not be expected to produce, when it rests upon an object so splendid as a life of immortal felicity ? Were this hope entertained with that full persuasion which Christian faith demands, it would, in truth, not merely alleviate, but totally annihilate all human miseries. It would banish discontent, extinguish grief, and suspend the very feeling of pain.

But allowing for the mixture of human frailty ; admitting those abatements which our imperfection makes upon the effect of every religious principle, still you will find, that in proportion to the degree in which the hope of heaven operates upon good men, they will be tranquil under sufferings ; nay, they will be happy, in comparison of those who enjoy no such relief. What indeed, in the course of human affairs, is sufficient to distress, far less

to overwhelm, the mind of that man who can look down on all human things from an elevation so much above them? He is only a passenger through this world. He is travelling to a happier country. How disagreeable soever the occurrences of his journey may be, yet at every stage of that journey he receives the assurance that he is drawing nearer and nearer to the period of rest and felicity.—Endure, and thou shalt overcome. Persevere, and thou shalt be successful. The time of trial hastens to a close. Thy mansion is prepared above; thy rest remaineth among the people of God. The disorders which vice has introduced into the works of God, are about to terminate; and all tears are soon to be wiped away from the eyes of the just.—The firm assurance of this happy conclusion to the vexations and the vanities of life, works a greater effect on the sincere illiterate Christian, than all the refinements of philosophy can work on the most learned Infidel. These may gratify the mind that is at ease; may soothe the heart when slightly discomposed; but when it is sore and deeply torn; when bereaved of its best and most beloved comforts, the only consolations that can then find access, arise from the hope of a better world; where those comforts shall be again restored; and all the virtuous shall be assembled, in the presence of him who made them. Such hopes banish that despair which overwhelms, and leave only that tender melancholy which softens the heart, and often renders the whole character more gentle and amiable.

OF this nature are the resources which religion provides for good men. By its previous discipline, it trains them to fortitude; by the reflections of a good conscience it soothes, by the sense of Divine favour it supports them; and when every comfort fails them on earth, it cheers them with the hope of heaven. Distinguishing his servants with such advantages, God is justly said to erect *his pavilion* over them in the evil time. He not only *spreads a tent for them in the wilderness*, but he transforms in some measure the state of nature around them. To use the beautiful language of ancient prophecy; *In the desert, the thirsty land where no water is, he openeth springs. Instead of the thorn, he maketh the fir-tree to come up; instead of the briar, the myrtle to spring. In the midst of the habitation of dragons, he maketh green pastures rise, and still waters flow around his people.*

THE improvement to be made of these truths is as obvious as it is important. Let us study so to conduct our lives, that we may be qualified for deriving such consolations from religion. To their reality, and their importance, all mankind bear witness. For no sooner are they overtaken by distress, than to religion they fly. This throughout every age, has been the universal shelter which the young and the old, the high and

the low, the giddy and the serious, have sought to gain as soon as they found that rest could be no where else procured for the weary head or the aching heart. But amidst those multitudes that crowd to religion for relief, how few are entitled to approach that sacred source of comfort? On what feeble props do their hopes and pretensions rest? How much superstition mingles with that religion to which men are driven by distress and fear!—You must first apply to it as the guide of life, before you can have recourse to it as the refuge of sorrow. You must submit to its legislative authority, and experience its renewing influence, before you can look for its consolatory effect— You must secure the testimony of a good conscience, and peace with God through Jesus Christ; otherwise, *when the floods shall come, and the rains descend, and the winds blow*, the house which you had proposed for your retreat, shall prove the *house founded on the sand, not on the rock*.

There are two plans, and there are but two, on which any man can propose to conduct himself through the dangers and distresses of human life. The one is the plan of worldly wisdom; the other, that of determined adherence to conscience. He who acts upon the former lays principle aside, and trusts his defence to his art and ability. He avails himself of every advantage which his knowledge of the world suggests. He attends to nothing but what he considers as his interest; and unconfined by conscience, pursues it by every course which promises him success. This plan, though too often adopted, will be found, on trial, ineffectual and deceitful. For human ability is an unequal match for the violent and unforeseen vicissitudes of the world. When these torrents rise in their might, they sweep away in a moment the banks which worldly wisdom had reared for defence, and overwhelm alike the crafty and the artless. In the mean time, persons of this character condemn themselves to live a most unquiet life. They pass their days in perpetual anxiety, listening to every motion, startled by every alarm; changing their measures on every new occurrence; and when distress breaks in over all their defences, they are left under it hopeless and disconsolate.

The plan, which in opposition to this religion recommends, as both more honourable in itself, and more effectual for security, is, at all hazards, to do your duty, and to leave the consequences to God. Let him who would act upon this plan, adopt for the rule of his conduct that maxim of the Psalmist's, *Trust in the Lord and do good*.* To firm integrity, let him join a humble reliance on God. Let his adherence to duty encourage his

* Psalm xxxviii. 3.

religious trust. Let his religious trust inspire him with fortitude in the performance of his duty. Let him know no path but the straight and direct one. In the most critical moments of action, let him ask no farther questions, than what is the right, the fit, the worthy part? How, as a man, and as a Christian, it becomes him to act? Having received the decision of conscience, let him *commit his way unto the Lord*. Let him without trepidation or wavering proceed in discharging his duty; resolved, that though the world may make him unfortunate, it shall never make him base; and confiding, that in what God and his conscience require him to act or suffer, God and a good conscience will support him. Such principles as these, are the best preparation for the vicissitudes of the human lot. They are the shield of inward peace. He who thinks and acts thus, shall be exposed to no wounds but what religion can cure. He may feel the blows of adversity; but he shall not know the wounds of the heart.

SERMON III.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION UPON PROSPERITY.

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season : his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth shall prosper.—PSALM i. 3.

THE happy influence of religion upon human life, in the time of adversity, has been considered in the preceding discourse. Concerning this the sentiment of men are more generally agreed, than with respect to some other prerogatives which religion claims. They very readily assign to it the office of a Comforter. But as long as their state is prosperous, they are apt to account it an unnecessary guest, perhaps an unwelcome intruder. Let us not be thus unjust to religion, nor confine its importance to one period only in the life of man. It was never intended to be merely the nurse of sickness, and the staff of old age. I purpose now to show you, that it is no less essential to the enjoyment of prosperity, than to the comfort of adversity: That prosperity is prosperous, if we may be allowed the expression, to a good man only; and that to every other person, it will prove, notwithstanding its fair appearance, a barren and joyless state.

The Psalmist, in the text, by an image taken from one of the most beautiful objects in nature, describes a man who flourishes in full prosperity. But to whom is the description limited? To him, as the preceding verses inform us, *that walketh not in the council of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but hath his delight in the law of God.* He only is *like the tree planted by the rivers of water*; whilst *the ungodly, as he adds, are not so*; but, how prosperous soever they may appear to the world, are in truth but like *the chaff which the wind driveth away*. In conformation of this doctrine, I shall lay before you some of those circumstances which distinguish the prosperity of the good man beyond that of the sinner; and shall conclude, with pointing out the dangers and miseries into which the latter is apt to be betrayed by his favourable situation in the world.

1. PIETY, and gratitude to God, contribute in a high degree to enliven prosperity. Gratitude is a pleasing emotion. The sense of being distinguished by the kindness of another, gladdens the heart, warms it with reciprocal affection, and gives to any possession, which is agreeable in itself, a double relish, from its being the gift of a friend. Favours conferred by men, I acknowledge may prove burdensome. For human virtue is never perfect; and sometimes unreasonable expectations on the one side, sometimes a mortifying sense of dependence on the other, corrode in secret the pleasure of benefits, and convert the obligations of friendship into grounds of jealousy. But nothing of this kind can affect the intercourse of gratitude with Heaven. Its favours are wholly disinterested: and with a gratitude the most cordial and unsuspecting, a good man looks up to that Almighty Benefactor, who aims at no end but the happiness of those whom he blesses, and who desires no return from them but a devout and thankful heart. While others can trace their prosperity to no higher source than a concurrence of worldly causes, and, often, of mean or trifling incidents which occasionally favoured their designs; with what superior satisfaction does the servant of God remark the hand of that gracious Power which hath raised him up; which hath happily conducted him through the various steps of life, and crowned him with the most favourable distinction beyond his equals?

Let us farther consider, that not only gratitude for the past, but a cheering sense of God's favour at the present enter into the pious emotion. They are only the virtuous, who in their prosperous days hear this voice addressed to them: *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.** He who is the Author of their prosperity gives them a title to enjoy, with complacency, his own gift. While bad men snatch the pleasures of the world as by stealth, without countenance from god, the propriety of the world; the righteous sit openly down to the feast of life, under the smile of approving Heaven. No guilty fears damp their joys. The blessing of God rests upon all that they possess! his protection surrounds them; and hence, *in the habitations of the righteous is found the voice of rejoicing and salvation.* A lustre unknown to others invests, in their sight, the whole face of nature. Their piety reflects a sunshine from heaven upon the prosperity of the world; unites, in one point of view, the smiling aspect, both of the powers above and of the objects below. Not only have they as full a relish as others, of the innocent pleasures of life, but, moreover, in these they hold communion with God. In all that is good or fair, they trace his hand. From

* Eccles. ix. 7.

the beauties of nature, from the improvements of art, from the enjoyments of social life, they raise their affection to the source of all the happiness which surrounds them; and thus widen the sphere of their pleasures, by adding intellectual, and spiritual, to earthly joys.

For illustration of what I have said on this head, remark that cheerful enjoyment of a prosperous state which King David had, when he wrote the twenty-third Psalm; and compare the highest pleasures of the riotous sinner, with the happy and satisfied spirit which breathes throughout that Psalm.—In the midst of the splendor of royalty, with what amiable simplicity of gratitude does he look up to the Lord as *his shepherd*; happier in ascribing all his success to divine favour, than to the policy of his councils, or to the force of his arms! How many instances of divine goodness arose before him in pleasing remembrance, when with such relish he speaks of the *green pastures and still waters beside which God had led him*: of *his cup which he hath made to overflow*; and of *the table which he hath prepared for him in presence of his enemies*! With what perfect tranquillity does he look forward to the time of his passing through *the valley of the shadow of death*; unappalled by that Spectre, whose most distant appearance blasts the prosperity of sinners! He fears no evil, as long as *the rod and the staff* of his Divine Shepherd are with him; and through all the unknown periods of this and of future existence, commits himself to his guidance with secure and triumphant hope. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*; and *I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*.—What a purified, sentimental enjoyment of prosperity is here exhibited! How different from that gross relish of worldly pleasures, which belongs to those who behold only the terrestrial side of things; who raise their views to no higher objects than the succession of human contingencies, and the weak efforts of human ability; who have no protector or patron in the heavens, to enliven their prosperity, or to warm their hearts with gratitude and trust.

II. RELIGION affords to good men peculiar security in the enjoyment of their prosperity. One of the first reflections which must strike every thinking man, after his situation in the world has become agreeable, is, That the continuation of such a situation is most uncertain. From a variety of causes, he lies open to change. On many sides he sees that he may be pierced; and the wider his comforts extend, the broader is the mark which he spreads to the arrows of misfortune. Hence many a secret alarm to the reflecting mind; and to those who reject all such alarms, the real danger increases, in proportion to their improvident security.

By worldly assistance it is in vain to think of providing any effectual defence, seeing the world's mutability is the very cause of our terror. It is from a higher principle, from a power superior to the world, that relief must be sought amidst such disquietudes of the heart. He who in his prosperity can look up to One who is witness to his moderation, humanity, and charity; he who can appeal to Heaven, that he has not been elated by pride, nor overcome by pleasure, but has studied to employ its gifts to the honour of the Giver; this man, if there be any truth in religion, if there be any benignity or goodness in the administration of the universe, has just cause for encouragement and hope. Not that an interest in the divine grace will perpetuate to a good man, more than to others, a life of unruffled prosperity. Change and alteration form the very essence of the world. But let the world change around him at pleasure, he has ground to hope that it shall not be able to make him unhappy. Whatever may vary, God's providence is still the same; and his love to the righteous remains unaltered. If it shall be the Divine will to remove one comfort, he trusts that some other shall be given. Whatever is given, whatever is taken away, he confides that in the last result all *shall work for his good*.

Hence he is not disturbed, like bad men, by the instability of the world. Dangers, which overcome others, shake not his more steady mind. He enjoys the pleasures of life pure and unallayed, because he enjoys them, as long as they last, without anxious terrors. They are not his all, his only good. He welcomes them when they arrive; and when they pass away, he can eye them, as they depart, without agony or despair. His prosperity strikes a deeper and firmer root than that of the ungodly. And for this reason he is compared, in the text, to a *tree planted by the rivers of water*: a tree whose branches the tempest may indeed bend, but whose roots it cannot touch; a tree, which may occasionally be stripped of its leaves and blossoms, but which still maintains its place, and in due season flourishes anew. Whereas the sinner in his prosperity, according to the allusion in the book of Job, resembles *the rush that groweth up in the mire*;* a slender reed, that may flourish green for a while by the side of the brook, as long as it is cherished by the sun, and fanned by the breeze; till the first bitter blast breaks its feeble stem, roots it out from its bed, and lays it in the dust. Lo! such is the prosperity of *them that forget God; and thus their hope shall perish*.

III. RELIGION forms good men to the most proper temper for the enjoyment of prosperity. A little reflection may satisfy us, that mere possession, even granting it to be secure, does not

* Job, viii. 11.

constitute enjoyment. Give a man all that is in the power of the world to bestow; surround him with riches; crown him with honours; invest him, if you will, with absolute dominion; but leave him at the same time under some secret oppression or heaviness of heart; you bestow indeed the materials of enjoyment, but you deprive him of ability to extract it. You set a feast before him, but he wants the power of tasting it. Hence prosperity is so often an equivocal word, denoting merely affluence of possession, but unjustly applied to the miserable possessor.

We all know the effects which any indisposition of the body, even though slight, produces on external prosperity. Visit the gayest and most fortunate man on earth, only with sleepless nights; disorder any single organ of the senses; corrode but one of his smallest nerves; and you shall presently see all his gaiety vanish; and you shall hear him complain that he is a miserable creature, and express his envy of the peasant and the cottager.—And can you believe, that a disease in the soul is less fatal to enjoyment than a disease in the animal frame; or that a sound mind is not as essential as a sound body, to the prosperity of man?—Let us rate sensual gratifications as high as we please, we shall be made to feel that the seat of enjoyment is in the soul. The corrupted temper, and the guilty passions of the bad, frustrate the effect of every advantage which the world confers on them. The world may call them men of pleasure; but of all men they are the greatest foes to pleasure. From their eagerness to grasp, they strangle and destroy it. None but the temperate, the regular, and the virtuous, know how to enjoy prosperity. They bring to its comforts the manly relish of a sound uncorrupted mind. They stop at the proper point, before enjoyment degenerates into disgust, and pleasure is converted into pain. They are strangers to those complaints which flow from spleen, caprice, and all the fantastical distresses of a vitiated mind. While riotous indulgence enervates both the body and the mind, purity and virtue heighten all the powers of human fruition. Moderate and simple pleasures relish high with the temperate; in the midst of his studied refinements, the voluptuary languishes.

Wherever guilt mingles with prosperity, a certain gloom and heaviness enter along with it. Vicious intrigues never fail to entangle and embarrass those who engage in them. But innocence confers ease and freedom on the mind; leaves it open to every pleasing sensation; gives a lightness to the spirits, similar to the native gaiety of youth and health; ill imitated, and ill supplied, by that forced levity of the vicious, which arises not from the health, but from the drunkenness of the mind.

Feeble are all pleasures in which the heart has no part. The selfish gratifications of the bad, are both narrow in their circle,

and short in their duration. But prosperity is redoubled to a good man, by his generous use of it. It is reflected back upon him from every one whom he makes happy. In the intercourse of domestic affection, in the attachment of friends, the gratitude of dependents, the esteem and good-will of all who know him, he sees blessings multiplied round him, on every side. *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing with joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame: I was a father to the poor; and the cause which I knew not, I searched out.**—Thus, while the righteous flourished like a tree planted by the rivers of water, he bringeth forth also his fruit in his season; and that fruit, to pursue the allusion of the text, he brings forth, not for himself alone. He flourishes, not like a tree in some solitary desert, which scatters its blossoms to the wind, and communicates neither fruit nor shade to any living thing; but like a tree in the midst of an inhabited country, which to some affords friendly shelter, to others, fruit; which is not only admired by all for its beauty, but blessed by the traveller for the shade, and by the hungry for the sustenance it hath given.

IV. RELIGION heightens the prosperity of good men, by the prospect which it affords them of greater happiness to come in another world. I showed, in the foregoing discourse, the mighty effect of the hope of Heaven, in relieving the mind under the troubles of life. And sure, if this hope be able to support the falling, it cannot but improve the flourishing state of man; if it can dispel the thickest gloom of adversity, it must needs enliven prosperity, by the additional lustre which it throws upon it. What is present, is never sufficient to give us full satisfaction. To the present we must always join some agreeable anticipations of futurity, in order to complete our pleasure. What an accession then must the prosperity of the righteous man receive, when, borne with a smooth and gentle gale along the current of life, and looking round on all the blessings of his state, he can consider these as no more than an introduction to higher scenes which are hereafter to open; he can view his present life, as only the porch through which he is to pass into the palace of bliss; and his present joys, as but a feeble stream, dispensed for his occasional refreshment, until he arrive at that river of life, which flows at God's right hand!—Such prospects purify the mind, at the same time that they gladden it. They prevent the good man from setting too high a value on his present posses-

* Job, xxix. 11—17.

sions; and thereby assist him in maintaining, amidst the temptations of worldly pleasure, that command of himself which is so essential to the wise and temperate enjoyment of prosperity.

It is the fate of all human pleasures, by continuance, to fade; of most of them, to cloy. Hence, in the most prosperous state, there are frequent intervals of languor, and even of dejection. There are vacuities in the happiest life, which it is not in the power of the world to fill up. What relief so adapted to those vacant or dejected periods, as the pleasing hopes which arise from immortality? How barren and imperfect is that prosperity, which can have recourse to no such subsidiary comfort, in order to animate the stagnation of vulgar life, and to supply the insufficiency of worldly pleasures!

Worldly prosperity declines with declining life. In youth its relish was brisk and poignant. It becomes more sober as life advances; and flattens as life descends. He who lately overflowed with cheerful spirits and high hopes, begins to look back with heaviness on the days of former years. He thinks of his old companions who are gone; and reviews past scenes, more agreeable than any which are likely to return. The activity of pursuit is weakened. The gaiety of amusement is fled. The gratifications of sense languish. When his accustomed pleasures, one after another, thus steal treacherously away, what can he, who is an utter stranger to religion, and to the hope of Heaven, substitute in their place?—But even in that drooping period, the promises and hopes of religion support the spirits of a good man till the latest hour. *His leaf*, it is said in the text, *shall not wither*. It shall not be in the power of time to blast his prosperity: But old age shall receive him into a quiet retreat, where if lively sensations fail, gentle pleasures remain to soothe him. That hope of immortality, which formerly improved his other enjoyments, now in a great measure supplies their absence. Its importance rises, in proportion as its object draws near. He is not forsaken by the world, but retires from it with dignity; reviewing with a calm mind the part which he has acted, and trusting to the promise of God for an approaching reward. Such sentiments and expectations shed a pleasing tranquillity over the old age of the righteous man. They make the evening of his days go down unclouded; and allow the stream of life, though fallen low, to run clear to the last drop.

THUS I have shown, I hope, with full evidence, what material ingredients religion and a good conscience are in the prosperity of life. Separated from them, prosperity, how fair soever it may seem to the world, is insipid, nay frequently noxious to the possessor: United with them, it rises into a real blessing bestowed by God upon man. *God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner he giveth sore*

*travail, to gather, and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God.**

ALLOW me now to conclude the subject, with representing to the prosperous men of the world, those crimes and miseries into which the abuse of their condition is likely to betray them, and calling upon them to beware of the danger with which they are threatened.

It is unfortunate for mankind that those situations which favour pleasure, are too generally adverse to virtue. Virtue requires internal government and discipline; prosperity relaxes the mind, and inflames the passion. Virtue is supported by a regard to what is future; prosperity attaches us wholly to what is present. The characteristics of virtue, are modesty and humility; the most common attendants of prosperity, are pride and presumption. One should think, that prosperity would prove the strongest incitement to remember and to honour that God who bestows it. Yet such is the perverseness of human nature, that it proves much oftener the motive to impiety. The changes of the world call the attention of men to an invisible Power. But a train of events proceeding according to their wish, leads them to nothing beyond what they see. The Supreme Giver is concealed from view by his own gifts. This instance of success they ascribe to a fortunate concurrence of worldly causes; that acquisition, to their own skill and industry; unmindful of him, who from the beginning arranged that series of causes, and who placed them in circumstances where their industry could operate with success. From forgetting God, they too often proceed to despise him. All that is light or giddy in their minds is set in motion by the gale of prosperity. Arrogance and self-sufficiency are lifted up; and their state is considered, as secured by their own strength. Hence that *pride of countenance*, through which the wicked in their prosperity, as David observes, *refuse to seek after God*. They are described as *speaking loftily, and setting their mouth against the Heavens*. *They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ; and they say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? Or, what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*

They say unto God, depart from us.—What an impious voice! Could we have believed it possible, that worldly pleasures should so far intoxicate any human heart? Wretched and infatuated men! Have you ever examined on what your confidence rests?—You have said in your hearts, *You shall never be moved*; you fancy yourselves placed on a *mountain which standeth strong*. Awake from those flattering dreams, and behold how every

* Eccles. ii. 26.

thing totters around you ! You stand on the edge of a precipice ; and the ground is sliding away below your feet. In your health, life, possessions, connections, pleasures, principles of destruction work. The mine advances in secret, which saps the foundations, while you revel on the surface. No mighty effort, no long preparation of events, is needed to overturn your prosperity. By slow degrees it rose. Long time, much labour, and the concurrence of many assisting causes were necessary to rear it up ; but one slight incident can entirely overthrow it. Suspicions are infused into the patron or the prince on whom you depend ; and your disgrace ensues. Exercise, or amusement, kindles a fever in the veins of those whom you loved ; and you are robbed of your comforts and hopes. A few grains of sand lodge themselves within you ; and the rest of your life is disease and misery. Ten thousand contingencies ever float on the current of life, the smallest of which, if it meet your frail bark in the passing, is sufficient to dash it in pieces.—Is this a place, is this a time, to swell with fancied security, to riot in unlawful pleasure, and, by your disregard of moral and religious duties, to brave the government of the Almighty ? He hath stamped every possession of man with this inscription, *Rejoice with trembling*. Throughout every age, he hath pointed his peculiar displeasure against the confidence of presumption, and the arrogance of prosperity. He hath pronounced, that *whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased*. And shall neither the admonitions which you receive from the visible inconstancy of the world, nor the declarations of the divine displeasure, be sufficient to check your thoughtless career ? Know that, by your impiety, you multiply the dangers which already threaten you on every side ; you accelerate the speed with which the changes of the world advance to your destruction. The Almighty touches with his rod that edifice of dust, on which you stand, and boast of your strength ; and, at that instant, it crumbles to nothing.

As men, then, bethink yourselves of human instability. As Christians, reverence the awful government of God. Insure your prosperity, by consecrating it to religion and virtue. Be humble in your elevation ; be moderate in your views ; be submissive to Him who hath raised and distinguished you. Forget not, that on his providence you are as dependent, and to the obedience of his laws as much bound, as the meanest of your fellow creatures. Disgrace not your station, by that grossness of sensuality, that levity of dissipation, or that insolence of rank, which bespeak a little mind. Let the affability of your behaviour show that you remember the natural equality of men. Let your moderation in pleasure, your command of passion, and your steady regard to the great duties of life, show that you possess a mind worthy of your fortune. Establish your charac-

ter on the basis of esteem ; not on the flattery of dependents, or the praise of sycophants, but on the respect of the wise and the good. Let innocence preside over your enjoyments. Let usefulness and beneficence, not ostentation and vanity, direct the train of your pursuits. Let *your alms, together with your prayers, come up in memorial before God.* So shall your prosperity, under the blessing of Heaven, be *as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* So shall it resemble those celestial fires which glow above, with beneficent, with regular, and permanent lustre ; and not prove that *mirth of fools*, which by Solomon is compared to *the crackling of thorns under a pot*, a glittering and fervent blaze, but speedily extinct.

On the whole, let this be our conclusion, that, both in prosperity and in adversity, religion is the safest guide of human life. Conducted by its light, we reap the pleasures, and at the same time escape the dangers of a prosperous state. Sheltered under its protection, we stand the shock of adversity with most intrepidity, and suffer least from the violence of the storm. *He that desireth life, and loveth many days that he may see good, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from guile. Let him depart from evil, and do good. Let him seek peace with God, and pursue it.* Then, in his adversity, *God shall hide him in his pavilion.* In his prosperity, *he shall flourish like a tree planted by the rivers of water.* *The ungodly are not so ; but are like the chaff, light and vile, which the wind driveth away.*

SERMON IV.

ON OUR IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF A FUTURE STATE.

For now we see through a glass, darkly.—1 COR. xiii. 12.

THE Apostle here describes the imperfection of our knowledge with relation to spiritual and eternal objects. He employs two metaphors to represent more strongly the disadvantages under which we lie: One, that we see those objects *through a glass*, that is, through the intervention of a medium which obscures their glory; the other, that we see them *in a riddle* or enigma, which our translators have rendered by seeing them *darkly*; that is, the truth in part discovered, in part concealed, and placed beyond our comprehension.

This description, however just and true, cannot fail to occasion some perplexity to an enquiring mind. For it may seem strange, that so much darkness should be left upon those celestial objects, towards which we are at the same time commanded to aspire. We are strangers in the universe of God. Confined to that spot on which we dwell, we are permitted to know nothing of what is transacting in the regions above us and around us. By much labour, we acquire a superficial acquaintance with a few sensible objects which we find in our present habitation; but we enter, and we depart, under a total ignorance of the nature and laws of the spiritual world. One subject in particular, when our thoughts proceed in this train, must often recur upon the mind with peculiar anxiety; that is, the immortality of the soul, and the future state of man. Exposed as we are at present to such variety of afflictions, and subjected to so much disappointment in all our pursuits of happiness, Why, it may be said, has our gracious Creator denied us the consolation of a full discovery of our future existence, if indeed such an existence be prepared for us?—Reason, it is true, suggests many arguments in behalf of immortality: Revelation gives full assurance of it. Yet even that Gospel, which is said to have *brought life and immortality to light*, allows us to *see only through a glass darkly*. *It doth not yet appear what we shall be*. Our knowledge of a future world is very imperfect; our ideas of it are faint and confused. It is

not displayed in such a manner, as to make an impression suited to the importance of the object. The faith even of the best men is much inferior both in clearness and in force, to the evidence of sense; and proves on many occasions insufficient to counterbalance the temptations of the present world. Happy moments indeed there sometimes are in the lives of pious men, when, sequestered from worldly cares, and borne up on the wings of divine contemplation, they rise to a near and transporting view of immortal glory. But such efforts of the mind are rare, and cannot be long supported. When the spirit of meditation subsides, this lively sense of a future state decays; and though the general belief of it remain, yet even good men, when they return to the ordinary business and cares of life, seem to rejoin the multitude, and to reassume the same hopes, and fears, and interests which influence the rest of the world.

From such reflections, a considerable difficulty respecting this important subject, either arises, or seems to arise. Was such an obscure and imperfect discovery of another life worthy to proceed from God? Does it not afford some ground, either to tax his goodness, or to suspect the evidence of its coming from him?—This is the point which we are now to consider; and let us consider it with that close attention which the subject merits. Let us enquire, whether we have any reason, either to complain of Providence or to object to the evidence of a future state, because that evidence is not of a more sensible and striking nature. Let us attempt humbly to trace the reasons, why, though permitted to know and to see somewhat of the eternal world, we are nevertheless permitted only to *know in part and to see through a glass, darkly.*

It plainly appears to be the plan of the Deity, in all his dispensations, to mix light with darkness, evidence with uncertainty. Whatever the reasons of this procedure be, the fact is undeniable. He is described in the Old Testament as *a God that hideth himself.* Clouds and darkness* are said to *surround him. His way is in the sea, and his path is in the great waters; his footsteps are not known.* Both the works and the ways of God are full of mystery. In the ordinary course of his government, innumerable events occur which perplex us to the utmost. There is a certain limit to all our enquiries of religion, beyond which, if we attempt to proceed, we are lost in a maze of inextricable difficulties. Even that revelation which affords such material instruction to man, concerning his duty and his happiness, leaves many doubts unresolved. Why it was not given sooner; why not to all men; why there should be so many things in it *hard to be understood*; are difficulties not inconsiderable, in the midst

* Isaiah, xlv. 15.

of that incontestible evidence by which it is supported. If, then, the future state of man be not placed in so full and clear a light as we desire, this is no more than what the analogy of all religion, both natural and revealed, gave us reason to expect.

But such a solution of the difficulty will be thought imperfect. It may, perhaps, not give much satisfaction to show, that all religion abounds with difficulties of a light nature. Our situation, it will be said, is so much the more to be lamented, that not on one side only we are confined in our enquiries, but on all hands environed with mysterious obscurity.—Let us then, if so much dissatisfied with our condition, give scope for once to Fancy, and consider how the plan of Providence might be rectified to our wish. Let us call upon the Sceptic, and desire him to say, what measure of information would afford him entire satisfaction.

This, he will tell us, requires not any long or deep deliberation. He desires only to have his view enlarged beyond the limits of the corporeal state. Instead of resting upon evidence which requires discussion, which must be supported by much reasoning, and which, after all, he alleges, yields very imperfect information, he demands the everlasting mansions to be so displayed, if in truth such mansions there be, as to place faith on a level with the evidence of sense. What noble and happy effects, he exclaims, would instantly follow, if man thus beheld his present and his future existence at once before him! He would then become worthy of his rank in the creation. Instead of being the sport, as now, of degrading passions and childish attachments, he would act solely on the principles of immortality. His pursuit of virtue would be steady; his life would be undisturbed and happy. Superior to the attacks of distress, and to the solicitations of pleasure, he would advance, by a regular process, towards those divine rewards and honours which were continually present to his view.—Thus Fancy, with as much ease and confidence as if it were a perfect judge of creation, erects a new world to itself, and exults with admiration of its own work. But let us pause, and suspend this admiration, till we coolly examine the consequences that would follow from this supposed reformation of the universe.

CONSIDER the nature and circumstances of man. Introduced into the world in an indigent condition, he is supported at first by the care of others; and as soon as he begins to act for himself, finds labour and industry to be necessary for sustaining his life, and supplying his wants. Mutual defence and interest gives rise to society; and society, when formed, requires distinctions of property, diversity of conditions, subordinations of ranks, and a multiplicity of occupations, in order to advance the general good. The services of the poor, and the protection of the rich, become reciprocally necessary. The governors, and the govern-

ed; must co-operate for general safety. Various arts must be studied; some respecting the cultivation of the mind, others the care of the body; some to ward off the evils, and some to provide the conveniences of life. In a word, by the destination of his Creator, and the necessities of his nature, man commences, at once, an active, not merely a contemplative being. Religion assumes him as such. It supposes him employed in this world, as on a busy stage. It regulates, but does not abolish, the enterprises and cares of ordinary life. It addresses itself to the various ranks in society; to the rich and the poor, to the magistrate and the subject. It rebukes the slothful; directs the diligent how to labour; and requires every man to *do his own business*.

Suppose, now, that veil to be withdrawn which conceals another world from our view. Let all obscurity vanish; let us no longer *see darkly, as through a glass*; but let every man enjoy that intuitive perception of divine and eternal objects which the Sceptic was supposed to desire. The immediate effect of such a discovery would be, to annihilate in our eye all human objects, and to produce a total stagnation in the affairs of the world. Were the celestial glory exposed to our admiring view; did the angelic harmony sound in our enraptured ears; what earthly concerns would have the power of engaging our attention for a single moment? All the studies and pursuits, the arts and labours, which now employ the activity of man, which support the order, or promote the happiness of society, would lie neglected and abandoned. Those desires and fears, those hopes and interests, by which we are at present stimulated, would cease to operate. Human life would present no objects sufficient to rouse the mind; to kindle the spirit of enterprise, or to urge the hand of industry. If the mere sense of duty engaged a good man to take some part in the business of the world, the task, when submitted to, would prove distasteful. Even the preservation of life would be slighted, if he were not bound to it by the authority of God. Impatient of his confinement within this tabernacle of dust, languishing for the happy day of his translation to those glorious regions which were displayed to his sight, he would sojourn on earth as a melancholy exile. Whatever Providence has prepared for the entertainment of man, would be viewed with contempt. Whatever is now attractive in society would appear insipid. In a word, he would be no longer a fit inhabitant of this world, nor be qualified for those exertions which are allotted to him in his present sphere of being. But, all his faculties being sublimated above the measure of humanity, he would be in the condition of a being of a superior order, who, obliged to reside among men, would regard their pursuits with scorn, as dreams, trifles, and puerile amusements of a day.

But to this reasoning it may perhaps be replied, That such consequences as I have now stated, supposing them to follow, deserve not much regard.—For what though the present arrangement of human affairs were entirely changed, by a clearer view, and a stronger impression of our future state? Would not such a change prove the highest blessing to man? Is not his attachment to worldly objects the great source both of his misery and his guilt? Employed in perpetual contemplation of heavenly objects, and in preparation for the enjoyment of them, would he not become more virtuous, and of course more happy, than the nature of his present employments and attachments permits him to be?—Allowing for a moment, the consequence to be such, this much is yielded, that, upon the supposition which was made, man would not be the creature which he now is, nor human life the state which we now behold. How far the change would contribute to his welfare, comes to be considered.

If there be any principle fully ascertained by religion, it is, That this life was intended for a state of trial and improvement to man. His preparation for a better world required a gradual purification carried on by steps of progressive discipline. The situation, therefore, here assigned him, was such as to answer this design, by calling forth all his active powers, by giving full scope to his moral dispositions, and bringing to light his whole character. Hence it became proper, that difficulty and temptation should arise in the course of his duty. Ample rewards were promised to virtue; but these rewards were left, as yet, in obscurity and distant prospect. The impressions of sense were so balanced against the discoveries of immortality, as to allow a conflict between faith and sense, between conscience and desire, between present pleasure and future good. In this conflict, the souls of good men are tried, improved, and strengthened. In this field, their honours are reaped. Here are formed the capital virtues of fortitude, temperance and self-denial; moderation in prosperity, patience in adversity, submission to the will of God, and charity and forgiveness to men, amidst the various competitions of worldly interest.

Such is the plan of Divine wisdom for man's improvement. But put the case that the plans devised by human wisdom were to take place, and that the rewards of the just were to be more fully displayed to view; the exercise of all those graces which I have mentioned, would be entirely superseded. Their very names would be unknown. Every temptation being withdrawn, every worldly attachment being subdued by the overpowering discoveries of eternity, no trial of sincerity, no discrimination of characters would remain; no opportunity would be afforded for those active exertions, which are the means of purifying and perfecting the good. On the competition between time and eternity de-

pends the chief exercise of human virtue. The obscurity which at present hangs over eternal objects, preserves the competition. Remove that obscurity, and you remove human virtue from its place. You overthrow that whole system of discipline, by which imperfect creatures are, in this life, gradually trained up for a more perfect state.

This, then, is the conclusion to which at last we arrive: That the full display which was demanded, of the heavenly glory, would be so far from improving the human soul, that it would abolish those virtues and duties which are the great instruments of its improvement. It would be unsuitable to the character of man in every view, either as an active being, or moral agent. It would disqualify him for taking part in the affairs of the world; for relishing the pleasures, or for discharging the duties of life: In a word, it would entirely defeat the purpose of his being placed on this earth, and the question, why the Almighty has been pleased to leave a spiritual world, and the future existence of man, under so much obscurity, resolves in the end into this, Why there should be such a creature as man in the universe of God?—Such is the issue of the improvements proposed to be made on the plans of Providence. They add to the discoveries of the superior wisdom of God, and of the presumption and folly of man.

From what has been said it now appears, that no reasonable objection to the belief of a future state arises, from the imperfect discoveries of it which we enjoy; from the difficulties that are mingled with its evidence; from our *seeing as through a glass, darkly, and being left to walk by faith, and not by sight*. It cannot be otherwise, it ought not to be otherwise, in our present state. The evidence which is afforded, is sufficient for the conviction of a candid mind, sufficient for a rational ground of conduct; though not so striking as to withdraw our attention from the present world, or altogether to overcome the impression of sensible objects. In such evidence, it becomes us to acquiesce, without indulging either doubts or complaints, on account of our not receiving all the satisfaction which we fondly desire. but which our present immaturity of being excludes. For, upon the supposition of immortality, this life is no other than the childhood of existence; and the measures of our knowledge must be proportioned to such a state. To the successive stages of human life, from infancy to old age, belong certain peculiar attachments, certain cares, desires, and interests; which open not abruptly, but by gradual advances on the mind, as it becomes fit to receive them, and is prepared for acting the part to which, in their order, they pertain. Hence, in the education of a child, no one thinks of inspiring him all at once with the knowledge, the sentiments, and views of a man, and with contempt for the exercises and amusements of childhood. On the contrary, employ-

ments suited to his age are allowed to occupy him. By these his powers are gradually unfolded; and advantage is taken of his youthful pursuits, to improve and strengthen his mind; till, step by step, he is led on to higher prospects, and prepared for a larger and more important scene of action.

This analogy, which so happily illustrates the present conduct of the Deity towards man, deserves attention the more, as it is the very illustration used by the Apostle, when treating of this subject in the context. *Now, says he, we know in part—but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: Now I know in part; but then, I shall know even as I am known.* Under the care of the Almighty, our education is now going on, from a mortal to an immortal state. As much light is let in upon us, as we can bear without injury. When the objects become too splendid and dazzling for our sight, the curtain is drawn. Exercised in such a field of action, as suits the strength of our unripened powers, we are at the same time, by proper prospects and hopes, prompted to aspire towards the manhood of our nature, the time when *childish things shall be put away.* But still, betwixt those future prospects, and the impression of present objects, such an accurate proportion is established, as on the one hand shall not produce a total contempt of earthly things, while we aspire to those that are heavenly; and on the other, shall not encourage such a degree of attachment to our present state, as would render us unworthy of future advancement. In a word, the whole course of things is so ordered, that we neither, by an irregular and precipitate education, become men too soon; nor, by a fond and trifling indulgence, be suffered to continue children for ever.

Let these reflections not only remove the doubts which may arise from our obscure knowledge of immortality, but likewise produce the highest admiration of the wisdom of our Creator. The structure of the natural world affords innumerable instances of profound design, which no attentive spectator can survey without wonder. In the moral world, where the workmanship is of much finer and more delicate texture, subjects of still greater admiration open to view. But admiration must rise to its highest point, when those parts of the moral constitution, which at first were reputed blemishes, which carried the appearance of objections, either to the wisdom or the goodness of Providence, are discovered, on more accurate inspection, to be adjusted with the most exquisite propriety. We have now seen that the darkness of man's condition is no less essential to his well-being, than the light which he enjoys. His internal powers, and his exter-

nal situation, appear to be exactly fitted to each other. Those complaints which we are apt to make, of our limited capacity and narrow views, of our inability to penetrate farther into the future destination of man, are found, from the foregoing observations, to be just as unreasonable, as the childish complaints of our not being formed with a microscopic eye, nor furnished with an eagle's wing, that is, of not being endowed with powers which would subvert the nature, and counteract the laws, of our present state.

In order to do justice to the subject, I must observe, that the same reasoning which has been now employed with respect to our knowledge of immortality, is equally applicable to many other branches of intellectual knowledge. Thus, why we are permitted to know so little of the nature of that Eternal Being who rules the universe; why the manner in which he operates on the natural and moral world, is wholly concealed; why we are kept in such ignorance with respect to the extent of his works, to the nature and agency of spiritual beings, and even with respect to the union between our own soul and body: To all these, and several other enquiries of the same kind, which often employ the solicitous researches of speculative men, the answer is the same that was given to the interesting question which makes the subject of our discourse. The degree of knowledge desired, would prove incompatible with the design, and with the proper business of this life. It would raise us to a sphere too exalted; would reveal objects too great and striking for our present faculties; would excite feelings too strong for us to bear; in a word, would unfit us for thinking or acting like human creatures. It is therefore reserved for a more advanced period of our nature; and the hand of Infinite Wisdom hath in mercy drawn a veil over scenes which would overpower the sight of mortals.

One instance, in particular, of Divine wisdom is so illustrious, and corresponds so remarkably with our present subject, that I cannot pass it over without notice: that is, the concealment under which Providence has placed the future events of our life on earth. The desire of penetrating into this unknown region, has ever been one of the most anxious passions of men. It has often seized the wise as well as the credulous, and given rise to many vain and impious superstitions throughout the whole earth.— Burning with curiosity at the approach of some critical event, and impatient under the perplexity of conjecture and doubt, How cruel is Providence, we are apt to exclaim, in denying to man the power of foresight, and in limiting him to the knowledge of the present moment! Were he permitted to look forward into the course of destiny, how much more suitably would he be prepared for the various turns and changes in his life? With what moderation would he enjoy his prosperity under the fore-know-

ledge of an approaching reverse? And with what eagerness be prompted to improve the flying hours, by seeing the inevitable term draw nigh which was to finish his course?

But while fancy indulges such vain desires, and criminal complaints, this coveted fore-knowledge must clearly appear to the eye of Reason, to be the most fatal gift which the Almighty could bestow. If, in the present mixed state, all the successive scenes of distress through which we are to pass, were laid before us in one view, perpetual sadness would overcast our life. Hardly would any transient gleams of intervening joy be able to force their way through the cloud. Faint would be the relish of pleasures of which we foresaw the close: Insupportable the burden of afflictions, under which we were oppressed by a load not only of present, but of an anticipated sorrow. Friends would begin their union, with lamenting the day which was to dissolve it; and, with weeping eye, the parent would every moment behold the child whom he knew that he was to lose. In short, as soon as that mysterious veil, which now covers futurity, was lifted up, all the gaiety of life would disappear; its flattering hopes, its pleasing illusions, would vanish; and nothing but its vanity and sadness remain. The foresight of the hour of death would continually interrupt the course of human affairs, and the overwhelming prospect of the future, instead of exciting men to proper activity, would render them immoveable with consternation and dismay.—How much more friendly to man is that mixture of knowledge and ignorance which is allotted to him in this state! Ignorant of the events which are to befall us and of the precise term which is to conclude our life, by this ignorance our enjoyment of present objects is favoured; and knowing that death is certain, and that human affairs are full of change, by this knowledge our attachment to those objects is moderated. Precisely in the same manner, as by the mixture of evidence and obscurity which remains on the prospect of a future state, a proper balance is preserved betwixt our love of this life, and our desire of a better.

The longer that our thoughts dwell on this subject, the more we must be convinced, that in nothing the Divine wisdom is more admirable, than in proportioning knowledge to the necessities of man. Instead of lamenting our condition, that we are permitted only to *see us through a glass, darkly*, we have reason to bless our Creator, no less for what he hath concealed, than for what he hath allowed us to know. He is *wonderful in counsel, as he is excellent in working. He is wise in heart, and his thoughts are deep. How unsearchable are the riches of the wisdom of the knowledge of God!*

FROM the whole view which we have taken of the subject, the important instruction arises, that the great design of all the

knowledge, and in particular of the religious knowledge which God hath afforded us, is, to fit us for discharging the duties of life. No useless discoveries are made to us in religion: No discoveries even of useful truths, beyond the precise degree of information, which is subservient to right conduct. To this great end all our information points. In this centre all the lines of knowledge meet. *Life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel*; yet not so displayed as to gratify the curiosity of the world with an astonishing spectacle; but only so far made known, as to assist and support us in the practice of our duty. If the discovery were more imperfect, it would excite no desire of immortality; if it were more full and striking, it would render us careless of life. On the first supposition, no sufficient motive to virtue would appear; on the second, no proper trial of it would remain. In the one case, we should think and act like men who *have their portion only in this world*; in the other case, like men who have no concern with this world at all. Whereas now, by the wise constitution of Heaven, we are placed unto the most favourable situation for acting, with propriety, our allotted part here; and for rising, in due course, to higher honour and happiness hereafter.

Let us then second the kind intentions of Providence, and act upon the plan which it hath pointed out. Checking our inquisitive solicitude about what the Almighty hath concealed, let us diligently improve what he hath made known. Inhabitants of the earth, we are at the same time candidates for Heaven. Looking upon these as only different views of one consistent character, let us carry on our preparation for Heaven, not by abstracting ourselves from the concerns of this world, but by fulfilling the duties and offices of every station in life. *Living soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world, let us look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Before I conclude, it may be proper to observe, That the reasonings in this discourse give no ground to apprehend any danger of our being too much influenced by the belief of a future state. I have shown the hurtful effects which would follow from too bright and full a discovery of the glory of that state; and in showing this, I have justified the decree of Providence, which permits no such discovery. But as our nature is at present constituted, attached by so many strong connexions to the world of sense, and enjoying a communication so feeble and distant with the world of spirits, we need fear no danger from cultivating intercourse with the latter as much as possible. On the contrary, from that intercourse the chief security of our virtue is to be sought. The bias of our nature leans so much towards sense,

that from this side the peril is to be dreaded, and on this side the defence is to be provided.

Let us then *walk by faith*. Let us strengthen this principle of action to the utmost of our power. Let us implore the Divine grace, to strengthen it within us more and more : That we may thence derive an antidote against that subtle poison, which incessant commerce with the objects of sense diffuses through our souls ; that we may hence acquire purity and dignity of manners suited to our divine hopes ; and undefiled by the pleasures of the world, unshaken by its terrors, may preserve to the end one constant tenor of integrity. Till at last, having, under the conduct of Christian faith, happily finished the period of discipline, we enter on that state, where a far nobler scene shall open ; where eternal objects shall shine in their native splendor ; where this twilight of mortal life being past, the *Sun of righteousness* shall rise ; and, *that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away.*

SERMON V.

ON THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come.—JOHN, xvii. 1.

THESE were the words of our blessed Lord on a memorable occasion. The feast of the passover drew nigh, at which he knew that he was to suffer. The night was arrived wherein he was to be delivered into the hands of his enemies. He had spent the evening in conference with his disciples; like a dying father in the midst of his family, mingling consolations with his last instructions. When he had ended his discourse to them, he *lifted up his eyes to heaven*, and with the words which I have now read, began that solemn prayer of intercession for the church, which closed his ministry. Immediately after, he went forth with his disciples into the garden of Gethsemane, and surrounded himself to those who came to apprehend him.

Such was the situation of our Lord at the time of his pronouncing these words. He saw his mission on the point of being accomplished. He had the prospect full before him, of all that he was about to suffer—*Father! the hour is come.*—What hour? An hour the most critical, the most pregnant with great events, since hours had begun to be numbered, since time had begun to run. It was the hour in which the Son of God was to terminate the labours of his important life, by a death still more important and illustrious; the hour of atoning, by his sufferings, for the guilt of mankind; the hour of accomplishing prophecies, types, and symbols, which had been carried through a series of ages; the hour of concluding the old, and of introducing to the world the new dispensation of religion; the hour of his triumphing over the world, and death and hell; the hour of his erecting that spiritual kingdom which is to last forever. Such is the hour. Such are the events, which you are to commemorate in the sacrament of our Lord's Supper. I shall attempt to set them before you as

proper subjects, at this time, of your devout meditation. To display them in their genuine majesty, is beyond the ability of man.

I. THIS was the hour in which Christ was glorified by his sufferings. The whole of his life has discovered much real greatness, under a mean appearance. Through the cloud of his humiliation, his native lustre often broke forth; but never did it shine so bright, as in this last, this trying hour. It was indeed the hour of distress, and of blood. He knew it to be such; and when he uttered the words of the text, he had before his eyes, the executioner and the cross, the scourge, the nails, and the spear. But by prospects of this nature his soul was not to be overcome. It is distress which ennobles every great character; and distress was to glorify the Son of God. He was now to teach all mankind, by his example, how to suffer and to die. He was to stand forth before his enemies, as the faithful witness of the truth; justifying by his behaviour the character which he assumed, and sealing with his blood the doctrine which he taught.

What magnanimity in all his words and actions on this great occasion! The court of Herod, the judgment-hall of Pilate, the hill of Calvary, were so many theatres prepared for his displaying all the virtues of a constant and patient mind. When led forth to suffer, the first voice which we hear from him, is a generous lamentation over the fate of his unfortunate, though guilty, country; and, to the last moment of his life, we behold him in possession of the same gentle and benevolent spirit. No upbraiding, no complaining expression escaped from his lips, during the long and painful approaches of a cruel death. He betrayed no symptom of a weak or a vulgar, of a discomposed or impatient mind. With the utmost attention of filial tenderness, he committed his aged mother to the care of his beloved disciple.* With all the dignity of a sovereign, he conferred pardon on a penitent fellow-sufferer. With a greatness of mind beyond example, he spent his last moments in apologies and prayers for those who were shedding his blood.

By wonders in heaven, and wonders on earth, was this hour distinguished. All nature seemed to feel it; and the dead and the living bore witness to its importance. The veil of the temple was rent in twain. The earth shook. There was darkness over all the land. The graves were opened, and *many who slept arose, and went into the Holy City*. Nor were these the only prodigies of this awful hour. The most hardened hearts were subdued and changed. The judge who, in order to gratify the multitude, passed sentence against him, publicly attested his innocence. The Roman centurion who presided at the execution, *glorified God*, and acknowledged the sufferer to be more than man. *After he*

* John, xix. 26. 27.

saw the things which had passed, he said, *Certainly this was a righteous person ; truly this was the Son of God.* The Jewish malefactor who was crucified with him, addressed him as a King, and implored his favour. Even the crowd of insensible spectators, who had come forth as to a common spectacle, and who began with clamors and insults, *returned home, smiting their breasts.*—Look back on the heroes, the philosophers, the legislators of old. View them in their last moments. Recal every circumstance which distinguished their departure from the world.—Where can you find such an assemblage of high virtues, and of great events, as concurred at the death of Christ? Where so many testimonies given to the dignity of the dying person, by earth and by heaven?

II. THIS was the hour in which Christ atoned for the sins of mankind, and accomplished our eternal redemption. It was the hour when that great sacrifice was offered up, the efficacy of which reaches back to the first transgression of man, and extends forward to the end of time; the hour when, from the cross, as from an high altar, the blood was flowing, which washed away the guilt of the nations.

This awful dispensation of the Almighty contains mysteries which are beyond the discovery of man. It is one of those things into which *the Angels desire to look.* What has been revealed to us is, That the death of Christ was the interposition of Heaven for preventing the ruin of human kind. We know, that, under the government of God, misery is the natural consequence of guilt. After rational creatures had, by their criminal conduct, introduced disorder into the divine kingdom, there was no ground to believe, that by their penitence and prayers alone they could prevent the destruction which threatened them. The prevalence of propitiatory sacrifices throughout the earth, proclaims it to be the general sense of mankind, that mere repentance was not of sufficient avail to expiate sin, or to stop its penal effects. By the constant allusions which are carried on in the New Testament to the sacrifices under the Law, as pre-signifying a great atonement made by Christ; and by the strong expressions which are used in describing the effects of his death, the sacred writers show, as plainly as language allows, that there was an efficacy in his sufferings, far beyond that of mere example and instruction. The nature and extent of that efficacy, we are unable, as yet, fully to trace. Part we are capable of beholding; and the wisdom of what we behold, we have reason to adore. We discern in this plan of redemption, the evil of sin strongly exhibited; and the justice of the Divine government awfully exemplified, in Christ suffering for sinners. But let us not imagine, that our present discoveries unfold the whole influence of the death of Christ. It is connected with causes into which we cannot penetrate. It pro-

duces consequences too extensive for us to explore. *God's thoughts are not as our thoughts.* In all things we see *only in part*; and here, if any where, we see also *as through a glass, darkly.*

This, however, is fully manifest, that redemption is one of the most glorious works of the Almighty. If the hour of the creation of the world was great and illustrious; that hour, when, from the dark and formless mass, this fair system of nature arose at the Divine command; when *the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy*; no less illustrious is the hour of the restoration of the world; the hour when, from condemnation and misery, it emerged into happiness and peace. With less external majesty it was attended, but is, on that account, the more wonderful, that, under an appearance so simple, such great events were covered.

III. IN this hour the long series of prophecies, visions, types, and figures, was accomplished. This was the centre in which they all met: This the point towards which they had tended and verged, throughout the course of so many generations. You behold the Law and the Prophets standing, if we may speak so, at the foot of the cross, and doing homage. You behold Moses and Aaron bearing the ark of the covenant; David and Elijah presenting the oracle of testimony; You behold all the priests and sacrifices, all the rites and ordinances, all the types and symbols assembled together to receive their consummation. Without the death of Christ, the worship and ceremonies of the Law would have remained a pompous, but unmeaning institution. In the hour when he was crucified, *the book with the seven seals* was opened. Every rite assumed its significancy; every prediction met its event; every symbol displayed its correspondence.

The dark, and seemingly ambiguous, method of conveying important discoveries under figures and emblems, was not peculiar to the sacred books. The spirit of God, in pre-signifying the death of Christ, adopted that plan, according to which the whole knowledge of those early ages was propagated through the world. Under the veil of mysterious allusion, all wisdom was then concealed. From the sensible world, images were every where borrowed, to describe things unseem. More was understood to be meant than was openly expressed. By enigmatical rites, the Priest communicated his doctrines; by parables and allegories, the Philosopher instructed his disciples; even the Legislator, by figurative sayings, commanded the reverence of the people. Agreeably to this prevailing mode of instruction, the whole dispensation of the Old Testament was so conducted, as to be the shadow and the figure of a spiritual system. Every remarkable event, every distinguished personage, under the Law, is interpreted in the New Testament, as bearing some reference to the hour of which we treat. If Isaac was laid upon the altar as an innocent

victim; if David was driven from his throne by the wicked, and restored by the hand of God; if the brazen serpent was lifted up to heal the people; if the rock was smitten by Moses, to furnish drink in the wilderness; all were types of Christ, and alluded to his death.

In predicting the same event the language of ancient prophecy was magnificent, but seemingly contradictory: For it foretold a Messiah, who was to be at once a sufferer and a conqueror. *The Star was to come out of Jacob, and the branch to spring from the stem of Jesse. The Angel of the covenant, the Desire of all Nations, was to come suddenly to his temple; and to him was to be the gathering of the people.* Yet, at the same time he was to be *despised and rejected of men; he was to be taken from prison and from judgment, and to be led as a lamb to the slaughter. Though he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, yet the Gentiles were to come to his light, and Kings to the brightness of his rising.* In the hour when Christ died, those prophetic riddles were solved; those seeming contradictions were reconciled. The obscurity of oracles, and the ambiguity of types, vanished. The *sun of righteousness* rose; and, together with the dawn of religion, those shadows passed away.

IV. This was the hour of the abolition of the Law, and the introduction of the Gospel; the hour of terminating the old and of beginning the new dispensation of religious knowledge and worship throughout the earth. Viewed in this light, it forms the most august æra which is to be found in the history of mankind. When Christ was suffering on the cross, we are informed by one of the Evangelists, that he said, *I thirst*; and that they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it to his mouth. *After he had tasted the vinegar, knowing that all things were now accomplished, and the scriptures fulfilled, he said, It is finished*;* that is, This offered draught of vinegar was the last circumstance predicted by an ancient prophet,† that remained to be fulfilled. The vision and the prophecy are now sealed: The Mosaic dispensation is closed. *And he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.*

It is finished.—When he uttered these words, he changed the state of the universe. At that moment the Law ceased, and the Gospel commenced. This was the ever-memorial point of time which separated the old and the new world from each other. On one side of the point of separation, you behold the Law, with its priests, its sacrifices, and its rites, retiring from sight. On the other side, you behold the Gospel, with its simple and venerable institutions, coming forward into view. Significantly was the veil of the temple rent in this hour; for the glory then departed

* John, xix. 28, 29, 30.

† Psalm, lxi. 21.

from between the cherubims. The legal High Priest delivered up his Urim and Thummim, his breast-plate, his robes, and his incense : and CHRIST stood forth as the great High Priest of all succeeding generations. By that one sacrifice, which he now offered, he abolished sacrifices for ever. Altars on which the fire had blazed for ages, were now to smoke no more. Victims were no more to bleed. *Not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with his own blood, he now entered into the Holy Place, there to appear in the presence of God for us.*

This was the hour of association and union to all the worshippers of God. When Christ said, *It is finished*, he threw down the wall of partition which had so long divided the Gentile from the Jew. He gathered into one, all the faithful out of every kindred and people. He proclaimed the hour to be come, when the knowledge of the true God should be no longer confined to one nation, nor his worship to one temple ; but over all the earth, the worshippers of the father should *serve him in spirit and in truth*. From that hour they who dwelt in the *uttermost ends of the earth, strangers to the covenant of promise*, began to be brought nigh. In that hour the light of the Gospel dawned from afar on the British islands.

During a long course of ages, Providence seemed to be occupied in preparing the world for this revolution. The whole Jewish economy was intended to usher it in. The knowledge of God was preserved unextinguished in one corner of the world, that thence, in due time, might issue forth the light which was to overspread the earth. Successive revelations gradually enlarged the views of men beyond the narrow bounds of Judea, to a more extensive kingdom of God. Signs and miracles awakened their expectation, and directed their eyes towards this great event. Whether God descended on the flaming mountain, or spoke by the Prophet's voice ; whether he scattered his chosen people into captivity or re-assembled them in their own land ; he was still carrying on a progressive plan, which was accomplished at the death of Christ.

Not only in the territories of Israel, but over all the earth, the great dispensation of Providence respected the approach of this important hour. If empires rose or fell : if war divided, or peace united the nations ; if learning civilized their manners, or philosophy enlarged their views ; all was, by the secret decree of Heaven, made to ripen the world for that *fulness of time*, when Christ was to publish the whole counsel of God. The Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman conqueror, entered upon the stage each at his predicted period ; and *though he meant not so, neither did his heart think so*, ministered to this hour. The revolutions of power, and the succession of monarchies, were so arranged by Provi-

dence, as to facilitate the progress of the Gospel through the habitable world, after the day had arrived, *when the stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands, should become a great mountain, and fill the earth.** This was the day which *Abraham saw afar off, and was glad.* This was the day which *many Prophets and Kings, and righteous men, desired to see, but could not;* the day for which *the earnest expectation of the creature, long oppressed with ignorance, and bewildered in superstition, might be justly said to wait.*

V. THIS was the hour of Christ's triumph over all the powers of darkness; the hour in which he overthrew dominions and thrones, *led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.* The contest which the kingdom of darkness had long maintained against the kingdom of light, was now brought to its crisis. The period was come, when *the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent.* For many ages, the most gross superstition had filled the earth. *The glory of the incorruptible God was every where, except in the land of Judea, changed into images made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and beasts, and creeping things.* The world, which the Almighty created for himself, seemed to have become a temple of idols. Even to vices and passions altars were raised; and what was entitled Religion, was in effect a discipline of impurity. In the midst of this universal darkness, Satan had erected his throne; and the learned and polished, as well as the savage nations, bowed down before him. But at the hour when Christ appeared on the cross, the signal of his defeat was given. His kingdom suddenly departed from him; the reign of idolatry passed away: He was *beheld to fall like lightning from Heaven.* In that hour, the foundation of every Pagan temple shook. The statue of every false God tottered on its base. The Priest fled from his falling shrine and the Heathen oracles became dumb for ever.

As on the cross Christ triumphed over Satan, so he overcame his auxiliary the world. Long had it assailed him with its temptations and discouragements. In this hour of severe trial, he surmounted them all. Formerly he had despised the pleasures of the world. He now baffled its terrors. Hence he is justly said to have *crucified the world.* By his sufferings he ennobled distress; and he darkened the lustre of the pomp and vanities of life. He discovered to his followers the path which leads, through affliction, to glory and to victory; and he imparted to them the same spirit which enabled him to overcome. *My kingdom is not of this world. In this world ye shall have tribulation: But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*†

* Dan. ii. 34, 35.

† John, xvi. 33.

Death also, the last foe of man, was the victim of this hour.—The formidable appearance of the spectre remained; but his dart was taken away. For, in the hour when Christ expiated guilt, he disarmed death, by securing the resurrection of the just. When he said to his penitent fellow-sufferer, *To day thou shalt be with me in paradise*, he announced to all his followers the certainty of heavenly bliss. He declared *the cherubims* to be dismissed, and the *flaming sword* to be sheathed, which had been appointed at the fall, *to keep from the man the way of the tree of life*.^{*} Faint, before this period, had been the hope, indistinct the prospect, which even good men enjoyed of the heavenly kingdom. *Life and immortality were now brought to light*. From the hill of Calvary, the first clear and certain view was given to the world of the everlasting mansions. Since that hour, they have been the perpetual consolation of believers in Christ. Under trouble, they soothe their minds; amidst temptation, they support their virtue; and in their dying moments enable them to say, *Oh death! where is thy sting? Oh grave! where is thy victory?*

VI. THIS was the hour when our Lord erected that spiritual kingdom which is never to end. How vain are the counsels and designs of men! How shallow is the policy of the wicked! How short their triumphing! The enemies of Christ imagined, that in this hour they had successfully accomplished their plan for his destruction. They believed, that they had entirely scattered the small party of his followers, and had extinguished his name and his honour forever. In derision, they addressed him as a King. They clothed him with purple robes; they crowned him with a crown of thorns; they put a reed into his hand; and, with insulting mockery, bowed the knee before him. Blind and impious men! How little did they know, that the Almighty was at that moment *setting him as a King on the hill of Sion; giving him the Heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession!* How little did they know, that their badges of mock royalty were at that moment converted into the signals of absolute dominion, and the instruments of irresistible power! The reed which they put into his hands became a *rod of iron*, with which he was to *break in pieces his enemies*; a sceptre, with which he was to rule the universe in righteousness. The cross, which they thought was to stigmatize him with infamy, became the ensign of his renown. Instead of being the reproach of his followers, it was to be their boast and their glory. The cross was to shine on palaces and churches, throughout the earth. It was to be assumed as the distinction of the most powerful monarchs, and to wave in the banner of victorious armies when the memory of Herod and

* Gen. iii. 24.

Pilate should be accursed; when Jerusalem should be reduced to ashes, and the Jews be vagabonds over all the world.

These were the triumphs which commenced at this hour. Our Lord saw them already in their birth; he *saw of the travail of his soul, and was satisfied*. He beheld the word of God going forth, conquering, and to conquer; subduing, to the obedience of his laws, the subduers of the world; carrying light into the regions of darkness, and mildness into the habitations of cruelty. He beheld the Gentiles waiting below the cross, to receive the Gospel. He beheld *Ethiopia and the Isles stretching out their hands to God; the desert beginning to rejoice and to blossom as the rose; and the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth, as the waters cover the sea*. Well pleased, he said, *it is finished*. As a conqueror, he retired from the field, reviewing his triumphs: *He bowed his head, and gave up the ghost*.—From that hour, Christ was no longer a mortal man, but *head over all things to the church*; the glorious King of men and angels, of whose dominion there shall be no end. His triumphs shall perpetually increase. *His name shall endure for ever; it shall last as long as the sun; men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed*.

SUCH were the transactions, such the effects of this ever memorable hour. With all those great events was the mind of our Lord filled, when he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, *Father! the hour is come*.

From this view which we have taken of this subject, permit me to suggest, what ground it affords to confide in the mercy of God for the pardon of sin; to trust to his faithfulness, for the accomplishment of all his promises; and to approach to him, with gratitude and devotion, in acts of worship.

IN the first place, the death of Christ affords us ground to confide in the Divine mercy for the pardon of sin. All the steps of that high dispensation of Providence, which we have considered, lead directly to this conclusion, *He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?** This is the final result of the discoveries of the Gospel. On this rests that great system of consolation, which it hath reared up for men. We are not left to dubious and intricate reasonings, concerning the conduct which God may be expected to hold towards his offending creatures: But we are led to the view of important and illustrious facts, which strike the mind with evidence irresistible. For, is it possible to believe, that such great operations, as I have endeavoured to describe, were carried on by the Almighty in vain? Did he excite in the hearts of his creatures such encouraging hopes, without any in-

* Rom. viii. 32.

tention to fulfil them? After so long a preparation of goodness, could he mean to deny forgiveness to the penitent and the humble? When, overcome by the sense of guilt, man looks up with an astonished eye to the justice of his Creator, let him recollect that hour which the text speaks, and be comforted. The signals of Divine mercy, erected in his view, are too conspicuous to be either distrusted or mistaken.

In the next place, the discoveries of this hour afford the highest reason to trust in the Divine faithfulness, for the accomplishment of every promise which remains yet unfulfilled. For this was the hour of the completion of God's ancient covenant.

It was the *performance of the mercy promised to the Fathers*. We behold the consummation of a great plan, which, throughout a course of ages, had been uniformly pursued; and which, against every human appearance, was, at the appointed moment, exactly fulfilled. *No word that is gone out of the mouth of the Lord, shall fail.* No length of time alters his purpose. No obstacles can retard it. Towards the ends accomplished in this hour, the most repugnant instruments were made to operate. We discern God bending to his purpose, the jarring passions, the opposite interests, and even the vices of men; uniting seeming contrarieties in his scheme; making *the wrath of man to praise him*; obliging the ambition of Princes, the prejudices of the Jews, the malice of Satan, all to concur, either in bringing forward this hour, or in completing its destined effects. With what entire confidence ought we to wait for the fulfilment of all his other promises in their due time; even when events are most embroiled, and the prospect is most discouraging. *Although thou sayest, thou canst not see him; yet judgment is before him: therefore trust thou in him.* Be attentively only to perform thy duty; leave the event to God; and be assured, that under the direction of his Providence, *all things shall work together* for a happy issue.

LASTLY, the consideration of this whole subject tends to excite gratitude and devotion, when we approach to God in acts of worship. The hour of which I have discoursed, presents him to us in the amiable light of the Deliverer of mankind, the Restorer of our forfeited hopes. We behold the greatness of the Almighty, softened by the mild radiance of condescension and mercy. We behold him diminishing the awful distance at which we stand from his presence, by appointing for us a Mediator and Intercessor, through whom the humble may, without dismay, approach to Him who made them. By such views of the Divine nature, Christian faith lays the foundation for a worship which shall be at once rational and affectionate; a worship, in which the light of the understanding shall concur with the devotion of the heart, and the most profound reverence be united with the most cordial love.—

Christian faith is not a system of speculative truths. It is not a lesson of moral instruction only. By a train of high discoveries which it reveals, by a succession of interesting objects which it places in our view, it is calculated to elevate the mind, to purify the affections, and, by the assistance of devotion, to confirm and encourage virtue. Such, in particular, is the scope of that Divine institution, the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper. To this happy purpose, let it conduce; by concentrating, in one striking point of light, all that the Gospel has displayed of what is most important to man. Touched with just contrition for past offences, and filled with a grateful sense of Divine goodness, let us come to the altar of God; and, with a humble faith in his infinite mercies, devote ourselves to his service for ever.

SERMON VI.

ON GENTLENESS.

*The wisdom that is from above—is gentle—*JAMES, iii. 17.

TO be wise in our own eyes, to be wise in the opinion of the world, and to be wise in the sight of God, are three things so very different, as rarely to coincide. One may often be wise in his own eyes, who is far from being so in the judgment of the world; and to be reputed a prudent man by the world, is no security for being accounted wise by God. As there is a worldly happiness, which God perceives to be no other than disguised misery; as there are worldly honours, which in his estimation are reproach; so there is a worldly wisdom, which *in his sight is foolishness*. Of this worldly wisdom the characters are given in the context, and placed in contrast with those of the *wisdom which is from above*. The one is the wisdom of the crafty; the other, that of the upright. The one terminates in selfishness; the other, in charity. The one is *full of strife and bitter envyings*; the other, *of mercy and of good fruits*. One of the chief characters by which the wisdom from above is distinguished, is *gentleness*, of which I am now to discourse. Of this there is the greater occasion to discourse, because it is too seldom viewed in a religious light; and is more readily considered by the bulk of men, as a mere felicity of nature, or an exterior accomplishment of manners, than as a Christian virtue, which they are bound to cultivate. I shall first explain the nature of this virtue; and shall then offer some arguments to recommend, and some directions to facilitate, the practice of it.

I BEGIN with distinguishing true gentleness from passive tameness of spirit, and from unlimited compliance with the manners of others. That passive tameness, which submits, without struggle, to every encroachment to the violent and assuming, forms no part of Christian duty; but, on the contrary, is destructive of general happiness and order. That unlimited complaisance, which, on every occasion, falls in with the opinions and manners of others, is so far from being a virtue, that it is itself a vice, and the parent of many vices. It overthrows all steadiness of principle; and produces that sinful conformity with

the world which taints the whole character. In the present corrupted state of human manners, always to assent and to comply, is the very worst maxim we can adopt. It is impossible to support the purity and dignity of Christian morals, without opposing the world on various occasions, even though we should stand alone. That gentleness, therefore, which belongs to virtue, is to be carefully distinguished from the mean spirit of cowards, and the fawning assent of sycophants. It renounces no just right from fear. It gives up no important truth from flattery. It is indeed not only consistent with a firm mind, but it necessarily requires a manly spirit, and a fixed principle, in order to give it any real value. Upon this solid ground only, the polish of gentleness can with advantage be superinduced.

It stands opposed, not to the most determined regard for virtue and truth, but to harshness and severity, to pride and arrogance, to violence and oppression. It is, properly, that part of the great virtue of charity which makes us unwilling to give pain to any of our brethren. Compassion prompts us to relieve their wants. Forbearance prevents us from retaliating their injuries. Meekness restrains our angry passions; candor, our severe judgments. Gentleness corrects whatever is offensive in our manners; and, by a constant strain of humane attentions, studies to alleviate the burden of common misery.—Its office, therefore, is extensive. It is not, like some other virtues, called forth only on peculiar emergencies; but it is continually in action, when we are engaged in intercourse with men. It ought to form our address, to regulate our speech, and to diffuse itself over our whole behaviour.

I must warn you, however, not to confound this gentle *wisdom which is from above*, with that artificial courtesy, that studied smoothness of manners, which is learned in the school of the world. Such accomplishments, the most frivolous and empty may possess. Too often they are employed by the artful, as a snare; too often affected by the hard and unfeeling, as a cover to the baseness of their minds. We cannot, at the same time, avoid observing the homage which even in such instances the world is constrained to pay to virtue. In order to render society agreeable, it is found necessary to assume somewhat, that may at least carry its appearance. Virtue is the universal charm. Even its shadow is courted, when the substance is wanting. The imitation of its form has been reduced into an art; and, in the commerce of life, the first study of all who would either gain the esteem or win the hearts of others, is to learn the speech, and to adopt the manners, of candor, gentleness, and humanity. But that gentleness which is the characteristic of a good man, has, like every other virtue, its seat in the heart: And let me add, nothing, except what flows from the

heart, can render even external manners truly pleasing. For no assumed behaviour can at all times hide the real character. In that unaffected civility which springs from a gentle mind, there is a charm infinitely more powerful than all the studied manners of the most finished courtier.

True gentleness is founded on a sense of what we owe to him who made us, and to the common nature of which we all share. It arises from reflection on our own failings and wants; and from just views of the condition, and the duty of man. It is native feeling, heightened and improved by principle. It is the heart which easily relents; which feels for every thing that is human; and is backward and slow to inflict the least wound. It is affable in its address, and mild in its demeanor; ever ready to oblige, and willing to be obliged by others; breathing habitual kindness towards friends, courtesy to strangers, long-suffering to enemies. It exercises authority with moderation; administers reproof with tenderness; confers favours with ease and modesty. It is unassuming in opinion, and temperate in zeal. It contends not eagerly about trifles; is slow to contradict, and still slower to blame; but prompt to allay dissension, and to restore peace. It neither intermeddles unnecessarily with the affairs, nor pries inquisitively into the secrets of others. It delights above all things to alleviate distress, and, if it cannot dry up the falling tear, to soothe at least the grieving heart. Where it has not the power of being useful, it is never burdensome. It seeks to please, rather than to shine and dazzle; and conceals with care that superiority, either of talents or of rank, which is oppressive to those who are beneath it. In a word, it is that spirit and that tenor of manners, which the Gospel of Christ enjoins, when it commands us to *bear one another's burdens; to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep; to please every one his neighbour for his good; to be kind and tender-hearted; to be pitiful and courteous; to support the weak, and to be patient towards all men.*

Having now sufficiently explained the nature of this amiable virtue, I proceed to recommend it to your practice. Let me, for this end, desire you to consider the duty which you owe to God; to consider the relation which you bear one to another; to consider your own interest.

I. CONSIDER the duty which you owe to God. When you survey his works, nothing is so conspicuous as his greatness and majesty. When you consult his word, nothing is more remarkable than his attention to soften that greatness, and to place it in the mildest and least oppressive light. He not only characterises himself as the *God of consolation*, but, with condescending gentleness, he particularly accommodates himself to the situation of the unfortunate. *He dwelleth with the humble and contrite. He*

hideth not his face when the afflicted cry. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.—When his son came to be the Saviour of the world, he was eminent for the same attribute of mild and gentle goodness. Long before his birth, it was prophesied of him that he should *not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; that the bruised reed he should not break, nor quench the smoking flax:** And after his death, this distinguishing feature in his character was so universally remembered, that the Apostle Paul, on occasion of a request which he makes to the Corinthians, uses those remarkable expressions,† *I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.* During all his intercourse with men, no harshness, or pride, or stately distance appeared in his demeanor. In his access, he was easy; in his manners, simple; in his answers, mild; in his whole behaviour, humble and obliging. *Learn of me,* said he, *for I am meek and lowly in heart.*—As the Son of God is the pattern, so the Holy Ghost is the inspirer of gentleness. His name is *the comforter, the spirit of Grace and Peace.* His fruit, or operations on the human mind are *love, meekness, gentleness and long-suffering.*‡—Thus, by every discovery of the Godhead, honour is conferred upon gentleness. It is held up to our view, as peculiarly connected with Celestial Nature. And suitable to such discoveries, is the whole strain of the Gospel. It were unnecessary to appeal to any single precept. You need only open the New Testament, to find this virtue perpetually inculcated. Charity, or love, is the capital figure ever presented to our view; and gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness, are the sounds ever recurring on our ear.

So predominant, indeed, is this spirit throughout the Christian dispensation, that even the vices and corruptions of men have not been able altogether to defeat its tendency. Though that dispensation is far from having hitherto produced its full effect upon the world, yet we can clearly trace its influence in humanizing the manners of men. Remarkable, in this respect, is the victory which it has gained over those powers of violence and cruelty which belong to the infernal kingdom. Wherever Christianity prevails, it has discouraged, and, in some degree, abolished slavery. It has rescued human nature from that ignominious yoke, under which, in former ages, the one half of mankind groaned. It has introduced more equality between the two sexes, and rendered the conjugal union more rational and happy. It has abated the ferociousness of war. It has mitigated the rigor of despotism; mitigated the cruelty of punishment; in a word, has reduced mankind from their ancient barbari-

* Matth. xii. 19, 20.

† 2 Cor. x. 1.

‡ Gal. v. 22.

ty, into a more humane and gentle state.—Do we pretend respect and zeal for this religion, and at the same time allow ourselves in that harshness and severity, which are so contradictory to its genius? Too plainly we show, that it has no power over our hearts. We may retain the Christian name; but we have abandoned the Christian spirit.

II. CONSIDER the relation which you bear to one another.—Man, as a solitary individual, is a very wretched being. As long as he stands detached from his kind, he is possessed, neither of happiness, nor of strength. We are formed by nature to unite; we are impelled towards each other, by the compassionate instincts in our frame; we are linked by a thousand connections, founded on common wants. Gentleness, therefore, or, as it is very properly termed, humanity, is what man, as such, in every station, owes to man. To be inaccessible, contemptuous, and hard of heart, is to revolt against our own nature; is, in the language of scripture, *to hide ourselves from our own flesh*. Accordingly, as all feel the claim which they have to mildness and humanity, so all are sensibly hurt by the want of it in others. On no side are we more vulnerable. No complaint is more feelingly made, than that of the harsh and rugged manners of persons with whom we have intercourse.—But how seldom do we transfer the cause to ourselves, or examine how far we are guilty of inflicting on others, whose sensibility is the same with ours, those very wounds of which we so loudly complain?

But, perhaps, it will be pleaded by some, That this gentleness on which we now insist, regards only those smaller offices of life, which in their eye are not essential to religion and goodness. Negligent, they confess, on slight occasions, of the government of their temper, or the regulation of their behaviour, they are attentive, as they pretend, to the great duties of beneficence; and ready, whenever the opportunity presents, to perform important services to their fellow-creatures. But let such persons reflect, that the occasions of performing those important good deeds very rarely occur. Perhaps their situation in life, or the nature of their connections, may in a great measure exclude them from such opportunities. Great events give scope for great virtues; but the main tenor of human life is composed of small occurrences. Within the round of these, lie the materials of the happiness of most men; the subjects of their duty, and the trials of their virtue. Virtue must be formed and supported, not by unfrequent acts, but by daily and repeated exertions. In order to its becoming either vigorous or useful, it must be habitually active; not breaking forth occasionally, with a transient lustre, like the blaze of the comet; but regular in its

returns, like the light of day : Not like the aromatic gale, which sometimes feasts the sense ; but like the ordinary breeze, which purifies the air, and renders it healthful.

Years may pass over our heads, without affording any opportunity for acts of high beneficence or extensive utility. —Whereas, not a day passes, but in the common transactions of life, and especially in the intercourse of domestic society, gentleness finds place for promoting the happiness of others, and for strengthening in ourselves the habit of virtue. Nay, by seasonable discoveries of a humane spirit, we sometimes contribute more materially to the advancement of happiness, than by actions which are seemingly more important. There are situations, not a few, in human life, where the encouraging reception, the condescending behaviour, and the look of sympathy, bring greater relief to the heart than the most bountiful gift. While, on the other side, when the hand of liberality is extended to bestow, the want of gentleness is sufficient to frustrate the intention of the benefit. We sour those whom we mean to oblige ; and by conferring favours with ostentation and harshness, we convert them into injuries. Can any disposition then be held to possess a low place in the scale of virtue, whose influence is so considerable on the happiness of the world ?

Gentleness is, in truth, the great avenue to mutual enjoyment. Amidst the strife of interfering interests, it tempers the violence of contention, and keeps alive the seeds of harmony. It softens animosities ; renews endearments ; and renders the countenance of man a refreshment to man. Banish gentleness from the earth : suppose the world to be filled with none but harsh and contentious spirits ; and what sort of society would remain ? The solitude of the desert were preferable to it. The conflict of jarring elements in chaos ; the cave, where subterraneous winds contend and roar ; the den, where serpents hiss, and beasts of the forests howl ; would be the only proper representations of such assemblies of men.—*Oh, that I had wings like a dove ! for then I would fly away, and be at rest. Lo ! then I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness ; I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest : For I have seen violence and strife in the city. Mischief and sorrow are in the midst of it : Deceit and guile depart not from her streets.**—Strange ! that where men have all one common interest, they should so often absurdly concur in defeating it ! Has not Nature already provided a sufficient quantity of unavoidable evils for the state of man ? As if we did not suffer enough from the storm which beats upon us without, must we conspire also, in those societies where we

* Psalm, iv. 6, 7, 8.

assemble, in order to find a retreat from that storm, to harass one another?—But if the sense of duty, and of common happiness, be insufficient to recommend the virtue of which we treat, then let me desire you,

III. To consider your own interest. Whatever ends a good man can be supposed to pursue, gentleness will be found to favour them. It prepossesses and wins every heart. It persuades, when every other argument fails; often disarms the fierce, and melts the stubborn. Whereas harshness confirms the opposition it would subdue; and, of an indifferent person, creates an enemy. He who could overlook an injury committed in the collision of interests, will long and severely resent the slights of a contemptuous behaviour.—To the man of gentleness, the world is generally disposed to ascribe every other good quality. The higher endowments of the mind we admire at a distance, and when any impropriety of behaviour accompanies them, we admire without love. They are like some of the distant stars, whose beneficial influence reaches not to us. Whereas of the influence of gentleness, all in some degree partake, and therefore all love it. The man of this character rises in the world without struggle, and flourishes without envy. His misfortunes are universally lamented; and his failings are easily forgiven.

But whatever may be the effect of this virtue on our external condition, its influence on our internal enjoyment is certain and powerful. That inward tranquillity which it promotes, is the first requisite to every pleasurable feeling. It is the calm and clear atmosphere, the serenity and sunshine of the mind. When benignity and gentleness reign within, we are always least in hazard of being ruffled from without; every person, and every occurrence, are beheld in the most favourable light. But let some clouds of disgust and ill-humour gather on the mind; and immediately the scene changes. Nature seems transformed; and the appearance of all things is blackened to our view. The gentle mind is like the smooth stream, which reflects every object in its just proportion, and in its fairest colours. The violent spirit, like troubled waters, renders back the images of things distorted and broken; and communicates to them all that disordered motion which arises solely from its own agitation.

Offences must come. As soon may the waves of the sea cease to roll, as provocations not arise from human corruption and frailty. Attacked by great injuries, the man of mild and gentle spirit will feel what human nature feels; and will defend and resent, as his duty allows him. But to those slight provocations, and frivolous offences, which are the most frequent causes of disquiet, he is happily superior. Hence his days flow in a far more placid tenor than those of others; exempted from the numberless discomposures which agitate vulgar minds. Inspired with high-

er sentiments ; taught to regard with indulgent eye the frailties of men, the omissions of the careless, the follies of the imprudent, and the levity of the fickle, he retreats into the calmness of his spirit, as into an undisturbed sanctuary ; and quietly allows the usual current of life to hold its course.

This virtue has another, and still more important, connexion with our interest, by means of that relation which our present behaviour bears to our eternal state. Heaven is the region of gentleness and friendship : Hell, of fierceness and animosity. If then, as the scripture instructs us, *according to what we now sow, we must hereafter reap* ; it follows, that the cultivation of a gentle temper is necessary to prepare us for heavenly felicity, and that the indulgence of harsh dispositions is the introduction to future misery. Men, I am afraid, too often separate those articles of their belief which relate to eternity, from the ordinary affairs of the world. They connect them with the seasons of seriousness and gravity. They leave them with much respect, as in a high region, to which, only on great occasions, they resort ; and, when they descend into common life, consider themselves as at liberty to give free scope to their humors and passions. Whereas, in fact, it is their behaviour in the daily train of social intercourse, which, more than any other cause, fixes and determines their spiritual character ; gradually instilling those dispositions, and forming those habits, which affect their everlasting condition. With regard to trifles, perhaps their malignant dispositions may chiefly be indulged. But let them remember well, that those trifles, by increasing the growth of peevishness and passion, become pregnant with the most serious mischiefs ; and may fit them, before they are aware, for being the future companions of none but infernal spirits.

I mean not to say, that, in order to our preparation for Heaven, it is enough to be mild and gentle ; or that this virtue alone will cover all our sins. Through the felicity of natural constitution, a certain degree of this benignity may be possessed by some, whose hearts are in other respects corrupt, and their lives irregular. But what I mean to assert is, That where no attention is given to the government of temper, meetness for Heaven is not yet acquired, and the regenerating power of religion is as yet unknown. One of the first works of the spirit of God is, to infuse into every heart which it inhabits, that *gentle wisdom which is from above*. *They who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts* ; but let it not be forgotten, that among the *works of the flesh, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, and envyings*, are as expressly enumerated, as *uncleanness, murders, drunkenness, and revelling*. *—

They who continue either in the one, or the other, *shall not inherit*, indeed cannot inherit, *the kingdom of God*.

Having thus shown the importance of gentleness, both as a moral virtue, and as a Christian grace, I shall conclude the subject, with briefly suggesting some considerations which may be of use to facilitate the practice of it.

For this end let me advise you to view your character with an impartial eye; and to learn from your own failings, to give that indulgence which in your turn you claim. It is pride which fills the world with so much harshness and severity. In the fulness of self-estimation, we forget what we are. We claim attentions to which we are not entitled. We are rigorous to offences, as if we had never offended; unfeeling to distress, as if we knew not what it was to suffer. From those airy regions of pride and folly, let us descend to our proper level. Let us survey the natural equality on which Providence has placed man with man, and reflect on the infirmities common to all. If the reflection on natural equality and mutual offences be insufficient to prompt humanity, let us at least remember what we are in the sight of God. Have we none of that forbearance to give to one another, which we all so earnestly entreat from Heaven? Can we look for clemency or gentleness from our Judge, when we are so backward to show it to our own brethren?

Accustom yourselves also to reflect on the small moment of those things which are the usual incentives to violence and contention. In the ruffled and angry hour, we view every appearance through a false medium. The most inconsiderable point of interest, or honour, swells into a momentous object; and the slightest attack seems to threaten immediate ruin. But after passion or pride has subsided, we look round in vain for the mighty mischiefs we dreaded. The fabric, which our disturbed imagination had reared, totally disappears. But, though the cause of contention has dwindled away, its consequences remain. We have alienated a friend, we have embittered an enemy; we have sown the seeds of future suspicion, malevolence, or disgust.—Suspend your violence, I beseech you, for a moment, when causes of discord occur. Anticipate that period of coolness, which of itself will soon arrive. Allow yourselves to think, how little you have any prospect of gaining by fierce contention; but how much of the true happiness of life you are certain of throwing away. Easily, and from the smallest chink, the bitter waters of strife are let forth; but their course cannot be foreseen; and he seldom fails of suffering most from their poisonous effect, who first allowed them to flow.

But gentleness will, most of all, be promoted by frequent views of those great objects which our holy religion presents. Let the prospects of immortality fill your minds. Look upon this world

as a state of passage. Consider yourselves as engaged in the pursuits of higher interests; as acting now, under the eye of God, an introductory part to a more important scene. Elevated by such sentiments, your minds will become calm and sedate. You will look down, as from a superior station, on the petty disturbances of the world. They are the selfish, the sensual, and the vain, who are most subject to the impotence of passion. They are linked so closely to the world; by so many sides they touch every object, and every person around them, that they are perpetually hurt, and perpetually hurting others. But the spirit of true religion removes us to a proper distance from the grating objects of worldly contention. It leaves us sufficiently connected with the world, for acting our part in it with propriety; but disengages us from it so far, as to weaken its power of disturbing our tranquillity. It inspires magnanimity; and magnanimity always breathes gentleness. It leads us to view the follies of men with pity, not with rancor; and to treat, with the mildness of a superior nature, what in little minds would call forth all the bitterness of passion.

Aided by such considerations, let us cultivate that gentle wisdom which is, in so many respects, important both to our duty and our happiness. Let us assume it as the ornament of every age, and of every station. Let it temper the petulance of youth, and soften the moroseness of old age. Let it mitigate authority in those who rule, and promote deference among those who obey. I conclude with repeating the caution, not to mistake for true gentleness, that flimsy imitation of it called polished manners, which often, among men of the world, under a smooth appearance, conceals much asperity. Let yours be native gentleness of heart, flowing from the love of God, and the love of man. Unite this amiable spirit with a proper zeal for all that is right, and just, and true. Let piety be combined in your character with humanity. Let determined integrity dwell in a mild and gentle breast. A character thus supported will command more real respect, than can be procured by the most shining accomplishments, when separated from virtue.

SERMON VII.

ON THE DISORDERS OF THE PASSIONS.

Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.—ESTHER, v. 13.

THESE are the words of one, who, though high in station and power, confessed himself to be miserable. They relate to a memorable occurrence in the Persian history, under the reign of Ahasuerus, who is supposed to be the Prince known among the Greek historians by the name of Artaxerxes. Ahasuerus had advanced to the chief dignity in his kingdom, Haman, an Amalekite, who inherited all the ancient enmity of his race to the Jewish nation. He appears, from what is recorded of him, to have been a very wicked minister. Raised to greatness without merit, he employed his power solely for the gratification of his passions. As the honours which he possessed were next to royal, his pride was every day fed with that servile homage which is peculiar to Asiatic courts; and all the servants of the King prostrated themselves before him. In the midst of this general adulation, one person only stooped not to Haman. This was Mordecai the Jew; who, knowing this Amalekite to be an enemy to the people of God, and, with virtuous indignation, despising that insolence of prosperity with which he saw him lifted up, *bowed not, nor did him reverence.* On this appearance of disrespect from Mordecai, Haman *was full of wrath: but he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone.* Personal revenge was not sufficient to satisfy him. So violent and black were his passions, that he resolved to exterminate the whole nation to which Mordecai belonged. Abusing, for this cruel purpose, the favor of his credulous Sovereign, he obtained a decree to be sent forth, that, against a certain day, all the Jews throughout the Persian dominions should be put to the sword. Mean-while, confident of success, and blind to approaching ruin, he continued exulting in his prosperity. Invited by Ahasuerus to a royal banquet, which Esther the queen had prepared, *he went forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart.* But behold how slight an incident

was sufficient to poison his joy ! As he went forth, he saw Mordecai in the King's gate ; and observed, that still he refused to do him homage. *He stood not up nor was moved for him ;* although he well knew the formidable designs which Haman was preparing to execute. One private man, who despised his greatness, and disdained submission, while a whole kingdom trembled before him ; one spirit, which the utmost stretch of his power could neither subdue nor humble, blasted his triumphs.—His whole soul was shaken with a storm of passion. Wrath, pride, and desire of revenge, rose into fury. With difficulty he restrained himself in public ; but as soon as he came to his own house, he was forced to disclose the agony of his mind.—He gathered together his friends and family, with Zerish his wife. *He told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the King had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the King. He said, moreover, yea, Esther the Queen did let no man come in with the King unto the banquet that she had prepared, but myself ; and to-morrow also am I invited unto her with the King.*—After all this preamble, what is the conclusion ?—*Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.*

The sequel of Haman's history I shall not now pursue. It might afford matter for much instruction, by the conspicuous justice of God in his fall and punishment. But, contemplating only the singular situation in which the text presents him, and the violent agitation of his mind which it displays, the following reflections naturally arise, which, together with some practical improvements, shall make the subject of this discourse. I. How miserable is vice, when one guilty passion creates so much torment ! II. How unavailing is prosperity, when, in the height of it, a single disappointment can destroy the relish of all its pleasures ! III. How weak is human nature, which, in the absence of real, is thus prone to form to itself imaginary woes.

I. How miserable is vice, when one guilty passion is capable of creating so much torment ! When we discourse to you of the internal misery of sinners ; when we represent the pangs which they suffer from violent passions, and a corrupted heart ; we are sometimes suspected of choosing a theme for declamation, and of heightening the picture which we draw, by colours borrowed from fancy. They whose minds are, by nature, happily tranquil, or whose situation in life removes them from the disturbance and tumult of passion, can hardly conceive, that as long as the body is at ease, and the external condition prosperous, any thing which passes within the mind should cause such exquisite woe. But, for the truth of our assertions, we appeal, to the history of mankind. We might reason from the constitution of

the rational frame; where the understanding is appointed to be supreme, and the passions to be subordinate; and where, if this due arrangement of its parts be overthrown, misery as necessarily ensues, as pain is consequent in the animal frame upon the distortion of its members. But laying speculations of this kind aside, it is sufficient to lead you to the view of facts, the import of which can neither be controverted, nor mistaken. This is, indeed, the great advantage of history, that it is a mirror which holds up mankind to their own view. For, in all ages, human nature has been the same. In the circle of worldly affairs, the same characters and situations are perpetually returning; and in the follies and passions, the vices and crimes, of the generations that are past, we read those of the present.

Attend then to the instance now before us; and conceive, if you can, a person more thoroughly wretched, than one reduced to make this humiliating confession, that though surrounded with power, opulence, and pleasure, he was lost to all happiness, through the fierceness of his resentment; and was at that moment stung by disappointment, and torn by rage beyond what he could bear. *All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.*—Had this been a soliloquy of Haman's within himself, it would have been a sufficient discovery of his misery, but when we consider it as a confession which he makes to others, it is a proof that his misery was become insupportable. For such agitations of the mind every man strives to conceal, because he knows they dishonour him. Other griefs and sorrows he can, with freedom, pour out to a confidant. What he suffers from the injustice or malice of the world, he is not ashamed to acknowledge. But when his suffering arises from the bad dispositions of his own heart; when, in the height of prosperity, he is rendered miserable solely by disappointed pride, every ordinary motive for communication ceases. Nothing but the violence of anguish can drive him to confess a passion which renders him odious, and a weakness which renders him despicable. To what extremity, in particular, must he be reduced, before he can disclose to his own family the infamous secret of his misery? In the eye of his family every man wishes to appear respectable, and to cover from their knowledge whatever may vilify or degrade him. Attacked or reproached abroad, he consoles himself with his importance at home; and in domestic attachment and respect, seeks for some compensation for the injustice of the world. Judge then of the degree of torment which Haman endured, by its breaking through all these restraints, and forcing him to publish his shame before those from whom all men seek most to hide it. How severe must have been the conflict which he underwent within himself, before he called together his wife and all

his friends for this purpose! How dreadful the agony he suffered at the moment of his confession, when, to the astonished company, he laid open the cause of his distress!

Assemble all the evils which poverty, disease, or violence can inflict, and their stings will be found by far less pungent, than those which such guilty passions dart into the heart. Amidst the ordinary calamities of the world, the mind can exert its powers, and suggest relief: And the mind is properly the man; the sufferer, and his sufferings, can be distinguished. But those disorders of passion, by seizing directly on the mind, attack human nature in its strong hold, and cut off its last resource. They penetrate to the very seat of sensation; and convert all the powers of thought into instruments of torture.

Let us remark, in the event that is now before us, the awful hand of God; and admire his justice, in thus making the sinner's *own wickedness to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him*. Sceptics reason in vain against the reality of divine government. It is not a subject of dispute. It is a fact which carries the evidence of sense, and displays itself before our eyes. We see the Almighty manifestly *pursuing the sinner with evil*. We see him connecting with every single deviation from duty, those wounds of the spirit which occasion the most exquisite torments. He hath not merely promulgated his laws now, and delayed the distribution of rewards and punishments until a future period of being. But the sanctions of his laws already take place; their effects appear; and with such infinite wisdom are they contrived, as to require no other executioners of justice against the sinner, than his own guilty passions. God needs not come forth from his secret place, in order to bring him to punishment. He needs not call thunder down from the heavens, nor raise any ministers of wrath from the abyss below. He needs only say, *Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone*: And, at that instant, the sinner becomes his own tormentor. The infernal fire begins, of itself, to kindle within him. The worm that never dies, seizes on his heart.

Let us remark also, from this example, how imperfectly we can judge, from external appearances, concerning real happiness or misery. All Persia, it is probable, envied Haman as the happiest person in the empire; while yet, at the moment of which we now treat, there was not within its bounds one more thoroughly wretched. We are seduced and deceived by that false glare which prosperity sometimes throws around bad men. We are tempted to imitate their crimes, in order to partake of their imagined felicity. But remember Haman, and beware of the snare. Think not, when you behold a pageant of grandeur displayed to public view, that you discern the ensign of certain happiness. In order to form any just conclusion, you

must follow the great man into the retired apartment, where he lays aside his disguise; you must not only be able to penetrate into the interior of families, but you must have a faculty by which you can look into the inside of hearts. Were you endowed with such a power, you would most commonly behold good men in proportion to their goodness, satisfied and easy; you would behold atrocious sinners always restless and unhappy.

Unjust are our complaints, of the promiscuous distribution made by Providence, of its favours among men. From superficial views such complaints arise. The distribution of the goods of fortune, indeed, may often be promiscuous; that is, disproportioned to the moral characters of men; but the allotment of real happiness is never so. *For to the wicked there is no peace. They are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. They travel with pain all their days. Trouble and anguish prevail against them. Terrors make them afraid on every side. A dreadful sound is in their ears; and they are in great fear where no fear is.*—Hitherto we have considered Haman under the character of a very wicked man, tormented by criminal passions. Let us now consider him merely as a child of fortune, a prosperous man of the world; and proceed to observe.

II. How unavailing worldly prosperity is, since, in the midst of it, a single disappointment is sufficient to embitter all its pleasures. We might at first imagine, that the natural effect of prosperity would be, to diffuse over the mind a prevailing satisfaction, which the lesser evils of life could not ruffle or disturb. We might expect, that as one in the full glow of health, despises the inclemency of weather; so one in possession of all the advantages of high power and station, should disregard slight injuries; and, at perfect ease with himself, should view, in the most favorable light, the behaviour of others around him. Such effects would indeed follow, if worldly prosperity contained in itself the true principles of human felicity. But as it possesses them not, the very reverse of those consequences generally obtains. Prosperity debilitates, instead of strengthening the mind. Its most common effect is, to create an extreme sensibility to the slightest wound. It fomenting impatient desires; and raises expectations which no success can satisfy. It fosters a false delicacy, which sickens in the midst of indulgence. By repeated gratification, it blunts the feelings of men to what is pleasing, and leaves them unhappily acute to whatever is uneasy. Hence, the gale, which another would scarcely feel, is to the prosperous, a rude tempest. Hence the rose-leaf doubled below them on the couch, as it is told of the effeminate Sybarite, breaks their rest. Hence, the disrespect shown by Mordecai preyed with such violence on the heart of Haman. Upon no principle of reason can we assign a sufficient cause for all the distress which this incident oc-

caused to him. The cause lay not in the external incident. It lay within himself; it arose from a mind distempered by prosperity.

Let this example correct that blind eagerness with which we rush to the chase of worldly greatness and honours. I say not, that it should altogether divert us from pursuing them; since, when enjoyed with temperance and wisdom, they may doubtless both enlarge our utility, and contribute to our comfort. But let it teach us not to over-rate them. Let it convince us, that unless we add to them the necessary correctives of piety and virtue, they are by themselves more likely to render us wretched, than to make us happy.

Let the memorable fate of Haman suggest to us also, how often, besides corrupting the mind and engendering internal misery, they lead us among precipices, and betray us into ruin. At the moment when fortune seemed to smile upon him with the most serene and settled aspect, she was digging in secret the pit for his fall. Prosperity was weaving around his head the web of destruction. Success inflamed his pride; pride increased his thirst of revenge; the revenge which, for the sake of one man, he sought to execute on a whole nation, incensed the Queen, and he is doomed to suffer the same death which he had prepared for Mordecai.—Had Haman remained in a private station, he might have arrived at a peaceable old age. He might have been, I shall not say, a good or a happy man, yet probably far less guilty, and less wretched, than when placed at the head of the greatest empire in the East. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life? all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow.*

An extensive contemplation of human affairs will lead us to this conclusion, That, among the different conditions and ranks of men, the balance of happiness is preserved in a great measure equal; and that the high and the low, the rich and the poor, approach, in point of real enjoyment, much nearer to each other, than is commonly imagined. In the lot of man, mutual compensations, both of pleasure and of pain, universally take place.—Providence never intended, that any state here should be either completely happy or entirely miserable. If the feelings of pleasure are more numerous, and more lively, in the higher departments of life, such also are those of pain. If greatness flatters our vanity, it multiplies our dangers. If opulence increases our gratifications, it increases, in the same proportion, our desires and demands. If the poor are confined to a more narrow circle, yet within that circle lie most of those natural satisfactions, which, after all the refinements of art, are found to be the most genuine and true.—In a state, therefore, where there is neither so much to be coveted on the one hand, nor to be dreaded on the

other, as at first appears, how submissive ought we to be to the disposal of Providence! How temperate in our desires and pursuits! How much more attentive to preserve our virtue, and to improve our minds, than to gain the doubtful and equivocal advantages of worldly prosperity!—But now, laying aside the consideration of Haman's great crimes; laying aside his high prosperity; viewing him simply as a man; let us observe, from his history.

III. How weak human nature is, which in the absence of real, is thus prone to create to itself imaginary woes. *All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.*—What was it, Oh Haman! to thee, though Mordecai had continued to sit there, and neglected to do thee homage? Would the banquet have been on that account the less magnificent, thy palace less splendid, or thy retinue less numerous? Could the disrespect of an obscure stranger dishonour the favourite of a mighty King? In the midst of a thousand submissive courtiers, was one sullen countenance an object worthy of drawing thy notice, or of troubling thy repose?—Alas! in Haman we behold too just a picture of what often passes within ourselves. We never know what it is to be long at ease.—Let the world cease from changing around us: let external things keep that situation in which we most wish them to remain; yet somewhat from within shall soon arise, to disturb our happiness. A *Mordecai* appears, or seems to appear, *sitting at the gate.* Some vexation, which our fancy has either entirely created, or at least has unreasonably aggravated, corrodes us in secret; and until that be removed, all that we enjoy *availeth us nothing.* Thus, while we are incessantly complaining of the vanity and the evils of human life, we make that vanity, and we increase those evils. Unskilled in the art of extracting happiness from the objects around us, our ingenuity solely appears in converting them into misery.

Let it not be thought, that troubles of this kind are incident only to the great and the mighty. Though they, perhaps, from the intemperance of their passions, are peculiarly exposed to them; yet the disease itself belongs to human nature, and spreads through all ranks. In the humble and seemingly quiet shade of private life, discontent broods over its imaginary sorrows; preys upon the citizen, no less than upon the courtier; and often nourishes passions equally malignant in the cottage and in the palace. Having once seized the mind, it spreads its own gloom over every surrounding object; it every where searches out materials for itself; and in no direction more frequently employs its unhappy activity, than in creating divisions amongst mankind, and in magnifying slight provocations into mortal injuries. Those self-created miseries, imaginary in the cause, but

real in the suffering, will be found to form a proportion of human evils, not inferior, either in severity or in number, to all that we endure from the unavoidable calamities of life. In situations where much comfort might be enjoyed, this man's superiority, and that man's neglect, our jealousy of a friend, our hatred of a rival, an imagined affront, or a mistaken point of honour, allow us no repose. Hence, discords in families, animosities among friends, and wars among nations. Hence, Haman miserable in the midst of all that greatness could bestow. Hence, multitudes in the most obscure stations, for whom providence seemed to have prepared a quiet life, no less eager in their petty broils, nor less tormented by their passions, than if princely honours were the prize for which they contended.

FROM this train of observation, which the text has suggested, can we avoid reflecting upon the disorder in which human nature plainly appears at present to lie? We have beheld, in Haman, the picture of that misery which arises from evil passions; of that unhappiness, which is incident to the highest prosperity; of that discontent, which is common to every state. Whether we consider him as a bad man, a prosperous man, or simply as a man, in every light we behold reason too weak for passion. This is the source of the reigning evil; this is the root of the universal disease. The story of Haman only shows us, what human nature has too generally appeared to be in every age.—Hence, when we read the history of nations, what do we read but the history of the follies and crimes of men? We may dignify those recorded transactions, by calling them the intrigues of statesmen, and the exploits of conquerors; but they are, in truth, no other than the efforts of discontent to escape from its misery, and the struggles of contending passions among unhappy men. The history of mankind has ever been a continued tragedy; the world a great theatre exhibiting the same repeated scene, of the follies of men shooting forth into guilt, and of their passions fermenting, by a quick process, into misery.

But can we believe, that the nature of man came forth in this state from the hands of its gracious Creator? Did he frame this world, and store it with inhabitants, solely that it might be replenished with crimes and misfortunes?—In the moral, as well as in the natural world, we may plainly discern the signs of some violent convulsion, which has shattered the original workmanship of the Almighty. Amidst this wreck of human nature, traces still remain which indicate its Author. Those high powers of conscience and reason, that capacity for happiness, that ardor of enterprise, that glow of affection, which often break through the gloom of human vanity and guilt, are like the scattered columns, the broken arches, and defaced sculptures of some fallen temple, whose ancient splendor appears amidst its

ruins. So conspicuous in human nature are those characters, both of a high origin, and of a degraded state, that by many religious sects throughout the earth, they have been seen and confessed. A tradition seems to have pervaded almost all nations, that the human race had either through some offence forfeited, or through some misfortune lost, that station of primeval honour which they once possessed. But while from this doctrine, ill understood and involved in many fabulous tales, the nations wandering in Pagan darkness could draw no consequences that were just; while totally ignorant of the nature of the disease, they sought in vain for the remedy; the same divine revelation, which has informed us in what manner our apostasy arose from the abuse of our rational powers, has instructed us also how we may be restored to virtue and to happiness.

LET US, therefore, study to improve the assistance which this revelation affords for the restoration of our nature, and the recovery of our felicity. With humble and grateful minds, let us apply to those medicinal springs which it hath opened, for curing the disorders of our heart and passions. In this view, let us, with reverence, look up to that Divine Personage, who descended into this world, on purpose to be *the light and the life of men*; who came in the fulness of grace and truth, *to repair the desolation of many generations*, to restore order among the works of God, and to raise up a *new earth and new heavens, wherein righteousness should dwell for ever*. Under his tuition let us put ourselves; and amidst the storms of passion to which we are here exposed, and the slippery paths which we are left to tread, never trust presumptuously to our own understanding. Thankful that a Heavenly Conductor vouchsafes his aid, let us earnestly pray, that from him may descend divine light to guide our steps, and divine strength to fortify our minds. Let us pray, that his grace may keep us from all intemperate passions, and mistaken pursuits of pleasure; that whether it shall be his will to give or to deny us earthly prosperity, he may bless us with a calm, a sound, and well-regulated mind; may give us moderation in success, and fortitude under disappointment; and may enable us so to take warning from the crimes and miseries of others, as to escape the snares of guilt.

WHILE we thus maintain a due dependence on God, let us also exert ourselves with care in acting our own part. From the whole of what has been said, this important instruction arises, that the happiness of every man depends more upon the state of his own mind, than upon any one external circumstance; nay more than upon all external things put together. We have seen, that inordinate passions are the great disturbers of life; and that unless we possess a good conscience, and a well governed mind, discontent will blast every enjoyment, and the highest

prosperity will prove only disguised misery. Fix then this conclusion in your minds, that the destruction of your virtue is the destruction of your peace. *Keep thy heart with all diligence*; govern it with the greatest care; *for out of it are the issues of life*. In no station, in no period, think yourselves secure from the dangers which spring from your passions. Every age and every station they beset; from youth to gray hairs, and from the peasant to the prince.

At your first setting out in life, especially when yet unacquainted with the world and its snares, when every pleasure enchants with its smile, and every object shines with the gloss of novelty; beware of the seducing appearances which surround you, and recollect what others have suffered from the power of headstrong desire. If you allow any passion, even though it be esteemed innocent, to acquire an absolute ascendant, your inward peace will be impaired. But if any which has the taint of guilt, take early possession of your mind, you may date from that moment the ruin of your tranquillity. Nor with the season of youth does the peril end. To the impetuosity of youthful desire, succeed the more sober, but no less dangerous attachments of advancing years; when the passions which are connected with interest and ambition begin their reign, and too frequently extend their malignant influence, even over those periods of life which ought to be most tranquil. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline must never be relaxed, of guarding the heart from the dominion of passion. Eager passions, and violent desires, were not made for man. They exceed his sphere. They find no adequate objects on earth; and of course can be productive of nothing but misery. The certain consequence of indulging them is, that there shall come an evil day, when the anguish of disappointment shall drive us to acknowledge, that all which we enjoy *availeth us nothing*.

You are not to imagine, that the warnings which I have given in this discourse, are applicable only to the case of such signal offenders as he was, of whom the text treats. Think not, as I am afraid too many do, that because your passions have not hurried you into atrocious deeds, they have therefore wrought no mischief, and have left no sting behind them. By a continued series of loose, though apparently trivial gratifications, the heart is often as thoroughly corrupted, as by the commission of any one of those enormous crimes which spring from great ambition, or great revenge. Habit gives the passions strength, while the absence of glaring guilt seemingly justifies them; and, unawakened by remorse, the sinner proceeds in his course, till he wax bold in guilt, and become ripe for ruin. For by gradual and latent steps, the destruction of our virtue advances. Did the evil unveil itself at the beginning; did the storm which is to overthrow

our peace, discover, as it rose, all its horrors, precautions would more frequently be taken against it. But we are imperceptibly betrayed; and from one licentious attachment, one criminal passion, are, by a train of consequences, drawn on to another, till the government of our minds is irrecoverably lost. The enticing and the odious passions are, in this respect, similar in their process; and, though by different roads, conduct at last to the same issue. David, when he first beheld Bathsheba, did not plan the death of Uriah. Haman was not delivered up all at once to the madness of revenge. His passions rose with the rising tide of prosperity; and pride completed what prosperity began. What was originally no more than displeasure at Mordecai's disrespect, increased with every invitation he received to the banquet of the Queen; till it impelled him to devise the slaughter of a whole nation, and ended in a degree of rage which confounded his reason, and hurried him to ruin. In this manner, every criminal passion, in its progress, swells and blackens; and what was at first a small cloud, such as the prophet's servant saw, *no bigger than a man's hand rising from the sea,** is soon found to carry the tempest in its womb.

* 1 Kings, xviii. 44.

SERMON VIII.

ON OUR IGNORANCE OF GOOD AND EVIL IN THIS LIFE.

Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?—ECCLES. vi. 12.

THE measure according to which knowledge is dispensed to man, affords conspicuous proofs of divine wisdom. In many instances we clearly perceive, that either more or less would have proved detrimental to his state; that entire ignorance would have deprived him of proper motives to action; and that complete discovery would have raised him to a sphere too high for his present powers. He is, therefore, permitted to *know only in part; and to see through a glass, darkly*. He is left in that state of conjecture, and partial information, which though it may occasionally subject him to distress, yet, on the whole, conduces most to his improvement; which affords him knowledge sufficient for the purposes of virtue, and of active life, without disturbing the operations of his mind, by a light too bright and dazzling. This evidently holds with respect to that degree of obscurity which now covers the great laws of Nature, the decrees of the Supreme Being, the state of the invisible world, the future events of our own life, and the thoughts and designs which pass within the breasts of others.*

But there is an ignorance of another kind, with respect to which the application of this remark may appear more dubious; the ignorance under which men labour concerning their happiness in the present life, and the means of obtaining it. If there be foundation for Solomon's complaint in the text, *who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* This consequence may be thought inevitably to follow, that the *days of his life* must be *vain* in every sense; not only because they are fleeting, but because they are empty too, like the *shadow*. For to what purpose are all his labours in the pursuit of an object, which it is not in his power to discover or ascertain?—Let us then seriously enquire,

* Vide Sermon iv.

what account can be given of our present ignorance, respecting what is good for us in this life; whether nothing be left, but only to wander in uncertainty amidst this darkness, and to lament it as the sad consequence of our fallen state; or whether such instructions may not be derived from it, as give ground for acknowledging, that by this, as by all its other appointments, the wisdom of Providence brings real good out of seeming evil. I shall, in order to determine this point, first endeavour to illustrate the doctrine of the text, that we know not, or at most know imperfectly, *what is good for us in this life*: I shall next explain the causes to which this defect in our knowledge is owing: And then shall show the purposes which it was intended to serve, and the effects which it ought to produce on our conduct.

THE whole history of mankind seems a comment on the doctrine of the text. When we review the course of human affairs, one of the first objects which every where attracts our notice, is, the mistaken judgment of men concerning their own interest.—The *sore evil* which Solomon long ago remarked with respect to riches, of their being *kept by the owners thereof to their hurt*, takes place equally with respect to dominion and power, and all the splendid objects and high stations of life. We every day behold men climbing, by painful steps to that dangerous height, which, in the end, renders their fall more severe, and their ruin more conspicuous. But it is not to high stations that the doctrine of the text is limited. In the crimes by which too often these are gained, and in the misfortunes which they afterwards bring forth, the greater part of every audience may think themselves little concerned. Leaving such themes, therefore, to the poet and the historian, let us come nearer to ourselves, and survey the ordinary walk of life.

Around us, we every where behold a busy multitude. Restless and uneasy in their present situation, they are incessantly employed in accomplishing a change of it; and as soon as their wish is fulfilled, we discern, by their behaviour, that they are dissatisfied as they were before. Where they expected to have found a paradise, they find a desert. The man of business pines for leisure. The leisure for which he had longed proves an irksome gloom; and, through want of employment, he languishes, sickens, and dies. The man of retirement fancies no state to be so happy as that of active life. But he has not engaged long in the tumults and contests of the world, until he finds cause to look back with regret on the calm hours of his former privacy and retreat. Beauty, wit, eloquence, and fame, are eagerly desired by persons in every rank of life. They are the parent's fondest wish for his child: the ambition of the young, and the admiration of the old. And yet, in what numberless instances have

they proved, to those who possessed them, no other than shining snares; seductions to vice, instigations to folly, and, in the end, sources of misery? Comfortably might their days have passed, had they been less conspicuous. But the distinctions which brought them forth to notice, conferred splendor, and withdrew happiness. Long life is, of all others, the most general, and seemingly the most innocent object of desire. With respect to this too, we so frequently err, that it would have been a blessing to many to have had their wish denied. There was a period when they might have quitted the stage with honour, and in peace. But, by living too long, they outlived their reputation; outlived their family, their friends, and comforts; and reaped nothing from the continuance of days, except to feel the pressure of age, to taste the dregs of life, and to behold a wider compass of human misery.

Man walketh in a vain show. His fears are often as vain as his wishes. As what flattered him in expectation, frequently wounds him in possession; so the event to which he looked forward with an anxious and fearful eye, has often, when it arrived, laid its terrors aside; nay, has brought in its train unexpected blessings. Both good and evil are beheld at a distance, though a perspective which deceives. The colours of objects when nigh, are entirely different from what they appeared when they were viewed in futurity.

THE fact then being undoubtedly certain, that it is common for men to be deceived in their prospects of happiness, let us next enquire into the causes of that deception. Let us attend to those peculiar circumstances in our state, which render us such incompetent judges of future good or evil in this life.

First, We are not sufficiently acquainted with ourselves to foresee our future feelings. We judge by the sensations of the present moment; and, in the fervor of desire, pronounce confidently concerning the desired object. But we reflect not that our minds, like our bodies, undergo great alteration, from the situations into which they are thrown, and the progressive stages of life through which they pass. Hence, concerning any condition which is yet untried, we conjecture with much uncertainty. In imagination, we carry our present wants, inclinations, and sentiments, into the state of life to which we aspire. But no sooner have we entered on it, than our sentiments and inclinations change. New wants and desires arise; new objects are required to gratify them; and by consequence our old dissatisfaction returns, and the void, which was to have been filled, remains as great as it was before.

But next, supposing our knowledge of ourselves sufficient to direct us in the choice of happiness, yet still we are liable to err, from our ignorance of the connections which subsist between

our own condition and that of others. No individual can be happy, unless the circumstances of those around him be so adjusted as to conspire with his interest. For, in human society, no happiness or misery stands unconnected and independent. Our fortunes are interwoven by threads innumerable. We touch one another on all sides. One man's misfortune or success, his wisdom or his folly, often, by its consequences, reaches through multitudes. Such a system is far too complicated for our arrangement. It requires adjustments beyond our skill and power. It is a chaos of events into which our eye cannot pierce; and is capable of regulation, only by Him who perceives at one glance the relation of each to all.

Farther, as we are ignorant of the events which will arise from the combination of our circumstances with those of others, so we are equally ignorant of the influence which the present transactions of our life may have upon those which are future. The important question is not, what is good for a man one day? but, What is *good for him all the days of his life?*—Not, What will yield him a few scattered pleasures? but, What will render his life happy on the whole amount? And is he able to answer that question, who knoweth not what *one day may bring forth?* who cannot tell, whether the events of it may not branch out into consequences, which will assume a direction quite opposite to that in which they set forth, and spread themselves over all his life to come? There is not any present moment that is unconnected with some future one. The life of every man is a continued chain of incidents, each link of which hangs upon the former. The transition from cause to effect, from event to event, is often carried on by secret steps, which our foresight cannot divine, and our sagacity is unable to trace. Evil may, at some future period, bring forth good; and good may bring forth evil, both equally unexpected. Had the patriarch Joseph, continued to loiter under his father's fond indulgence, he might have lived an obscure and insignificant life. From the pit and the prison, arose the incidents which made him the ruler of Egypt, and the saviour of his father's house.

Lastly, Supposing every other incapacity to be removed, our ignorance of the dangers to which our spiritual state is exposed, would disqualify us for judging soundly concerning our true happiness. Higher interests than those of the present world, are now depending. All that is done or suffered by us here, ultimately refers to that immortal world, for which good men are trained up, under the care of an Almighty Parent. We are as incompetent judges of the measures necessary to be pursued for this end, as children are of the proper conduct to be held in their education. We foresee the dangers of our spiritual, still less than we do those of our natural state; because we are less at-

tentive to trace them We are still more exposed to vice than to misery: because the confidence which we place in our virtue, is yet worse founded than that which we place in our wisdom. Can you esteem him prosperous who is raised to a situation which flatters his passions, but which corrupts his principles, disorders his temper; and, finally, oversets his virtue? In the ardor of pursuit, how little are these effects foreseen! And yet, how often are they accomplished by a change of condition! Latent corruptions are called forth; seeds of guilt are quickened into life: a growth of crimes arises, which, had it not been for the fatal culture of prosperity, would never have seen the light. How often is man, boastful as he is of reason, merely the creature of his fortune; formed and moulded by the incidents of his life!—Hazael, when yet a private man, detested the thoughts of cruelty. *Thou shalt slay the young men with the sword,* said the Prophet: *Thou shalt dash the children, and rip up the women with child. Is thy servant a dog,* replied Hazael, *that he should do these things?** But no sooner was he clothed with the coveted purple, than it seemed to taint his nature. He committed the crimes of which, at a distance, he believed himself incapable; and became the bloody tyrant whose character his soul once abhorred.

SUCH then at present is man; thus incapable of pronouncing with certainty concerning his own good or evil. Of futurity, he discerns little; and even that little he sees through a cloud. Ignorant of the alteration which his sentiments and desires will undergo, from new situations in life; ignorant of the consequences which will follow from the combination of his circumstances with those of others around him; ignorant of the influence which the present may have on the future events of his life; ignorant of the effect which a change of condition may produce on his moral character, and his eternal interests; how can he know *what is good for him all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?*

Instead of only lamenting this ignorance, let us, in the last place, consider how it ought to be improved; what duties it suggests, and what wise ends it was intended by Providence to promote.

I. LET this doctrine teach us to proceed with caution and circumspection, through a world where evil so frequently lurks under the form of good. To be humble and modest in opinion, to be vigilant and attentive in conduct, to distrust fair appearances, and to restrain rash desires, are instructions which the darkness of our present state should strongly inculcate. God hath appointed our situation to be so ambiguous, in order both

* 2 Kings, viii. 12, 13.

1791

to call forth the exertion of those intelligent powers which he hath given us, and to enforce our dependence on his gracious aid. *It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.* Surrounded with so many bewildering paths, among which the wisest are ready to stray, how earnestly should we implore, and how thankfully should we receive, that divine illumination which is promised in Scripture to the pious and the humble! *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. He will guide them with his counsel. He will teach them the way that they should choose.* But what must be the fate of him, who, amidst all the dangers attending human conduct, neither looks up to Heaven for direction, nor properly exerts that reason which God hath given him? If to the most diligent enquirer, it proves so difficult a task to distinguish true good, from those fallacious appearances with which it is ever blended, how should he discover it who brings neither patience nor attention to the search; who applies to no other counsellor than present pleasure, and, with a rash and credulous mind, delivers himself up to every suggestion of desire?

This admonition I particularly direct to those, who are in a period of life too often characterised by forward presumption and headlong pursuit. The self-conceit of the young, is the great source of those dangers to which they are exposed, and it is peculiarly unfortunate, that the age which stands most in need of the counsel of the wise, should be the most prone to contemn it. Confident in the opinions which they adopt, and in the measures which they pursue, they seem as if they understood Solomon to say, not, *Who knoweth*, but, *Who is ignorant of what is good for man all the days of his life?* The bliss to be aimed at, is, in their opinion, fully apparent. It is not the danger of mistake, but the failure of success, which they dread. Activity to seize, not sagacity to discern, is the only requisite which they value.—How long shall it be, ere the fate of your predecessors in the same course teach you wisdom? How long shall the experience of all ages continue to lift its voice to you in vain? Beholding the ocean on which are embarked covered with wrecks, are not those fatal signals sufficient to admonish you of the hidden rock? If, in Paradise itself, there was a tree which bare fruit fair to the eye, but mortal in its effects, how much more in this fallen state, may such deceiving appearances be expected to abound! The whole state of Nature is now become a scene of delusion to the sensual mind. Hardly any thing is what it appears to be. And what flatters most, is always farthest from reality. There are voices which sing around you: but whose strains allure to ruin. There is a banquet spread, where poison is in every dish. There is a couch which invites you to repose; but to slumber upon it, is death. In such a situation, *be not high-minded but fear.* Let sobriety temper

your unwearied ardor. Let modesty check your rash presumption. Let wisdom be the offspring of reflection now, rather than the fruit of bitter experience hereafter.

II. LET our ignorance of what is good or evil, correct anxiety about worldly success. As rashness is the vice of youth, the opposite extreme of immoderate care is the vice of advancing years. The doctrine which I have illustrated, is equally adapted for checking both. Since we are so often betrayed into evil by the mistaken pursuit of good, care and attention are requisite, both in forming our choice, and in conducting our pursuit; but since our attention and care are liable to be so often frustrated, they should never be allowed to deprive us of tranquillity.

The ignorance in which we are left concerning good and evil, is not such as to supersede prudence in conduct: For wisdom is still found to *excel folly as far as light excelleth darkness*. But it is that degree of uncertainty, which ought to render us temperate in pursuit; which ought to calm the perturbation of hope and fear, and to cure the pain of anxiety. Anxiety is the poison of human life. It is the parent of many sins, and of more miseries. In a world where every thing is so doubtful, where you may succeed in your wish, and be miserable; where you may be disappointed, and be blest in the disappointment; what means this restless stir and commotion of mind? Can your solicitude alter the course, or unravel the intricacy of human events? Can your curiosity pierce through the cloud which the Supreme Being hath made impenetrable to mortal eye?—To provide against every apparent danger, by the employment of the most promising means, is the office of wisdom. But at this point wisdom stops. It commands you to retire, after you have done all that was incumbent on you, and to possess your mind in peace. By going beyond this point; by giving yourselves up to immoderate concern about unknown events, you can do nothing to advance your success, and you do much to ruin your peace. You plant within your breast the thorn which is long to gall you. To the vanity of life, you add a vexation of spirit, which is wholly of your own creation, not of Divine appointment. For the dubious goods of this world were never designed by God to raise such eager attachment. They were given to man for his occasional refreshment, not for his chief felicity. By setting an excessive value upon objects which were intended only for your secondary regard, you change their nature. Seeking more satisfaction from them than they are able to afford, you receive less than they might give. From a mistaken care to secure your happiness, you bring upon yourselves certain misery.

III. LET our ignorance of good and evil determine us to follow Providence, and to resign ourselves to God. One of the most important lessons which can be given to man, is resignation to his Maker; and nothing inculcates it more than the experience of his own inability to guide himself.—You know not what is good for you, in the future periods of life. But God perfectly knows it; and if you faithfully serve him, you have reason to believe that he will always consult it. Before him lies the whole succession of events which are to fill up your existence. It is in his power to arrange and model them at his pleasure, and so to adapt one thing to another, as to fulfil his promise of making them *all work together for good to those who love him*. Here then, amidst the agitations of desire, and the perplexities of doubt, is one fixed point of rest. By this let us abide; and dismiss our anxiety about things uncertain and unknown. *Acquaint yourselves with God, and be at peace*. Secure the *one thing needful*. Study to acquire an interest in the Divine favour; and you may safely surrender yourselves to the Divine administration.

When tempted to repine at your condition, reflect how uncertain it is, whether you should have been happier in any other. Remembering the vanity of many of your former wishes, and the fallacy which you have so often experienced in your schemes of happiness, be thankful that you are placed under a wiser direction than your own. Be not too particular in your petitions to Heaven, concerning your temporal interest. Suffer God to govern the world according to his own plan; and only pray, that he would bestow what his unerring wisdom sees to be best for you on the whole. In a word, *commit your way unto the Lord, trust in him, and do good*. Follow wherever his Providence leads; comply with whatever his will requires; and leave all the rest to him.

IV. LET our ignorance of what is good for us in this life, prevent our taking any unlawful step, in order to compass our most favourite designs. Were the sinner bribed with any certain and unquestionable advantage; could the means which he employs ensure his success, and could that success ensure his comfort: he might have some apology to offer for deviating from the path of virtue. But the doctrine which I have illustrated, deprives him of all excuse, and places his folly in the most striking light. He climbs the steep rock, and treads on the edge of a precipice, in order to catch a shadow. He has cause to dread, not only the uncertainty of the event which he wishes to accomplish, but the nature also of that event when accomplished. He is not only liable to that disappointment of success, which so often frustrates all the designs of men; but liable to a disappointment still more cruel, that of being successful and miserable at

once. Riches and pleasures are the chief temptations to criminal deeds. Yet those riches, when obtained, may very possibly overwhelm him with unforeseen miseries. Those pleasures may cut short his health and life. And is it for such doubtful and fallacious rewards, that the deceiver fills his mouth with lies, the friend betrays his benefactor, the apostate renounces his faith, and the assassin covers himself with blood?

Whoever commits a crime, incurs a certain evil, for a most uncertain good. What will turn to his advantage in the course of this life, he cannot with any assurance know. But this he may know, with full certainty, that by breaking the Divine commandments, he will draw upon his head that displeasure of the Almighty, which shall crush him for ever. The advantages of this world, even when innocently gained, are uncertain blessings; when obtained by criminal means, they carry a curse in their bosom. To the virtuous, they are often no more than chaff. To the guilty, they are always poison.

V. LET our imperfect knowledge of what is good or evil, attach us the more to those few things concerning which there can be no doubt of their being truly good. Of temporal things which belong to this class, the catalogue, it must be confessed, is small. Perhaps the chief worldly good we should wish to enjoy, is a sound mind in a sound body. Health and peace, a moderate fortune, and a few friends, sum up all the undoubted articles of temporal felicity. Wise was the man who addressed this prayer to God; *remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.** He whose wishes, respecting the possessions of this world, are the most reasonable and bounded, is likely to lead the safest, and, for that reason, the most desirable life. By aspiring too high, we frequently miss the happiness which, by a less ambitious aim, we might have gained. High happiness on earth, is rather a picture which the imagination forms, than a reality which man is allowed to possess.

But with regard to spiritual felicity, we are not confined to such humble views. Clear and determinate objects are proposed to our pursuit; and full scope is given to the most ardent desire. The forgiveness of our sins, and the assistance of God's holy grace to guide our life; the improvement of our minds in knowledge and wisdom, in piety and virtue; the protection and favor of the great Father of all, of the blessed Redeemer of mankind, and of the Spirit of sanctification and comfort; these are objects, in the pursuit of which there is no room for hesitation.

* Prov. xxx. 3, 9.

and distrust, nor any ground for the question in my text, *Who knoweth what is good for man?* Had Providence spread an equal obscurity over happiness of every kind, we might have had some reason to complain of the vanity of our condition. But we are not left to so hard a fate. The Son of God hath descended from heaven to be the *light of the world*. He hath removed that veil which covered true bliss from the search of wandering mortals, and hath taught them the way which leads to life. Worldly enjoyments are shown to be hollow and deceitful, with an express intention to direct their affections towards those which are spiritual. The same discoveries which diminish the value of the one, serve to increase that of the other. Finally,

VI. LET our ignorance of what is good or evil here below, lead our thoughts and desires to a better world. I have endeavoured to vindicate the wisdom of Providence, by showing the many useful purposes which this ignorance at present promotes. It serves to check presumption and rashness, and to enforce a diligent exertion of our rational powers, joined with a humble dependance on Divine aid. It moderates eager passions respecting worldly success. It inculcates resignation to the disposal of a Providence which is much wiser than man. It restrains us from employing unlawful means in order to compass our most favourite designs. It tends to attach us more closely to those things which are unquestionably good. It is therefore such a degree of ignorance as suits the present circumstances of man, better than more complete information concerning good and evil.

At the same time, the causes which render this obscurity necessary, too plainly indicate a broken and corrupted state of human nature. They show this life to be a state of trial. They suggest the ideas of a land of pilgrimage, not of the house of rest. Low-minded and base is he, who aspires to no higher portion; who could be satisfied to spend his whole existence in chasing those treacherous appearances of good, which so often mock his pursuit. What shadow can be more vain, than the life of the greatest part of mankind? Of all that eager and bustling crowd which we behold on the earth, how few discover the path of true happiness? How few can we find whose activity has not been misemployed, and whose course terminates not in confessions of disappointments? Is this the state, are these the habitations, to which a rational spirit, with all its high hopes and great capacities, is to be limited for ever?—Let us bless that God who hath set nobler prospects before us; who by the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ, hath *begotten us to the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens*. Let us show ourselves worthy of such a hope, by *setting our affections upon*

the things above, not upon things on the earth. Let us *walk by faith, and not by sight*; and, amidst the obscurity of this faint and dubious twilight, console ourselves with the expectation of a brighter day which is soon to open. This earth is the land of shadows. But we hope to pass into the world of realities; where the proper objects of human desire shall be displayed; where the substance of that bliss shall be found, whose image only we now pursue; where no fallacious hopes shall any longer allure, no smiling appearances shall betray, no insidious joys shall sting; but where truth shall be inseparably united with pleasure, and the mists which hang over this preliminary state being dissipated, the perfect knowledge of good shall lead to the full enjoyment of it for ever.

SERMON IX.

ON RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT.

Commune with your own heart, upon your bed, and be still.

PSALM, iv. 4.

MUCH communing with themselves there has always been among mankind ; though frequently, God knows, to no purpose, or to a purpose worse than none. Could we discover the employments of men in retirement, how often should we find their thoughts occupied with subjects which they would be ashamed to own ? What a large share have ambition and avarice, at some times the grossest passions, and at other times the meanest trifles, in their solitary musings ? They carry the world, with all its vices, into their retreat ; and may be said to dwell in the midst of the world, even when they seem to be alone.

This, surely, is not that sort of communing which the Psalmist recommends. For this is not properly *communing with our heart*, but rather holding secret intercourse with the world.—What the Psalmist means to recommend, is religious recollection ; that exercise of thought which is connected with the precept given in the preceding words, *to stand in awe, and sin not*. It is to commune with ourselves, under the character of spiritual and immortal beings ; and to *ponder those paths of our feet*, which are leading us to eternity. I shall, in the first place, show the advantages of such serious retirement and meditation ; and shall, in the second place, point out some of the principal subjects which ought to employ us in our retreat.

The advantages of retiring from the world, *to commune with our heart*, will be found to be great, whether we regard our happiness in this world, or our preparation for the world to come.

LET us consider them, first, with respect to our happiness in this world. It will readily occur to you, that an entire retreat from worldly affairs, is not what religion requires ; nor does it even enjoin a great retreat from them. Some stations of life would not permit this ; and there are few stations which render it necessary. The chief field, both of the duty and of the im-

provement of man, lies in active life. By the graces and virtues which he exercises amidst his fellow-creatures, he is trained up for heaven. A total retreat from the world is so far from being, as the Roman Catholic Church holds, the perfection of religion, that, some particular cases excepted, it is no other than the abuse of it.

But, though entire retreat would lay us aside from the part for which Providence chiefly intended us, it is certain, that, without occasional retreat, we must act that part very ill. There will be neither consistency in the conduct, nor dignity in the character, of one who sets apart no share of his time for meditation and reflection. In the heat and bustle of life, while passion is every moment throwing false colors on the objects around us, nothing can be viewed in a just light. If you wish that reason should exert her native power, you must step aside from the crowd, into the cool and silent shade. It is there that, with sober and steady eye, she examines what is good or ill, what is wise or foolish, in human conduct; she looks back on the past, she looks forward to the future; and forms plans, not for the present moment only, but for the whole of life. How should that man discharge any part of his duty aright, who never suffers his passions to cool? And how should his passions cool, who is engaged, without interruption, in the tumult of the world? This incessant stir may be called the perpetual drunkenness of life. It raises that eager fermentation of spirit, which will be ever sending forth the dangerous fumes of rashness and folly. Whereas he who mingles religious retreat with worldly affairs, remains calm, and master of himself. He is not whirled round, and rendered giddy, by the agitations of the world; but, from that sacred retirement, in which he has been conversant among higher objects, comes forth into the world with manly tranquillity, fortified by the principles which he has formed, and prepared for whatever may befall.

As he who is unacquainted with retreat, cannot sustain any character with propriety, so neither can he enjoy the world with any advantage. Of the two classes of men who are most apt to be negligent of this duty, the men of pleasure and the men of business, it is hard to say which suffer most in point of enjoyment from that neglect. To the former every moment appears to be lost, which partakes not of the vivacity of amusement. To connect one plan of gaiety with another, is their whole study; till, in a very short time, nothing remains but to tread the same beaten round; to enjoy what they have already enjoyed, and to see what they have often seen. Pleasures, thus drawn to the dregs, become vapid and tasteless. What might have pleased long, if enjoyed with temperance and mingled with retirement, being devoured with such eager haste, speedily surfeits

and disgusts. Hence, these are the persons, who, after having run through a rapid course of pleasure, after having glittered for a few years in the foremost line of public amusements, are the most apt to fly at last to a melancholy retreat; not led by religion or reason, but driven by disappointed hopes, and exhausted spirits, to the pensive conclusion that *all is vanity*.

If uninterrupted intercourse with the world wear out the man of pleasure, it no less oppresses the man of business and ambition. The strongest spirits must at length sink under it. The happiest temper must be soured by incessant returns of the opposition, the inconstancy, and treachery of men. For he who lives always in the bustle of the world, lives in a perpetual warfare. Here an enemy encounters; there a rival supplants him. The ingratitude of a friend stings him this hour; and the pride of a superior wounds him the next. In vain he flies for relief to trifling amusements. These may afford a temporary opiate to eare; but they communicate no strength to the mind. On the contrary, they leave it more soft and defenceless, when molestations and injuries renew their attack.

Let him who wishes for an effectual cure to all the wounds which the world can inflict, retire from intercourse with men to intercourse with God. When he enters into his closet, and shuts the door, let him shut out, at the same time, all intrusion of worldly care; and dwell among objects divine and immortal. Those fair prospects of order and peace shall there open to his view, which form the most perfect contrast to the confusion and misery of this earth. The celestial inhabitants quarrel not; among them there is neither ingratitude, nor envy nor tumult. Men may harass one another, but in the kingdom of God, concord and tranquillity reign for ever. From such objects there beams upon the mind of the pious man, a pure and enlivening light; there is diffused over his heart a holy calm. His agitated spirit re-assumes its firmness, and regains its peace. The world sinks in its importance; and the load of mortality and misery loses almost all its weight. The *green pastures* open, and the *still waters* flow around him, beside which the *Shepherd of Israel* guides his flock. The disturbances and alarms, so formidable to those who are engaged in the tumults of the world, seem to him only like thunder rolling afar off; like the noise of distant waters, whose sound he hears, whose course he traces, but whose waves touch him not.—As religious retirement is thus evidently conducive to our happiness in this life, so,

IN the second place, it is absolutely necessary, in order to prepare us for the life to come. He who lives always in public, cannot live to his own soul. The world *lieth in wickedness*; and with good reason the Christian is exhorted, *not to be conformed to it, but transformed by the renewing of his mind*. Our

conversation and intercourse with the world is, in several respects, an education for vice. From our earliest youth we are accustomed to hear riches and honours extolled as the chief possessions of man; and proposed to us, as the principal aim of our future pursuits. We are trained up, to look with admiration on the flattering marks of distinction which they bestow. In quest of those fancied blessings, we see the multitude around us eager and fervent. Principles of duty, we may, perhaps, hear sometimes inculcated; but we seldom behold them brought into competition with worldly profit. The soft names and plausible colours, under which deceit, sensuality, and revenge, are presented to us in common discourse, weaken, by degrees, our natural sense of the distinction between good and evil. We often meet with crimes authorised by high examples, and rewarded with the caresses and smiles of the world. We discover, perhaps, at last, that those whom we are taught to reverence, and to regard as our patterns of conduct, act upon principles no purer than those of others. Thus breathing habitually a contagious air, how certain is our ruin, unless we sometimes retreat from this pestilential region, and seek for proper correctives of the disorders which are contracted there? Religious retirement both abates the disease, and furnishes the remedy. It lessens the corrupting influence of the world; and it gives opportunity for better principles to exert their power. He who is accustomed to turn aside, and commune with himself, will, sometimes at least, hear the truths which the multitude do not tell him. A more sound instructor will lift his voice, and awaken within the heart those latent suggestions, which the world had overpowered and suppressed.

The acts of prayer and devotion, the exercises of faith and repentance, all the great and peculiar duties of the religion of Christ, necessarily suppose retirement from the world. This was one chief end of their institution, that they might be the means of occasionally sequestering us from that great scene of vice and folly, the continued presence of which is so hurtful. Solitude is the hallowed ground which Religion hath, in every age, chosen for her own. There, her inspiration is felt, and her secret mysteries elevate the soul. There, falls the tear of contrition; there, rises towards Heaven, the sigh of the heart; there, melts the soul with all the tenderness of devotion, and pours itself forth before him who made, and him who redeemed it. How can any one who is unacquainted with such employments of mind, be fit for Heaven? If Heaven be the habitation of pure affections, and of intellectual joy, can such a state be relished by him who is always immersed among sensible objects, and has never acquired any taste for the pleasures of the understanding, and the heart.

The great and the worthy, the pious and the virtuous, have ever been addicted to serious retirement. It is the characteristic of little and frivolous minds, to be wholly occupied with the vulgar objects of life. These fill up their desires, and supply all the entertainment which their coarse apprehensions can relish. But a more refined and enlarged mind leaves the world behind it, feels a call for higher pleasures, and seeks them in retreat. The man of public spirit has recourse to it, in order to form plans for general good; the man of genius, in order to dwell on his favourite themes; the philosopher, to pursue his discoveries; the saint, to improve himself in grace. *Isaac went out to meditate in the fields, at the evening tide.* David, amidst all the splendor of royalty, often bears witness, both to the pleasure which he received, and to the benefit which he reaped, from devout meditation. *I communed with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto God's testimonies. In the multitude of thoughts within me, his comforts delight my soul.* Our blessed Saviour himself, though, of all who ever lived on earth, he needed least the assistance of religious retreat, yet, by his frequent practice, has done it signal honour. Often were the garden, the mountain, and the silence of the night, sought by him, for intercourse with Heaven. *When he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain, apart, to pray.*

The advantages of religious retirement will still more clearly appear, by considering, as was proposed, in the next place, some of those great objects which should there employ our thoughts. I shall mention only three, which are of the most plain and acknowledged importance; God, the world, and our own character.

I. WHEN you retire from the world, *commune with your hearts* concerning God. Impressions of Deity, besides their being the principle of what is strictly termed religion, are the great support of all moral sentiment, and virtuous conduct, among men. But with what difficulty are they preserved in any due degree of force, amidst the affairs and avocations of the world? While the crowd of surrounding objects is ever rushing on the imagination, and occupying the senses and the heart, what is not only absent from view, but, by its nature, invisible, is apt to vanish like a shadow. Hence it is given as the character of wicked men in Scripture, that they are *without God in the world.* They deny not, perhaps, that he does exist; but it is the same to them as though he did not: For having lost him from their view, his existence has no effect on their conduct. If, at any time, the idea of God rise in their mind, it rises like a terrifying phantom, which they hasten to expel, and which they gladly

fancy to be unreal, because they see it make so little impression on others around them.

Let him who retires to serious meditation, begin with impressing deeply on his mind this important truth, that there is undoubtedly a Supreme Governor, who presides over the universe. But let him not imagine that to commune with his heart concerning God, is to search into the mysteries of the Divine nature, or to attempt a discovery of the whole plan of Providence. Long enough he may bewilder himself in this maze, without making any proficiency in the practical knowledge of God.—Shall he who knows so little of his own nature, or of the nature of the objects with which he is surrounded, expect to comprehend the Being who made him? To commune with ourselves, to any useful purpose, on this subject, is to bring home to our souls the internal authoritative sense of God, as of a Sovereign and a Father. It is not to speculate about what is mysterious in his essence, but to contemplate what is displayed of his perfections. It is to realize the presence of the Supreme Being, so as to produce the most profound veneration; and to awaken the earnest desire of as near an approach as our nature will permit, to that great Fountain of happiness and life.

After this manner was that holy man affected, who uttered this ardent wish, *Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!**—If, with such a frame of mind, you seek after God, be assured that he is not far from you; and that, though you are not permitted as yet to *come to his seat*, you may, at least, reach the footstool of his throne, and touch the robe that covers him. In the midst of your solitary musings, lift your eyes, and behold all nature full of God. Look up to the firmament, and admire his glory. Look round on the earth, and observe his presence every where displayed. If the gay landscape, or the fruitful field, present themselves to your eye, behold him smiling upon his works. If the mountain raise its lofty head, or the expanse of waters roll its tide before you, contemplate, in those great and solemn objects, his power and majesty. Nature, in all its diversities, is a varied manifestation of the Deity. If you were to *take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea*, even there you would find him. For *in him you live and move*. He fills and animates all space. In the barren wilderness, as in the peopled region, you can trace his footsteps; and in the deepest solitude, you may hear a voice which testifies of him.

Him, indeed, you are never to confound with the workmanship of his hands. Nature, in its most awful or most pleasing

* Job, xxii. 3.

scenes, exhibits no more than different forms of inanimate matter. But on these dead forms is impressed the glory of a living spirit. The beauty, or the greatness, which appears in them, flows from the Fountain of all greatness and beauty; in him it centres; of his perfection it reflects an image; and towards him should lead your view.—In conversing with a fellow-creature on earth, it is not with his body we converse, though it is his body only which we see. From his words and actions we conceive his mind; with his mind, though invisible, we hold correspondence, and direct towards this Spiritual Essence our affection and regard. In like manner, though here we behold no more of God than what his works display, yet, in those displays, we are capable of perceiving the universal Spirit, and of holding correspondence with this unseen Being, in veneration, gratitude, and love.

It is thus that a pious man, in his retired meditations, viewing natural objects with a spiritual eye, communes with his heart concerning God. He walks among the various scenes of nature, as within the precincts of a great temple, in the habitual exercise of devotion. To those discoveries of the Supreme Being in his works, let him apply the comment of his word. From the world of Nature, let him follow God into the world of Grace.—When conducted from the outer courts into this inmost sanctuary of the temple, he shall feel himself brought still more nigh to the Sacred Presence. In the great plan of Divine Wisdom, for extirpating the evils produced by sin, he shall receive the interpretation of many of the hidden mysteries of Nature. He shall discover in Christ, the Deity made, in some degree, visible to sense. In the beneficent works which he performed, and the gracious undertaking which he accomplished, he shall behold *the brightness of the Father's glory*, and shall discern it to be *full of grace and truth*.—From the sacred retreat wherein his thoughts have been thus employed, he returns to the world like a superior being. He carries into active life those pure and elevating sentiments to which the giddy crowd are strangers. A certain odour of sanctity remains upon his mind, which, for a while at least, will repel the contagion of the world.

II. COMMUNE with your heart, in the season of retirement, concerning the world. The world is the great deceiver, whose fallacious arts it highly imports us to detect. But, in the midst of its pleasures and pursuits, the detection is impossible. We tread, as within an enchanted circle, where nothing appears as it truly is. It is only in retreat that the charm can be broken. Did men employ that retreat, not in carrying on the delusions which the world has begun, not in forming plans of imaginary bliss, but in subjecting the happiness which the world affords to

a strict discussion, the spell would dissolve; and in the room of the unreal prospects which had long amused them, the nakedness of the world would appear.

Prepare yourselves, then, to encounter the light of truth. Resolve rather to bear the disappointment of some flattering hopes, than to wander for ever in the paradise of fools. While others meditate in secret on the means of attaining worldly success, let it be your employment to scrutinize that success itself. Calculate fairly to what it amounts; and whether you are not losers, on the whole, by your apparent gain. Look back for this purpose on your past life. Trace it from your earliest youth; and put the question to yourselves, What have been its happiest periods? Were they those of quiet and innocence, or those of ambition and intrigue? Has your real enjoyment uniformly kept pace with what the world calls prosperity? As you are advanced in wealth or station, did you proportionably advance in happiness? Has success, almost in any one instance, fulfilled your expectation? Where you reckoned upon most enjoyment, have you not often found least? Wherever guilt entered into your pleasures, did not its sting long remain, after the gratification was past?—Such questions as these, candidly answered, would, in a great measure, unmask the world. They would expose the vanity of its pretensions; and convince you, that there are other springs than those which the world affords, to which you must apply for happiness.

While you commune with your heart concerning what the world now is, consider also what it will one day appear to be.—Anticipate the awful moment of your bidding it an eternal farewell. Think, what reflections shall most probably arise, when you are quitting the field, and looking back on the scene of action. In what light will your closing eyes contemplate those vanities which now shine so bright, and those interests which now swell into such high importance? What part will you then wish to have acted? What shall then appear momentous, what trifling, in human conduct?—Let the sober sentiments which such anticipations suggest, temper now your misplaced ardor.—Let the last conclusions which you shall form, enter into the present estimate which you make of the world, and of life.

Moreover, in communing with yourselves concerning the world, contemplate it as subject to the Divine dominion. The greater part of men behold nothing more than the rotation of human affairs. They see a great crowd ever in motion; the fortunes of men alternately rising and falling; virtue often distressed, and prosperity appearing to be the purchase of worldly wisdom. But this is only the outside of things. Behind the curtain there is a far greater scene, which is beheld by none but

the retired religious spectator. Lift up that curtain, when you are alone with God. View the world with the eye of a Christian; and you shall see, that while *man's heart deviseth his way, it is the Lord who directeth his steps*. You shall see, that however men appear to move and act after their own pleasure, they are, nevertheless, retained in secret bonds by the Almighty, and all their operations rendered subservient to the ends of his moral government. You shall behold him obliging *the wrath of man to praise him*; punishing the sinner by means of his own iniquities; from the trials of the righteous, bringing forth their reward; and to a state of seeming universal confusion, preparing the wisest and most equitable issue. While the *fashion of this world* is passing fast away, you shall discern the glory of another rising to succeed it. You shall behold all human events, our griefs and our joys, our love and our hatred, our character and our memory, absorbed in the ocean of eternity; and no trace of our present existence left, except its being for ever *well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked*.—Such a view of the world, frequently presented to our minds, could not fail to enforce those solemn conclusions: *There is no wisdom, nor counsel against the Lord. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man. What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

III. COMMUNE with your heart concerning yourselves, and your real character. To acquire a thorough knowledge of ourselves is an attainment no less difficult than important. For men are generally unwilling to see their own imperfections; and when they are willing to enquire into them, their self-love imposes on their judgment. Their intercourse with one another assists the delusion to which, of themselves, they are prone. For the ordinary commerce of the world is a commerce of flattery and falsehood; where reciprocally they deceive and are deceived, where every one appears under an assumed form, professes esteem which he does not feel, and bestows praise in order to receive it. It is only in retreat, where those false semblances disappear, and those flattering voices are silent, that a man can learn to *think soberly of himself, and as he ought to think*.

It has been said, that there are three characters which every man sustains; and these often extremely different from one another: One, which he possesses in his own opinion; another, which he carries in the estimation of the world; and a third, which he bears in the judgment of God. It is only the last which ascertains what he really is.—Whether the character which the world forms of you be above or below the truth, it imports you not much to know. But it is of eternal consequence, that the character, which you possess in your own eyes,

be formed upon that which you bear in the sight of God. In order to try it by this great standard, you must lay aside, as much as possible, all partiality to yourselves; and in the season of retirement, explore your heart with such accurate scrutiny, as may bring your hidden defects to light.

Enquire, for this purpose, whether you be not conscious, that the fair opinion which the world entertains of you, is founded on their partial knowledge both of your abilities and your virtues? Would you be willing that all your actions should be publicly canvassed? Could you bear to have your thoughts laid open? Are there no parts of your life which you would be uneasy if an enemy could discover? In what light, then, must these appear to God? When you have kept free of vice, has your innocence proceeded from purity of principle, or from worldly motives? Rise there no envy or malignity within you, when you compare your own condition with that of others? Have you been as solicitous to regulate your heart, as to preserve your manners from reproach? Professing yourselves to be Christians, has the spirit of Christ appeared in your conduct? Declaring that you hope for immortality, has that hope surmounted undue attachments to the present life?

Such investigation as this, seriously pursued, might produce to every man many discoveries of himself; discoveries not pleasing perhaps to vanity, but salutary and useful. For he can be only a flatterer, but no true friend to himself, who aims not at knowing his own defects as well as virtues. By imposing on the world, he may carry on some plan of fancied profit; but by imposing on his heart, what can he propose to gain? *He feedeth on ashes: A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand?**

Thus, I have set before you some of those great objects which ought to employ your meditation in religious retirement. I have endeavoured to introduce you into a proper intercourse with your heart, concerning God, the world, and your own character. Let this intercourse terminate in fixing the principles of your future conduct. Let it serve to introduce consistency into your life. Nothing can be more wavering and disjointed, than the behaviour of those who are wholly men of the world, and have never been inured to commune with themselves. Dissipation is a more frequent cause of their ruin, than determined impiety.— It is not so much because they have adopted bad principles, as because they have never attended to principles of any kind, that their lives are so full of incoherence and disorder. You hover on the borders of sin and duty. One day you read the Scriptures, you hear religious discourses, and form good resolutions.

* Isaiah, xliv. 20.

Next day you plunge into the world, and forget the serious impression, as if it had never been made. The impression is again renewed, and again effaced; and in this circle your life revolves. Is such conduct worthy of creatures endowed with intelligent powers? Shall the close of life overtake you, before you have determined how to live? Shall the day never come, that is to find you steady in your views, decided in your plans, and engaged in a course of action which your mind approves? If you wish that day ever to arrive, retirement and meditation must first bring you home to yourselves, from the dissipation in which you are now scattered; must teach you to fix such aims, and to lay down such rules of conduct as are suitable to rational and immortal beings. Then will your character become uniform and respectable. Then you may hope that your life will proceed in such a train as shall prepare you, when it is finished, for joining the society of more exalted spirits.

SERMON X.

ON DEVOTION.

Cornelius—a devout man—ACTS, x. I.

THAT religion is essential to the welfare of man, can be proved by the most convincing arguments. But these, how demonstrative soever, are insufficient to support its authority over human conduct. For arguments may convince the understanding, when they cannot conquer the passions. Irresistible they seem in the calm hours of retreat; but in the season of action, they often vanish into smoke. There are other and more powerful springs, which influence the great movements of the human frame. In order to operate with success on the active powers, the heart must be gained. Sentiment and affection must be brought to the aid of reason. It is not enough that men believe religion to be a wise and rational rule of conduct, unless they relish it as agreeable, and find it to carry its own reward. Happy is the man, who, in the conflict of desire between God and the world, can oppose not only argument to argument, but pleasure to pleasure; who, to the external allurements of sense, can oppose the internal joys of devotion; and to the uncertain promises of a flattering world, the certain experience of that *peace of God which passeth understanding, keeping his mind and heart*.—Such is the temper and spirit of a *devout man*. Such was the character of Cornelius, that good centurion, whose *prayers and alms* are said to have *come up in memorial before God*. Of this character, I intend, through Divine assistance, to discourse; and shall endeavour, I. To explain the nature of devotion; II. To justify and recommend it; and, III. To rectify some mistakes concerning it.

I. DEVOTION is the lively exercise of those affections, which we owe to the Supreme Being. It comprehends several emotions of the heart, which all terminate on the same great object. The chief of them are veneration, gratitude, desire, and resignation.

It implies, first, profound veneration of God. By veneration. I understand an affection compounded of awe and love, the affec-

tion which, of all others, it best becomes creatures to bear towards their infinitely perfect creator. Awe is the first sentiment that rises in the soul at the view of his greatness. But, in the heart of a devout man, it is a solemn and elevating, not a dejecting emotion; for he glows, rather than trembles, in the Divine presence. It is not the superstitious dread of unknown power, but the homage yielded by the heart to him, who is, at once, the greatest and the best of Beings. Omnipotence, viewed alone, would be a formidable object. But, considered in conjunction with the moral perfections of the Divine nature, it serves to heighten devotion. Goodness affects the heart with double energy, when residing in one so exalted. The goodness which we adore in him, is not like that which is common among men, a weak, mutable, undiscerning fondness, ill qualified to be the ground of assured trust. It is the goodness of a perfect Governor, acting upon a regular extensive plan; a steady principle of benevolence, conducted by wisdom; which, subject to no *variableness or shadow of turning*, free from all partiality and caprice, incapable of being either soothed by flattery or ruffled by resentment, resembles, in its calm and equal lustre, the eternal serenity of the highest heavens. *Thy mercy, Oh Lord! is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, and thy judgments are a great depth.*

Such are the conceptions of the great God, which fill with veneration the heart of a devout man. His veneration is not confined to acts of immediate worship. It is the habitual temper of his soul. Not only when engaged in prayer or praise, but in the silence of retirement, and even amidst the occupations of the world, the Divine Being dwells upon his thoughts. No place, and no object, appears to him void of God. On the works of Nature he views the impression of his hand; and in the actions of men, he traces the operation of his Providence. Whatever he beholds on earth, that is beautiful or fair, that is great or good, he refers to God, as to the supreme origin of all the excellence which is scattered throughout his works. From those effects he rises to the first cause. From those streams he ascends to the fountain whence they flow. By those rays he is led to that eternal source of light in which they centre.

DEVOTION implies, secondly, sincere gratitude to God for all his benefits. This is a warmer emotion than simple veneration. Veneration looks up to the Deity, as he is in himself: Gratitude regards what he is towards us. When a devout man surveys this vast universe, where beauty and goodness are every where predominant; when he reflects on those numberless multitudes of creatures who, in their different stations, enjoy the blessings of existence: and when, at the same time, he looks up to an Uni-

versaI Father, who hath thus filled creation with life and happiness, his heart glows within him. He adores that disinterested goodness which prompted the Almighty to raise up so many orders of intelligent beings, not that he might receive, but that he might give and impart; that he might pour forth himself, and communicate to the spirits which he formed. some emanations of his felicity.

The goodness of this Supreme Benefactor he gratefully contemplates, as displayed in his own state. He reviews the events of his life; and in every comfort which has sweetened it, he discerns the Divine hand. Does he remember with affection, the parents under whose care he grew up, and the companions with whom he passed his youthful life? Is he now happy, in his family rising around him; in the spouse who loves him, or in the children who give him comfort and joy? Into every tender remembrance of the past, and every pleasing enjoyment of the present devotion enters; for in all those beloved objects, it recognizes God. The communication of love from heart to heart, is an effusion of his goodness. From his inspiration descends all the friendship which ever glowed on earth; and therefore, to him it justly returns in gratitude, and terminates on him.

But this life, with all its interests, is but a small part of human existence. A devout man looks forward to immortality, and discovers still higher subjects of gratitude. He views himself as a guilty creature, whom Divine benignity has received into grace: whose forfeited hopes it has restored; and to whom it has opened the most glorious prospects of future felicity. Such generosity shown to the fallen and miserable, is yet more affecting to the heart, than favours conferred on the innocent. He contemplates, with astonishment, the labours of the Son of God, in accomplishing redemption for men; and his soul overflows with thankfulness to him, *who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.—What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits? Bless the Lord, Oh my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving kindness, and with tender mercies.*

DEVOTION implies, thirdly, the desire of the soul after the favour of the Supreme Being, as its chief good, and final rest.—To inferior enjoyments, the devout man allots inferior and secondary attachment. He disclaims not every earthly affection. He pretends not to renounce all pleasure in the comforts of his present state. Such an unnatural renunciation humanity forbids, and religion cannot acquire. But from these he expects not his supreme bliss. He discerns the vanity which belongs to

them all; and beyond the circle of mutable objects which surround him, he aspires after some principles of more perfect felicity, which shall not be subject to change or decay. But where is this complete and permanent good to be found? Ambition pursues it in courts and palaces; and returns from the pursuit, loaded with sorrows. Pleasure seeks it among sensual joys; and retires with the confession of disappointment. *The deep saith, it is not in me; and the sea saith it is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold; neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. Its place is not in the land of the living.*— True happiness dwells with God; and from *the light of his countenance*, it beams upon the devout man. His voice is, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.* After exploring heaven and earth for happiness, they seem to him a mighty void, a wilderness of shadows, where all would be empty and unsubstantial without God. But in his favour and love, he finds what supplies every defect of temporal objects; and assures tranquillity to his heart, amidst all the changes of his existence. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel; and thou shalt receive me to thy glory. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

FROM these sentiments and affections, Devotion advances, fourthly, to an entire resignation of the soul to God. It is the consummation of trust and hope. It banishes anxious cares and murmuring thoughts. It reconciles us to every appointment of Divine Providence; and resolves every wish into the desire of pleasing him whom our hearts adore. Its genuine breathings are to this effect: “Conduct me, O God! in what path soever seemeth good to thee. In nothing shall I ever arraign thy sacred will. Dost thou require me to part with any worldly advantages, for the sake of virtue and a good conscience? I give them up. Dost thou command me to relinquish my friends, or my country? At thy call I cheerfully leave them. Dost thou summon me away from this world? Lo! I am ready to depart. Thou hast made, thou hast redeemed me, and I am thine. Myself, and all that belongs to me, I surrender to thy disposal. Let the men of the world have *their portion in this life*. Be it mine, *to behold thy face in righteousness: and when I awake, to be satisfied with thy likeness.*”

This, surely, is one of the noblest acts of which the human mind is capable. when thus, if we may be allowed the expression, it unites itself with God. Nor can any devotion be genuine, which inspires not sentiments of this nature. For devotion is not to be considered as a transient glow of affection, occasioned by some casual impressions of Divine goodness, which are suffered to remain unconnected with the conduct of

life. It is a powerful principle, which penetrates the soul; which purifies the affections from debasing attachments; and, by a fixed and steady regard to God, subdues every sinful passion, and forms the inclinations to piety and virtue.

SUCH, in general, are the dispositions that constitute devotion. It is the union of veneration, gratitude, desire, and resignation. It expresses, not so much the performance of any particular duty, as the spirit which must animate all religious duties. It stands opposed, not merely to downright vice, but to a heart which is cold, and insensible to sacred things; which, from compulsion perhaps, and a sense of interest, preserves some regard to the Divine commands, but obeys them without ardour, love, or joy. I proceed,

II. To recommend this devout spirit to your imitation. I begin with observing, That it is of the utmost consequence to guard against extremes of every kind in religion. We must beware, lest, by seeking to avoid one rock, we split upon another. It has been long the subject of remark, that superstition and enthusiasm are two capital sources of delusion; superstition on the one hand, attaching men with immoderate zeal to the ritual and external part of religion; and enthusiasm, on the other, directing their whole attention to internal emotions, and mystical communications with the spiritual world; while neither the one nor the other has paid sufficient regard to the great moral duties of the Christian life. But, running with intemperate eagerness from these two great abuses of religion, men have neglected to observe, that there are extremes opposite to each of them, into which they are in hazard of precipitating themselves. Thus, the horror of superstition has sometimes reached so far as to produce contempt for all external institutions; as if it were possible for religion to subsist in the world, without forms of worship, or public acknowledgment of God. It has also happened that some, who, in the main, are well affected to the cause of goodness, observing that persons of a devout turn have at times been carried, by warm affections, into unjustifiable excesses, have thence hastily concluded that all devotion was akin to enthusiasm; and separating religion totally from the heart and affections, have reduced it to a frigid observance of what they call the rules of virtue. This is the extreme which I purpose at present to combat, by showing you, first, That true devotion is rational, and well-founded; next, That it is of the highest importance to every other part of religion and virtue; and lastly, That it is most conducive to our happiness.

IN the first place, True devotion is rational, and well-founded. It takes its rise from affections, which are essential to the human frame. We are formed by Nature to admire what is great, and to love what is amiable. Even inanimate objects

have power to excite those emotions. The magnificent prospects of the natural world, fill the mind with reverential awe. Its beautiful scenes create delight. When we survey the actions and behaviour of our fellow-creatures, the affections glow with greater ardour; and, if to be unmoved, in the former case, argues a defect of sensibility in our powers, it discovers, in the latter, an odious hardness and depravity in the heart. The tenderness of an affectionate parent, the generosity of a forgiving enemy, the public spirit of a patriot or a hero, often fill the eyes with tears, and swell the breast with emotions too big for utterance. The object of those affections is frequently raised above us, in condition and rank. Let us suppose him raised also above us, in nature. Let us imagine, that an angel, or any being of superior order, had condescended to be our friend, our guide, and patron; no person, sure, would hold the exaltation of his benefactor's character to be an argument why he should love and revere him less.—Strange! that the attachment and veneration, the warmth and overflowing of heart, which excellence and goodness on every other occasion command, should begin to be accounted irrational, as soon as the Supreme Being becomes their object. For what reason must human sensibility be extinct towards him alone? Are all benefits entitled to gratitude, except the highest and the best? Shall goodness cease to be amiable, only because it is perfect?

It will, perhaps, be said that an unknown and invisible being is not qualified to raise affection in the human heart. Wrapt up in the mysterious obscurity of his nature, he escapes our search, and affords no determinate object to our love or desire. *We go forward, but he is not there: and backward, but we cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him: He hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him.**—Notwithstanding this obscurity, is there any being in the universe more real and certain, than the Creator of the world, and the Supporter of all existence? Is he, in whom we live and move, too distant from us to excite devotion? His form and essence, indeed, we cannot see; but to be unseen, and imperfectly known, in many other instances, precludes neither gratitude nor love. It is not the sight, so much as the strong conception, or deep impression, of an object, which affects the passions. We glow with admiration of personages, who have lived in a distant age. Whole nations have been transported with zeal and affection for the generous hero, or public deliverer, whom they knew only by fame. Nay, properly speaking, the direct object of our love is, in every case, invisible. For that on which affection is placed, is the mind, the soul, the in-

* Job, xxiii. 8, 9.

ternal character of our fellow-creatures; which, surely, is no less concealed, than the Divine Nature itself is, from the view of sense. From actions, we can only infer the dispositions of men; from what we see of their behaviour, we collect what is invisible; but the conjecture which we form is, at best, imperfect; and when their actions excite our love, much of their heart remains still unknown. I ask, then, in what respect God is less qualified than any other being to be an object of affection? Convinced that he exists; beholding his goodness spread abroad in his works, exerted in the government of the world, displayed in some measure to sense, in the actions of his son Jesus Christ! are we not furnished with every essential requisite which the heart demands, in order to indulge the most warm, and at the same time the most rational emotions?

If these considerations justify the reasonableness of devotion, as expressed in veneration, love, and gratitude, the same train of thought will equally justify it when appearing in the forms of desire, delight, or resignation. The latter are indeed, the consequence of the former. For we cannot but desire some communication with what we love; and will naturally resign ourselves to one, on whom we have placed the full confidence of affection. The aspirations of a devout man after the favour of God, are the effects of that earnest wish for happiness which glows in every breast. All men have somewhat that may be called the object of their devotion; reputation, pleasure, learning, riches, or whatever apparent good has strongly attached their heart. This becomes the centre of attraction, which draws them towards it; which quickens and regulates all their motions. While the men of the world are thus influenced by the objects which they severally worship, shall he only who directs all his devotion towards the Supreme Being, be excluded from a place in the system of rational conduct? or be censured for having passions, whose sensibility corresponds to the great cause which moves them?—Having vindicated the reasonableness of devotion, I come,

In the second place, to show its importance, and the high place which it possesses in the system of religion. I address myself now to those, who, though they reject not devotion as irrational, yet consider it as an unnecessary refinement; an attainment which may be safely left to recluses and sequestered persons, who aim at uncommon sanctity. The solid and material duties of a good life, they hold to be in a great measure independent of devout affection; and think them sufficiently supported, by their necessary connection with our interest, both in this and in a future world. They insist much upon religion being a calm, a sober, and rational principle of conduct.—I admit that it is very laudable to have a rational religion. But I must admonish you, that it is both reproachful and criminal,

to have an insensible heart. If we reduce religion into so cool a state, as not to admit love, affection, and desire, we shall leave it in possession of small influence over human life. Look abroad into the world, and observe how few act upon deliberate and rational views of their true interest. The bulk of mankind are impelled by their feelings. They are attracted by appearances of good. Taste and inclination rule their conduct. To direct their inclination and taste towards the highest objects; to form a relish within them, for virtuous and spiritual enjoyment; to introduce religion into the heart, is the province of devotion; and hence arises its importance to the interests of goodness.

Agreeably to this doctrine, the great Author of our religion, who well *knew what was in man*, laid the foundation of his whole system in the regeneration of the heart. The change which was to be accomplished on his followers, he did not purpose to affect, merely by regulating their external conduct; but by forming within them a new nature; by *taking away the heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh*; that is, a heart relenting and tender, yielding to the Divine impulse, and readily susceptible of devout impressions. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength: This is the first and great commandment. My son, give me thy heart*, is the call of God to each of us: And, indeed, if the heart be withheld, it is not easy to conceive what other offering we can present, that will be acceptable to him.

Of what nature must that man's religion be, who professes to worship God, and to believe in Christ; and yet raises his thoughts towards God, and his Saviour, without any warmth of gratitude or love? I speak not of those occasional decays of pious affection, to which the best are subject, but of a total insensibility to this part of religion. Surely, let the outward behaviour be ever so irreproachable, there must be some essential defect in a heart which remains always unmoved at the view of infinite goodness. The affections cannot, in this case, be deemed to flow in their natural channel. Some concealed malignity must have tainted the inward frame. This is not the man whom you would choose for your bosom-friend, or whose heart you could expect to answer, with reciprocal warmth, to yours. His virtue, if it deserves that name, is not of the most amiable sort; and may, with reason, receive the appellation (often injudiciously bestowed) of cold and dry morality. Such a person must, as yet, be *far from the kingdom of Heaven*.

As devotion is thus essential to religion in its principle, so it enters into the proper discharge of all its duties. It diffuses an auspicious influence over the whole of virtue. The prevailing temper of the mind is formed by its most frequent employments. Intercourse with Supreme perfection cannot, therefore, but en-

noble and improve it. The pure love of God naturally connects itself with the love of man. Hence, devotion has been often found a powerful instrument in humanizing the manners of men, and taming their unruly passions. It smooths what is rough, and softens what is fierce, in our nature. It is the great purifier of the affections. It inspires contempt of the low gratifications belonging to animal life. It promotes a humble and cheerful contentment with our lot; and subdues that eager desire of riches and of power, which has filled this unhappy world with crimes and misery. Finally, it bestows that enlargement of heart in the service of God, which is the great principle, both of perseverance, and of progress in virtue. He who, unacquainted with devout affections, sets himself to keep the Divine commandments, will advance in obedience with a slow and languid pace; like one who, carrying a heavy burden, toils to mount the hill. But he whose heart devotion has warmed, will proceed on his way, cheerful and rejoicing. The one performs his duty only because it is commanded; the other, because he loves it. The one is inclined to do no more than necessity requires; the other seeks to excel. The one looks for his reward in somewhat besides religion; the other finds it in religion itself: It is *his meet and drink to do the will of that heavenly Father*, whom he loves and adores. Which of these two is likely to make the greatest improvement in goodness, is easily discerned. Let us now consider,

In the third place, the influence of devotion on the happiness of life. Whatever promotes and strengthens virtue, whatever calms and regulates the temper, is a source of happiness. Devotion, as I have just now shown, produces those effects in a remarkable degree. It inspires composure of spirit, mildness, and benignity; weakens the painful, and cherishes the pleasing emotions; and, by these means, carries on the life of a pious man in a smooth and placid tenor.

Besides exerting this habitual influence on the mind, devotion opens a field of enjoyments, to which the vicious are entire strangers; enjoyments the more valuable, as they peculiarly belong to retirement when the world leaves us, and to adversity when it becomes our foe. These are the two seasons, for which every wise man would most wish to provide some hidden store of comfort. For let him be placed in the most favourable situation which the human state admits, the world can neither always amuse him, nor always shield him from distress. There will be many hours of vacuity, and many of dejection, in his life. If he be a stranger to God, and to devotion, how dreary will the gloom of solitude often prove! With what oppressive weight will sickness, disappointment, or old age, fall upon his spirits! But, for those pensive periods, the pious man has a relief prepared. From

the tiresome repetition of the common vanities of life, or from the painful corrosion of its cares and sorrows, devotion transports him into a new region; and surrounds him there with such objects as are the most fitted to cheer the dejection, to calm the tumults, and to heal the wounds of his heart. If the world has been empty and delusive, it gladdens him with the prospect of a higher and better order of things, about to arise. If men have been ungrateful and base, it displays before him the faithfulness of that Supreme Being, who, though every other friend fail, will never forsake him. Consult your experience, and you will find, that the two greatest sources of inward joy are, the exercise of love directed towards a deserving object, and the exercise of hope terminating on some high and assured happiness. Both these are supplied by devotion; and therefore we have no reason to be surprised, if, on some occasions, it fill the hearts of good men with a satisfaction not to be expressed.

The refined pleasures of a pious mind are, in many respects, superior to the coarse gratifications of sense. They are pleasures which belong to the highest powers, and best affections of the soul; whereas the gratifications of sense reside in the lowest region of our nature. To the one, the soul stoops below its native dignity. The other raise it above itself. The one, leave always a comfortless, often a mortifying remembrance behind them. The other are reviewed with applause and delight. The pleasures of sense resemble a foaming torrent, which, after a disorderly course, speedily runs out, and leaves an empty and offensive channel. But the pleasures of devotion resemble the equable current of a pure river, which enlivens the fields through which it passes, and diffuses verdure and fertility along its banks. To thee, oh Devotion! we owe the highest improvement of our nature, and much of the enjoyment of our life. Thou art the support of our virtue, and the rest of our souls, in this turbulent world. Thou composest the thoughts. Thou calmest the passions. Thou exaltest the heart. Thy communications, and thine only, are imparted to the low, no less than to the high; to the poor, as well as to the rich. In thy presence, worldly distinctions cease; and under thy influence, worldly sorrows are forgotten. Thou art the balm of the wounded mind. Thy sanctuary is ever open to the miserable; inaccessible only to the unrighteous and impure. Thou beginnest on earth, the temper of Heaven. In thee, the hosts of angels and blessed spirits eternally rejoice. It now remains,

III. To endeavour to correct some errors, into which men are apt to fall concerning devotion. For it is but too obvious, that errors are often committed in this part of religion. These frequently disfigure its appearance before the world, and subject it to unjust reproach. Let us therefore attend deliberately to its

nature, so as to distinguish pure and rational devotion, of which I have hitherto treated, from that which is, in any degree, spurious and adulterated.

In the first place. it is an error to place devotion in the mere performance of any external act of worship. Prayer and praise, together with the ordinances peculiar to the Christian religion, are the appointed means of raising the heart towards the Supreme Being. They are the instituted signs of devotion; the language in which it naturally expresses itself. But let us remember, that they are signs and expressions only; and we all know, that, in various cases, these may not correspond to the thing signified. It is in the disposition of the heart, not in the motion of the lips, or in the posture of the body, that devotion consists. The heart may pray, or praise, when no words are uttered. But if the heart be unconcerned or ill affected, all the words we can utter, how properly framed soever, are no other than empty and unacceptable sounds in the ear of the Almighty.

In the second place, It is an error to conceive the pleasures and advantages of devotion to be indiscriminately open to all. Devotion, like many parts of religion, may in some lights be considered as a privilege, and in others as a duty. It is the duty of all to love God, and to resign themselves to his will. But it is the privilege of good men only, to rejoice in God, and to confide in his friendship. Hence a certain preparation is requisite, for the enjoyment of devotion in its whole extent. Not only must the life be reformed from gross enormities, but the heart must have undergone that change which the gospel demands. A competent knowledge of God must be acquired. A proper foundation must be laid in faith and repentance, for intercourse with heaven.

They who would rush all at once from the arms of the world, into the sacred retreat of devotion; they who imagine that retreat to stand always ready for the reception of such as betake themselves to it, for no reason, but because every other refuge excludes them, betray gross ignorance of this part of religion. They bring to it, faculties unqualified to taste its pleasures; and they grasp at hopes, to which they are not entitled. By incorporating with devotion the unnatural mixture of their unsanctified passions, they defile and corrupt it. Hence that gloom which has often spread over it. Hence those superstitious mortifications and austerities, by which the falsely devout hope to purchase favour from God; haunted by the terrors of a guilty conscience, and vainly struggling to substitute a servile and cringing homage, in the room of the pure affections of a renewed heart. On such altars the hallowed fire of true devotion cannot burn; nor can any incense ascend from them, that shall be grateful to Heaven. *Bring no more vain oblations. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from*

before mine eyes, saith the Lord. Cease to do evil; learn to do well. Then draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.—But though devotion requires a pure heart, and a virtuous life, and necessarily supposes the exercise of frequent retirement, I must observe,

In the third place, That it is an error to conceive it as requiring an entire retreat from the world. Devotion, like every other branch of religion, was intended to fit us for discharging the duties of life. We serve God, by being useful to one another. It is evident from the frame of our nature, and from our common necessities and wants, that we were designed by Providence for an active part on this earth. The Gospel of Christ, accordingly, considers us as engaged in the concerns of the world; and directs its exhortations to men, in all the various relations, characters, and employments of civil life. Abstraction from society, therefore, and total dedication of our time to devout exercises, cannot be the most proper method of acquiring the favour of God.

I mean not, however, to throw any blame on those, who, having lost all relish for the ordinary pursuits of life, in consequence of severe wounds which they have received from affliction; who, being left to stand alone, and discerning their connections with the world to be in some measure broken off, choose to seek tranquillity in a religious retirement, and to consecrate their days entirely to God. Situations sometimes occur, which both justify a great degree of retreat from the world, and entitle it to respect. But with regard to the bulk of mankind, Christian devotion neither requires nor implies any such sequestration from the affairs of men. Nay, for the most part, it will be cultivated with greater success, by those who mingle it with the active employments of life. For the mind, when entirely occupied by any one object, is in hazard of viewing it at last through a false medium. Objects especially so great and sublime as those of devotion, when we attempt to fix upon them unremitting attention, overstretch and disorder our feeble powers. The mind, by being relaxed, returns to them with more advantage. As none of our organs can bear intense sensations without injury; as the eye, when dazzled with overpowering light, beholds imaginary colours, and loses the real distinction of objects; so the mind, when overheated by perpetual contemplation of celestial things, has been sometimes found to mistake the strong impressions of fancy, for supernatural communications from above. To the employments of devotion, as to all other things, there are due limits. There is a certain temperate sphere, within which it preserves longest its proper exertion, and most successfully promotes the purposes for which it was designed.

IN the fourth place, It is an error to imagine, that devotion enjoins a total contempt of all the pleasures and amusements of human society. It checks, indeed, that spirit of dissipation which is too prevalent. It not only prohibits pleasures which are unlawful, but likewise that unlawful degree of attachment to pleasures in themselves innocent, which withdraws the attention of man from what is serious and important. But it brings amusement under due limitation, without extirpating it. It forbids it as the business, but permits it as the relaxation, of life. For there is nothing in the spirit of true religion, which is hostile to a cheerful enjoyment of our situation in the world.

THEY who look with a severe and indignant eye upon all the recreations by which the cares of men are relieved, and the union of society is cemented, are, in two respects, injurious to religion. First, they exhibit it to others under a forbidding form, by clothing it with the garb of so much unnecessary austerity. And next, they deprive the world of the benefit which their example might afford, in drawing the line between innocent and dangerous pleasures. By a temperate participation of those which are innocent, they might successfully exert that authority which a virtuous and respectable character always possesses, in restraining undue excess. They would show the young and unwearied, at what point they ought to stop. They would have it in their power to regulate, in some degree, the public manners; to check extravagance, to humble presumption, and put vice to the blush. But, through injudicious severity, they fall short of the good they might perform. By an indiscriminate censure of all amusement, they detract from the weight of their reproof, when amusement becomes undoubtedly sinful. By totally withdrawing themselves from the circle of cheerful life, they deliver up the entertainments of society into the hands of the loose and the corrupted; and permit the blind power of fashion, uncontrolled, to establish its own standards, and to exercise its dangerous sway over the world.

IN the fifth place, It is an error to believe, that devotion nourishes a spirit of severity, in judging of the manners and characters of others. Under this reproach, indeed, it has so long suffered in the world, that, with too many, the appellation of devout, suggests no other character, but that of a sour and recluse bigot, who delights in censure. But the reproach is unjust; for such a spirit is entirely opposite to the nature of true devotion. The very first traces which it imprints on the mind, are candour and humility. Its principles are liberal. Its genius is unassuming and mild. Severe only to itself, it makes every allowance for others which humanity can suggest. It claims no privilege of looking into their hearts, or of deciding with respect to their eternal state.—If your supposed devotion produce

contrary effects; if it infuse harshness into your sentiments, and acrimony into your speech; you may conclude, that, under a serious appearance, carnal passions lurk. And, if ever it shall so far lift you up with self-conceit, as to make you establish your own opinions as an infallible standard for the whole Christian world, and lead you to consign to perdition all who differ from you, either in some doctrinal tenets, or in the mode of expressing them; you may rest assured, that to much pride you have joined much ignorance, both of the nature of devotion, and of the Gospel of Christ. Finally,

IN the sixth place, It is an error to think, that perpetual rapture and spiritual joy belong to devotion. Devout feelings admit very different degrees of warmth and exaltation. Some persons, by the frame of their minds, are much more susceptible than others of the tender emotions. They more readily relent at the view of Divine goodness, glow with a warmer ardour of love, and, by consequence, rise to a higher elevation of joy and hope. But, in the midst of still and calm affections, devotion often dwells; and, though it produce no transports in the mind, diffuses over it a steady serenity. Devout sensations not only vary in their degree, according to the frame of different tempers; but, even among the best disposed, suffer much interruption and decay. It were too much to expect, that, in the present state of human frailty, those happy feelings should be uniform and constant. Oppression of worldly cares, languour of spirits, and infirmities of health, frequently indispose us for the enjoyment of devout affections. Pious men, on these occasions, are in hazard of passing judgment on their own state with too much severity; as if, for some great iniquity, they were condemned by God to final hardness of heart. Hence arises that melancholy, which has been seen to overcloud them; and which has given occasion to many contemptuous scoffs of ungodly men. But it is a melancholy which deserves to be treated with tenderness, not with contempt. It is the excess of virtuous and pious sensibility. It is the overflowing of a heart affected, in an extreme degree, with the humble sense of its own failings, and with ardent concern to attain the favour of God. A weakness, however, we admit it to be, though not a crime; and hold it to be perfectly separable from the essence of devotion. For contrition, though it may melt, ought not to sink or overpower the heart of a Christian. The tear of repentance brings its own relief. Religion is a spring of consolation, not of terror, to every well-informed mind, which, in a proper manner, rests its hope on the infinite goodness of God, and the all-sufficient merit of Christ.

To conclude. Let us remove from devotion all those mistakes, to which the corruptions of men, or their ignorance and prejudi-

ces, have given rise. With us, let it be the worship of God, *in spirit and in truth*; the elevation of the soul towards him in simplicity and love. Let us pursue it as the principle of virtuous conduct, and of inward peace; by frequent and serious meditation on the great objects of religion, let us lay ourselves open to its influence. By means of the institutions of the Gospel, let us cherish its impressions. And, above all, let us pray to God, that he may establish its power in our hearts. For here, if any where, his assistance is requisite. The spirit of devotion is his gift. From his inspiration it proceeds. Towards him it tends; and in his presence, hereafter, it shall attain its full perfection.

SERMON XI.

ON THE DUTIES OF THE YOUNG.

Young men likewise exhort, to be sober-minded.—TITUS, ii. 6

SOBRIETY of mind is one of those virtues which the present condition of human life strongly inculcates. The uncertainty of its enjoyments checks presumption; the multiplicity of its dangers demands perpetual caution. Moderation, vigilance, and self-government, are duties incumbent on all; but especially on such as are beginning the journey of life. To them, therefore, the admonition in the text is, with great propriety, directed; though there is reason to fear, that by them it is in hazard of being least regarded. Experience enforces the admonition on the most giddy, after they have advanced in years. But the whole state of youthful views and passions, is adverse to sobriety of mind. The scenes which present themselves, at our entering upon the world, are commonly flattering. Whatever they be in themselves, the lively spirits of the young gild every opening prospect. The field of hope appears to stretch wide before them. Pleasure seems to put forth its blossoms on every side. Impelled by desire, forward they rush with inconsiderate ardour: Prompt to decide, and to choose; averse to hesitate, or to enquire; credulous, because untaught by experience; rash, because unacquainted with danger; headstrong, because unsubdued by disappointment. Hence arise the perils, of which it is my design at present to warn them. I shall take *sobriety of mind*, in its most comprehensive sense, as including the whole of that discipline which religion and virtue prescribe to youth. Though the words of the text are directly addressed to *young men*, yet, as the same admonition is given in a preceding verse to the other sex, the instructions which arise from the text are to be considered as common to both. I intend, first, to show them the importance of beginning early to give serious attention to their conduct; and, next, to point out those virtues which they ought chiefly to cultivate.

As soon as you are capable of reflection, you must perceive that there is a right and a wrong in human actions. You see.

that those who are born with the same advantages of fortune, are not all equally prosperous in the course of life. While some of them, by wise and steady conduct, attain distinction in the world, and pass their days with comfort and honour; others of the same rank, by mean and vicious behaviour, forfeit the advantages of their birth, involve themselves in much misery, and end in being a disgrace to their friends, and a burden on society. Early, then, you may learn, that it is not on the external condition in which you find yourselves placed, but on the part which you are to act, that your welfare or unhappiness, your honour or infamy, depend. Now, when beginning to act that part, what can be of greater moment than to regulate your plan of conduct with the most serious attention, before you have yet committed any fatal or irremediable errors? If, instead of exerting reflection for this valuable purpose, you deliver yourselves up, at so critical a time, to sloth and pleasure; if you refuse to listen to any counsellor but humour, or to attend to any pursuit except that of amusement; if you allow yourselves to float loose and careless on the tide of life, ready to receive any direction which the current of fashion may chance to give you, what can you expect to follow from such beginnings?—While so many around you are undergoing the sad consequences of a like indiscretion, for what reason shall not those consequences extend to you? Shall you attain success without that preparation, and escape dangers without that precaution, which is required of others? Shall happiness grow up to you of its own accord, and solicit your acceptance, when, to the rest of mankind, it is the fruit of long cultivation, and the acquisition of labour and care?—Deceive not yourselves with such arrogant hopes. Whatever be your rank, Providence will not, for your sake, reverse its established order. The Author of your being hath enjoined you to *take heed to your ways; to ponder the paths of your feet; to remember your Creator in the days of your youth.* He hath decreed, that they only *who seek after wisdom shall find it; that fools shall be afflicted, because of their transgressions; and that whoso refuseth instruction shall destroy his own soul.* By listening to these admonitions, and tempering the vivacity of youth with a proper mixture of serious thought, you may ensure cheerfulness for the rest of life; but by delivering yourselves up at present to giddiness and levity, you lay the foundation of lasting heaviness of heart.

When you look forward to those plans of life, which either your circumstances have suggested, or your friends have proposed, you will not hesitate to acknowledge, that, in order to pursue them with advantage, some previous discipline is requisite. Be assured, that, whatever is to be your profession, no education is more necessary to your success, than the acquire-

ment of virtuous dispositions and habits. This is the universal preparation for every character, and every station in life. Bad as the world is, respect is always paid to virtue. In the usual course of human affairs, it will be found, that a plain understanding, joined with acknowledged worth, contributes more to prosperity, than the brightest parts without probity or honour. Whether science, or business, or public life, be your aim, virtue still enters, for a principle share, into all those great departments of society. It is connected with eminence, in every liberal art; with reputation, in every branch of fair and useful business; with distinction, in every public station. The vigour which it gives the mind, and the weight which it adds to character; the generous sentiments which it breathes, the undaunted spirit which it inspires, the ardour of diligence which it quickens, the freedom which it procures from pernicious and dishonourable avocations, are the foundations of all that is high in fame, or great in success, among men.

Whatever ornamental or engaging endowments you now possess, virtue is a necessary requisite, in order to their shining with proper lustre. Feeble are the attractions of the fairest form, if it be suspected that nothing within corresponds to the pleasing appearance without. Short are the triumphs of wit, when it is supposed to be the vehicle of malice. By whatever arts you may at first attract the attention, you can hold the esteem, and secure the hearts of others, only by amiable dispositions, and the accomplishments of the mind. These are the qualities whose influence will last, when the lustre of all that once sparkled and dazzled has passed away.

Let not then the season of youth be barren of improvements so essential to your future felicity and honour. Now is the seed-time of life; and according to *what you sow you shall reap*. Your character is now, under Divine assistance, of your own forming; your fate is, in some measure, put into your own hands. Your nature is as yet pliant and soft. Habits have not established their dominion. Prejudices have not pre-occupied your understanding. The world has not had time to contract and debase your affections. All your powers are more vigorous, disembarassed, and free, than they will be at any future period. Whatever impulse you now give to your desires and passions, the direction is likely to continue. It will form the channel in which your life is to run; nay, it may determine its everlasting issue. Consider then the employment of this important period, as the highest trust which shall ever be committed to you; as, in a great measure, decisive of your happiness, in time, and in eternity. As in the succession of the seasons, each, by the invariable laws of Nature, affects the productions of what is next in course; so, in human life, every period of our age, ac-

ording as it is well or ill spent, influences the happiness of that which is to follow. Virtuous youth gradually brings forward accomplished and flourishing manhood; and such manhood passes of itself, without uneasiness, into respectable and tranquil old age. But when nature is turned out of its regular course, disorder takes place in the moral, just as in the vegetable world. If the spring put forth no blossoms, in summer there will be no beauty, and in autumn no fruit. So if youth be trifled away without improvement, manhood will be contemptible, and old age miserable. If the beginnings of life have been *vanity*, its latter end can be no other than *vexation of spirit*.

Having thus shown the importance of beginning early to give serious attention to conduct, I come, next, to point out the virtues which are most necessary to be cultivated in youth. What I shall,

I. RECOMMEND, is piety to god. With this I begin; both as a foundation of good morals, and as a disposition particularly graceful and becoming in youth. To be void of it, argues a cold heart, destitute of some of the best affections which belong to that age. Youth is the season of warm and generous emotions. The heart should then, spontaneously, rise into the admiration of what is great, glow with the love of what is fair and excellent, and melt at the discovery of tenderness and goodness. Where can any object be found, so proper to kindle those affections, as the Father of the universe, and the Author of all felicity? Unmoved by veneration, can you contemplate that grandeur and majesty, which his works every where display? Untouched by gratitude, can you view that profusion of good, which, in this pleasing season of life, his benificent hand pours around you? Happy in the love and affection of those with whom you are connected, look up to the Supreme Being, as the inspirer of all the friendship which has ever been shown you by others; himself, your best and your first friend; formerly, the supporter of your infancy, and the guide of your childhood; now, the guardian of your youth, and the hope of your coming years. View religious homage, as a natural expression of gratitude to him for all his goodness. Consider it as the service of the *God of your Fathers*; of him, to whom your parents devoted you; of him, whom in former ages your ancestors honoured; and by whom they are now rewarded, and blessed in Heaven. Connected with so many tender sensibilities of soul, let religion be with you, not the cold and barren offspring of speculation, but the warm and vigorous dictate of the heart.

But though piety chiefly belong to the heart, yet the aid of the understanding is requisite, to give a proper direction to the devout affections. You must endeavour, therefore, to acquire just views, both of the great principles of natural religion, and

of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. For this end, study the sacred Scriptures. Consult the word of God, more than the systems of men, if you would know the truth in its native purity. When, upon rational and sober enquiry, you have established your principles, suffer them not to be shaken by the scoffs of the licentious, or the cavils of the sceptical. Remember, that in the examination of every great and comprehensive plan, such as that of Christianity, difficulties may be expected to occur; and that reasonable evidence is not to be rejected, because the nature of our present state allows us only to *know in part, and to see through a glass, darkly.*

Impress your minds with reverence for all that is sacred. Let no wantonness of youthful spirits, no compliance with the intemperate mirth of others, ever betray you into profane sallies.— Besides the guilt which is thereby incurred, nothing gives a more odious appearance of petulance and presumption to youth, than the affectation of treating religion with levity. Instead of being an evidence of superior understanding, it discovers a pert and shallow mind; which, vain of the first smatterings of knowledge, presumes to make light of what the rest of mankind revere.

At the same time you are not to imagine, that when exhorted to be religious, you are called upon to become more formal and solemn in your manners than others of the same years, or to erect yourselves into supercilious reprovers of those around you. The spirit of true religion breathes gentleness and affability. It gives a native, unaffected ease to the behaviour— It is social, kind, and cheerful; far removed from that gloomy and illiberal superstition which clouds the brow, sharpens the temper, dejects the spirit, and teaches men to fit themselves for another world, by neglecting the concerns of this. Let your religion, on the contrary, connect preparation for Heaven, with an honourable discharge of the duties of active life. Let it be associated in your imagination, with all that is manly and useful; *with whatsoever things are true, are just, are pure, are lovely, are of good report*, wherever there is any *virtue*, and wherever there is any *praise*. Of such religion discover, on every proper occasion, that you are not ashamed; but avoid making any unnecessary ostentation of it before the world.

II. To piety, join modesty and docility, reverence of your parents, and submission to those who are your superiors in knowledge, in station, and in years. Dependence and obedience belong to youth. Modesty is one of its chief ornaments; and has ever been esteemed a presage of rising merit. When entering on the career of life, it is your part, not to assume the reins as yet into your hands; but to commit yourselves to the guidance of the more experienced, and to become wise by the wisdom of those who have gone before you.

Of all the follies incident to youth, there are none which either deform its present appearance, or blast the prospect of its future prosperity, more than self-conceit, presumption, and obstinacy. By checking its natural progress in improvement, they fix it in long immaturity; and frequently produce mischiefs, which can never be repaired. Yet these are vices too commonly found among the young. Big with enterprise, and elated by hope, they resolve to trust for success to none but themselves. Full of their own abilities, they deride the admonitions which are given them by their friends, as the timorous suggestions of age. Too wise to learn, too impatient to deliberate, too forward to be restrained, they plunge, with precipitant indiscretion, into the midst of all the dangers with which life abounds. *Seest thou a young man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him.*—Positive as you now are in your opinions, and confident in your assertions, be assured, that the time approaches when both men and things will appear to you in a different light. Many characters which you now admire, will by and by, sink in your esteem; and many opinions, of which you are at present most tenacious, will alter as you advance in years. Distrust, therefore, that glare of youthful presumption, which dazzles your eyes. Abound not in your own sense. Put not yourselves forward with too much eagerness; nor imagine, that, by the impetuosity of juvenile ardour, you can overturn systems which have been long established, and change the face of the world. *Learn not to think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think, but to think soberly.* By patient and gradual progression in improvement, you may, in due time, command lasting esteem; but by assuming, at present, a tone of superiority, to which you have no title, you will disgust those whose approbation it is most important to gain. Forward vivacity may fit you to be the companion of an idle hour. More solid qualities must recommend you to the wise, and mark you out for importance and consideration in subsequent life.

III. It is necessary to recommend to you, sincerity and truth. This is the basis of every virtue. That darkness of character, where we can see no heart; those foldings of art, through which no native affection is allowed to penetrate, present an object, unamiable in every season of life, but particularly odious in youth. If, at an age when the heart is warm, when the emotions are strong, and when nature is expected to show itself free and open, you can already smile and deceive, what are we to look for when you shall be longer hackneyed in the ways of men; when interest shall have completed the obduration of your heart, and experience shall have improved you in all the arts of guile? Dissimulation in youth, is the fore-runner of perfidy in old age. Its first appearance is the fatal omen of growing de-

pravity, and future shame. It degrades parts and learning; obscures the lustre of every accomplishment; and sinks you into contempt with God and man.

As you value, therefore, the approbation of Heaven, or the esteem of the world, cultivate the love of truth. In all your proceedings, be direct and consistent. Ingenuity and candour possess the most powerful charm; they bespeak universal favour, and carry an apology for almost every failing. *The lip of truth shall be established for ever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment.** The path of truth, is a plain and a safe path; that of falsehood, is a perplexing maze. After the first departure from sincerity, it is not in your power to stop. One artifice unavoidably leads on to another; till, as the intricacy of the labyrinth increases, you are left entangled in your own snare. Deceit discovers a little mind, which stops at temporary expedients, without rising to comprehensive views of conduct. It betrays, at the same time, a dastardly spirit. It is the resource of one who wants courage to avow his designs, or to rest upon himself. Whereas, openness of character displays that generous boldness which ought to distinguish youth. To set out in the world with no other principle than a crafty attention to interest, betokens one who is destined for creeping through the inferior walks of life. But to give an early preference to honour above gain, when they stand in competition; to despise every advantage which cannot be attained without dishonest arts; to brook no meanness; and to stoop to no dissimulation; are the indications of a great mind, the presages of future eminence and distinction in life.

At the same time this virtuous sincerity is perfectly consistent with the most prudent vigilance and caution. It is opposed to cunning, not to true wisdom. It is not the simplicity of a weak and improvident, but the candour of an enlarged and noble mind; of one who scorns deceit, because he accounts it both base and unprofitable; and who seeks no disguise, because he needs none to hide him. *Lord! who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall ascend into thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.*

IV. YOUTH is the proper season of cultivating the benevolent and humane affections. As a great part of your happiness is to depend on the connexions which you form with others, it is of high importance that you acquire, by times, the temper and the manners which will render such connexions comfortable.—Let a sense of justice be the foundation of all your social qualities. in your most early intercourse with the world, and even in your youthful amusements, let no unfairness be found. En-

* Prov. xii. 19.

grave on your mind that sacred rule, of *doing all things to others, according as you wish that they should do unto you*. For this end, impress yourselves with a deep sense of the original and natural equality of men. Whatever advantages of birth or fortune you possess, never display them with an ostentatious superiority. —Leave the subordinations of rank, to regulate the intercourse of more advanced years. At present, it becomes you to act among your companions, as man with man. Remember how unknown to you are the vicissitudes of the world; and how often they, on whom ignorant and contemptuous young men once looked down with scorn, have risen to be their superiors in future years.

Compassion is an emotion of which you ought never to be ashamed. Graceful in youth is the tear of sympathy, and the heart that melts at the tale of woe. Let not ease and indulgence contract your affections, and wrap you up in selfish enjoyment. But go sometimes to the *house of mourning*, as well as to the *house of feasting*. Accustom yourselves to think of the distresses of human life; as the solitary cottage, the dying parent, and the weeping orphan. *Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt surely give unto him in the day of his need: And thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him; because that for this thing, the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works.** Never sport with pain and distress, in any of your amusements; nor treat even the meanest insect with wanton cruelty.

In young minds, there is commonly a strong propensity to particular intimacies and friendships. Youth, indeed, is the season when friendships are sometimes formed, which not only continue through succeeding life, but which glow to the last, with a tenderness unknown to the connections begun in cooler years.—The propensity therefore is not to be discouraged; though at the same time it must be regulated with much circumspection and care. Too many of the pretended friendships of youth, are mere combinations in pleasure. They are often founded on capricious likings; suddenly contracted, and as suddenly dissolved. Sometimes they are the effect of interested complaisance and flattery on the one side, and of credulous fondness on the other. Beware of such rash and dangerous connections, which may afterwards load you with dishonour. Remember, that by the character of those whom you choose for your friends, your own is likely to be formed, and will certainly be judged of by the world. Be slow, therefore, and cautious in contracting intimacy; but when a virtuous friendship is once established, consider it as a sacred engagement. Expose not yourselves to the reproach of lightness and inconstancy, which always bespeak

* Deut. xv. 7, 10.

either a trifling or a base mind. Reveal none of the secrets of your friend. Be faithful to his interests. Forsake him not in danger. Abhor the thought of acquiring any advantage by his prejudice or hurt. *There is a friend that loveth at all times, and a brother that is born for adversity. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.**

Finally, on this head; in order to render yourselves amiable in society, correct every appearance of harshness in behaviour. Let that courtesy distinguish your demeanor, which springs, not so much from studied politeness, as from a mild and gentle heart. Follow the customs of the world in matters indifferent; but stop when they become sinful. Let your manners be simple and natural; and of course they will be engaging. Affectation is certain deformity. By forming themselves on fantastic models, and vying with one another in every reigning folly, the young begin with being ridiculous, and end in being vicious and immoral.

V. LET me particularly exhort youth to temperance in pleasure: Let me admonish them, to beware of that rock on which thousands, from race to race, continue to split. The love of pleasure, natural to man in every period of his life, glows at this age with excessive ardour. Novelty adds fresh charms, as yet, to every gratification. The world appears to spread a continual feast; and health, vigour, and high spirits, invite them to partake of it without restraint. In vain we warn them of latent dangers. Religion is accused of insufferable severity, in prohibiting enjoyments; and the old, when they offer their admonitions, are upbraided with having forgot that they once were young.—And yet, my friends, to what do the restraints of religion, and the counsels of age, with respect to pleasure, amount? They may all be comprised in few words, not to hurt yourselves, and not to hurt others, by your pursuit of pleasure. Within these bounds pleasure is lawful; beyond them, it becomes criminal, because it is ruinous. Are these restraints any other than what a wise man would choose to impose on himself? We call you not to renounce pleasure, but to enjoy it in safety. Instead of abridging it, we exhort you to pursue it on an extensive plan. We propose measures for securing its possession, and for prolonging its duration.

Consult your whole nature. Consider yourselves not only as sensitive, but as rational beings; not only as rational, but social; not only as social, but immortal. Whatever violates your nature in any of these respects, cannot afford true pleasure; any more than that which undermines an essential part of the vital system can promote health. For the truth of this conclusion we

appeal, not merely to the authority of religion, nor to the testimony of the aged, but to yourselves and your own experience. We ask, whether you have not found, that in a course of criminal excess, your pleasure was more than compensated by succeeding pain? Whether, if not from every particular instance, yet from every habit, at least, of unlawful gratification, there did not spring some thorn to wound you, there did not arise some consequence to make you repent of it in the issue? *How long then, ye simple ones! will ye love simplicity?* How long repeat the same round of pernicious folly, and tamely expose yourselves to be caught in the same snare? If you have any consideration, or any firmness left, avoid temptations, for which you have found yourselves unequal, with as much care, as you would shun pestilential infection. Break off all connections with the loose and profligate. *When sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Look not on the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup: for at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.—Remove thy way from the strange woman, and come not near the door of her house. Let not thine heart incline to her ways; for her house is the way to hell. Thou goest after her as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.*

By these unhappy excesses of irregular pleasure in youth, how many amiable dispositions are corrupted or destroyed!—How many rising capacities and powers are suppressed!—How many flattering hopes of parents and friends are totally extinguished!—Who but must drop a tear over human nature, when he beholds that morning which arose so bright, overcast with such untimely darkness; that good humour which once captivated all hearts, that vivacity which sparkled in every company, those abilities which were fitted for adorning the highest station, all sacrificed at the shrine of low sensuality; and one who was formed for running the fair career of life in the midst of public esteem, cut off by his vices at the beginning of his course, or sunk, for the whole of it, into insignificancy, and contempt!—These, Oh sinful pleasure! are thy trophies. It is thus, that, co-operating with the foe of God and man, thou degradest human honour, and blastest the opening prospects of human felicity.

VI. DILIGENCE, industry, and proper improvement of time, are material duties of the young. To no purpose are they endowed with the best abilities, if they want activity for exerting them. Unavailing in this case, will be every direction that can be given them, either for their temporal or spiritual welfare. In youth the habits of industry are most easily acquired. In youth, the incentives to it are strongest, from ambition and from duty, from emulation and hope, from all the prospects which the begin-

ning of life affords. If, dead to these calls, you already languish in slothful inaction, what will be able to quicken the more sluggish current of advancing years?

Industry is not only the instrument of improvement, but the foundation of pleasure. Nothing is so opposite to the true enjoyment of life, as the relaxed and feeble state of an indolent mind. He who is a stranger to industry, may possess, but he cannot enjoy. For it is labour only which gives the relish to pleasure. It is the appointed vehicle of every good to man. It is the indispensable condition of our possessing a sound mind in a sound body. Sloth is so inconsistent with both, that it is hard to determine whether it be a greater foe to virtue, or to health and happiness. Inactive as it is in itself, its effects are fatally powerful. Though it appear a slowly flowing stream, yet it undermines all that is stable and flourishing. It not only saps the foundation of every virtue, but pours upon you a deluge of crimes and evils. It is like water which first putrifies by stagnation, and then sends up noxious vapours, and fills the atmosphere with death.

Fly, therefore, from idleness, as the certain parent both of guilt and of ruin. And under idleness I conclude, not mere inaction only, but all that circle of trifling occupations, in which too many saunter away their youth; perpetually engaged in frivolous society, or public amusements; in the labours of dress, or the ostentation of their persons.—Is this the foundation which you lay for future usefulness and esteem? By such accomplishments do you hope to recommend yourselves to the thinking part of the world, and to answer the expectations of your friends, and your country?—Amusements, youth requires. It were vain, it were cruel to prohibit them. But though allowable as the relaxation, they are most culpable as the business, of the young. For they then become the gulph of time, and the poison of the mind. They foment bad passions. They weaken the manly powers. They sink the native vigour of youth into contemptible effeminacy.

Redeeming your time from such dangerous waste, seek to fill it with employments which you may review with satisfaction.—The acquisition of knowledge is one of the most honourable occupations of youth. The desire of it discovers a liberal mind, and is connected with many accomplishments, and many virtues. But though your train of life should not lead you to study, the course of education always furnishes proper employments to a well-disposed mind. Whatever you pursue, be emulous to excel. Generous ambition, and sensibility to praise, are, especially at your age, among the marks of virtue. Think not that any affluence of fortune, or any elevation of rank, exempt you

from the duties of application and industry. Industry is the law of our being; it is the demand of Nature, of Reason, and of God. Remember always, that the years which now pass over your heads, leave permanent memorials behind them. From your thoughtless minds they may escape; but they remain in the remembrance of God. They form an important part of the register of your life. They will hereafter bear testimony, either for or against you, at that day, when, for all your actions, but particularly for the employments of youth, you must give an account to God.

THUS I have set before you some of the chief qualifications which belong to that *sober mind*, that virtuous and religious character, which the Apostle in my text recommends to youth; piety, modesty, truth, benevolence, temperance, and industry.—Whether your future course is destined to be long or short, after this manner it should commence; and, if it continue to be thus conducted, its conclusion, at what time soever it arrives, will not be inglorious or unhappy. For, *honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, or that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the gray hair to man, and an unspotted life is old age.*

LET me finish the subject, with recalling your attention to that dependence on the blessing of heaven, which, amidst all your endeavours after improvement, you ought continually to preserve. It is too common with the young, even when they resolve to tread the path of virtue and honour, to set out with presumptuous confidence in themselves. Trusting to their own abilities for carrying them successfully through life, they are careless of applying to God, or of deriving any assistance from what they are apt to reckon the gloomy discipline of religion. Alas! how little do they know the dangers which await them! Neither human wisdom, nor human virtue, unsupported by religion, are equal to the trying situations, which often occur in life. By the shock of temptation, how frequently have the most virtuous intentions been overthrown? Under the pressure of disaster, how often has the greatest constancy sunk? *Every good, and every perfect gift, is from above.* Wisdom and virtue, as well as *riches and honour, come from God.* Destitute of his favour, you are in no better situation with all your boasted abilities than orphans left to wander in a trackless desert, without any guide to conduct them, or any shelter to cover them from the gathering storm. Correct, then, this ill founded arrogance. Expect not, that your happiness can be independent of Him who made you. By faith and repentance, apply to the Redeemer of the world. By piety and prayer, seek the protection of the God of Heaven. I conclude with the solemn words, in

which a great Prince delivered his dying charge to his son ; words which every young person ought to consider as addressed to himself, and to engrave deeply on his heart: *Thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind. For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.**

* Chron. xxviii. 9.

SERMON XII.

ON THE DUTIES AND CONSOLATIONS OF THE AGED.

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.—PROVERBS, xvi. 31.

TO *fear God and keep his commandments*, is the rule of our duty in every period of life. But, as the light which guides our steps, varies with the progress of the day, so the rule of religious conduct is diversified in its application by the different stages of our present existence. To every age there belongs a distinct propriety of behaviour. There arises from it, a series of duties peculiar to itself.

Of those which are incumbent on youth, I have treated in the preceding discourse. As we advance from youth to middle age, a new field of action opens, and a different character is required. The flow of gay and impetuous spirits begins to subside. Life gradually assumes a graver cast; the mind a more sedate and thoughtful turn. The attention is now transferred from pleasure to interest; that is, to pleasure diffused over a wider extent, and measured by a larger scale. Formerly, the enjoyment of the present moment occupied the whole attention. Now, no action terminates ultimately in itself, but refers to some more distant aim. Wealth and power, the instruments of lasting gratification, are now coveted more than any single pleasure. Prudence and foresight lay their plans. Industry carries on its patient efforts. Activity pushes forward; address winds around. Here, an enemy is to be overcome; there, a rival to be displaced. Competitions warm; and the strife of the world thickens on every side. To guide men through this busy period, without loss of integrity; to guard them against the temptations which arise from mistaking or interfering interests; to call them from worldly pursuits to serious thoughts of their spiritual concerns, is the great office of religion.

But as this includes, in a great measure, the whole compass of moral duty, as the general strain of religious exhortation is addressed to those who are in this season of life; a delineation

of the virtues properly belonging to middle age, may appear unnecessary, and would lead us into too wide a field. Let us therefore turn our view to a bounded prospect; and contemplate a period of life, the duties of which are circumscribed within narrower limits. Old age is a stage of the human course, which every one hopes to reach; and therefore the consideration of it interests us all. It is a period justly entitled to general respect. Even its failings ought to be touched with a gentle hand; and though the petulant, and the vain, may despise the *hoary head*; yet the wisest of men has asserted in the text, that when *found in the way of righteousness, it is a crown of glory*- I shall first offer some counsels, concerning the errors which are most incident to the aged. Secondly, I shall suggest the peculiar duties they ought to practise; and, thirdly, point out the consolations they may enjoy.

I. As the follies and vices of youth are chiefly derived from inexperience and presumption; so almost all the errors of age may be traced up to the feebleness and distresses peculiar to that time of life. Though in every part of life, vexations occur, yet, in former years, either business or pleasure, served to obliterate their impression, by supplying occupation to the mind. Old age begins its advances, with disqualifying men for relishing the one, and for taking an active part in the other. While it withdraws their accustomed supports, it imposes, at the same time, the additional burden of growing infirmities. In the former stages of their journey, hope continued to flatter them with many a fair and enticing prospect. But in proportion as old age increases, those pleasing illusions vanish. Life is contracted within a narrow and barren circle. Year after year steals somewhat away from their store of comfort, deprives them of some of their ancient friends, blunts some of their powers of sensation, or incapacitates them for some function of life.

Though, in the plan of Providence, it is wisely ordered, that before we are called away from the world, our attachment to it should be gradually loosened; though it be fit in itself, that, as in the day of human life, there is a morning and a noon, so there should be an evening also, when the lengthening shadows shall admonish us of approaching night; yet we have no reason to be surprised, if they who are arrived at this dejecting season, feel and lament the change which they suffer. The complaints, therefore, of the aged, should meet with tenderness, rather than censure. The burden under which they labour ought to be viewed with sympathy, by those who must bear it in their turn, and who, perhaps, hereafter may complain of it as bitterly. At the same time, the old should consider, that all the seasons of life have their several trials allotted to them; and that to bear the infirmities of age with becoming patience, is as much their duty.

as is that of the young to resist the temptation of youthful pleasure. By calmly enduring, for the short time that remains, what Providence is pleased to inflict, they both express a resignation most acceptable to God, and recommended themselves to the esteem and assistance of all who are around them.

But though the querulous temper imputed to old age, is to be considered as a natural infirmity, rather than as a vice; the same apology cannot be made for that peevish disgust at the manners, and that malignant censure of the enjoyments, of the young, which is sometimes found to accompany declining years. Nothing can be more unjust, than to take offence at others, on account of their partaking of pleasures, which it is past your time to enjoy. By indulging this fretful temper, you both aggravate the uneasiness of age, and you alienate those on whose affection much of your comfort depends. In order to make the two extremes of life unite in amicable society, it is greatly to be wished, that the young would look forward, and consider that they shall one day be old; and that the old would look back, and, remembering that they once were young, make proper allowances for the temper and the manners of youth.

But, instead of this, it is too common to find the aged at declared enmity with the whole system of present customs and manners; perpetually complaining of the growing depravity of the world, and of the astonishing vices and follies of the rising generation. All things, according to them, are rushing fast into ruin. Decency and good order have become extinct, ever since that happy discipline, under which they spent their youth, has passed away.—Part, at least, of this displeasure, you may fairly impute to the infirmity of age, which throws its own gloom on every surrounding object. similar lamentations were, in the days of your youth, poured forth by your fathers; and they who are now young, shall, when it comes to their turn, inveigh, in the like strain, against those who succeed them. Great has been the corruption of the world in every age. Sufficient ground there is for the complaints made by serious observers, at all times, of abounding iniquity and folly. But, though particular modes of vice prevail in one age more than in others, it does not follow, that on that age all iniquity is accumulated. It is the form, perhaps, more than the quantity of corruption, which makes the distinction. In the worst of times, God has assured us, that there shall be always *a seed who shall serve him*.* *Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this. Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself otherwise.*† Former follies pass away and are forgotten. Those which are present,

* Psalm xxii. 34.

† Eccles. vii. 10, 16.

strike observation, and sharpen censure. Had the depravation of the world continued to increase in proportion to those gloomy calculations, which, for so many centuries past, have estimated each race as worse than the preceeding; by this time, not one ray of good sense, nor one spark of piety and virtue, must have remained unextinguished among mankind.

One of the vices of old age, which appears the most unaccountable, is that covetous attachment to worldly interest, with which it is often charged. But this, too, can naturally be deduced from the sense of its feebleness and decay. In proportion as the vigour both of body and mind declines, timidity may be expected to increase. With anxious and fearful eye, the aged look forward to the evils which threaten them, and to the changes which may befall. Hence, they are sometimes apt to overvalue riches, as the instrument of their defence against these dangers, and as the most certain means of securing them against solitude and disrespect. But, though their apprehensions may justify a cautious frugality, they can by no means excuse a sordid avarice. It is no less absurd, than it is culpable, in the old, from the dread of uncertain futurity, to deny themselves the enjoyment of the present; and to increase in anxiety, about their journey, in proportion as it draws nearer to its close. There are more effectual methods of commanding respect from the world, than the mere possession of wealth. Let them be charitable, and do good. Let them mix beneficence to their friends, with a cheerful enjoyment of the comforts which befit their state. They will then receive the returns of real respect and love. Whereas, by their riches, they procure no more than pretended demonstrations of regard; while their ill-judged parsimony occasions many secret wishes for their death.

As increasing years debilitate the body, so they weaken the force, and diminish the warmth of the affections. Chilled by the hand of time, the heart loses that tender sensibility, with which it once entered into the concerns and sorrows of others. It is, in truth, a merciful appointment of Providence, that as they who see many days, must behold many a sad scene, the impressions of grief upon their heart should be blunted by being often repeated; and that, in proportion as their power of advancing the prosperity of others decreases, their participation of the misfortunes of others should also lessen. However, as, in every period of life, humanity and friendship contribute to happiness, it is both the duty and the interest of the aged, to cherish the remains of the kind affections; and from the days of former years, to recall such impressions as may tend to soften their hearts. Let them not, from having suffered much in the course of their long pilgrimage, become callous to the sufferings of others. But remembering that they still are men, let them study to keep their

heart open to the sense of human woe. Practised in the ways of men, they are apt to be suspicious of design and fraud; for the knowledge and the distrust of mankind too often go together. Let not, however, that wary caution, which is the fruit of their experience, degenerate into craft. Experience ought also to have taught them, that amidst all the falsehood of men, integrity is the best defence; and that he who continueth to the end to *walk uprightly*, shall continue to *walk surely*. Having thus offered some admonitions concerning the errors most incident to age, I proceed,

II. To point out the duties which peculiarly belong to it.

The first which I shall mention is a timely retreat from the world. In every part of life, we are in hazard of being too deeply immersed in its cares. But during its vigorous periods, the impulse of active spirit, the necessary business of our station, and the allowable endeavours to advance our fortune by fair industry, render it difficult to observe true moderation. In old age, all the motives of eager pursuit diminish. The voice of nature then calls you to leave to others the bustle and contest of the world; and gradually to disengage yourselves from a burden, which begins to exceed your strength. Having borne your share of the heat and labour of the day, let the evening of life be passed in the cool and quiet shade. It is only in the shade, that the virtues of old age can flourish. There, its duties are discharged with more success; and there, its comforts are enjoyed with great satisfaction.

By the retreat of old age, however, I do not mean a total cessation from every worldly employment. There is an error in this as well as in the opposite extreme. Persons who have been long harassed with business and care, sometimes imagine, that when life declines, they cannot make their retirement from the world too complete. But where they expected a delicious enjoyment of leisure and ease, they have often found a melancholy solitude. Few are able, in any period of their days, to bear a total abstraction from the world. There remains a vacancy which they cannot fill up. Incapable of being always employed in the exercises of religion, and often little qualified for the entertainments of the understanding, they are in hazard of becoming a burden to themselves, and to all with whom they are connected. It is, therefore, the duty of the aged, not so much to withdraw entirely from worldly business, as to contract its circle; not so much to break off, as to loosen their communication with active life. Continuing that train of occupation to which they have been most accustomed, let them pursue it with less intenseness; relaxing their efforts, as their powers decline; retiring more and more from public observation, to domestic scenes, and serious thoughts; till, as the decays of life advance,

the world shall of itself withdraw to a greater distance from their view, its objects shall gradually yield their place to others of more importance; and its tumults shall sound in their ears, only like a noise which is heard from afar.

If it be the duty of the old, to retreat betimes from the fatigue of worldly care, it is still more incumbent on them to quit the pursuit of such pleasures as are unsuitable to their years. Cheerfulness, in old age, is graceful. It is the natural concomitant of virtue. But the cheerfulness of age is widely different from the levity of youth. Many things are allowable in that early period, which, in maturer years, would deserve censure; but which, in old age, become both ridiculous and criminal. By awkwardly affecting to imitate the manners, and to mingle in the vanities of the young, as the aged depart from the dignity, so they forfeit the privileges of gray hairs. But if, by follies of this kind, they are degraded, they are exposed to much deeper blame, by descending to vicious pleasure, and continuing to hover round those sinful gratifications to which they were once addicted. Amusement and relaxation the aged require, and may enjoy. But let them consider well, that by every intemperate indulgence, they accelerate decay; instead of enlivening they oppress, and precipitate their declining state. Ease, safety, and respect, are the proper enjoyments of age. Within these bounds let it remain, and not vainly attempt to break through that barrier by which nature has separated the pleasures of youth from the comforts left to the concluding years of life.

A material part of the duty of the aged consists in studying to be useful to the race who are to succeed them. Here opens to them an extensive field, in which they may so employ themselves, as considerably to advance the interest of religion, and the happiness of mankind. To them it belongs, to impart to the young the fruit of their long experience; to instruct them in the proper conduct, and to warn them of the various dangers of life; by wise counsel, so temper their precipitate ardour; and, both by precept and example, to form them to piety and virtue.

It is not by rigorous discipline, and unrelaxing austerity, that they can maintain an ascendant over youthful minds. The constraint which their presence will impose, and the aversion which their manners will create, if the one be constantly awful, and the other severe, tend to frustrate the effect of all their wisdom. They must assume the spirit of the companion, and the friend; and mix, with the authority of age, a proper degree of indulgence to the manners of the young. Instead of lessening the respect due to their years by such condescension, they take the surest method to increase it. Old age never appears with

greater dignity, than, when tempered with mildness, and enlivened with good humour, it acts as the guide and the patron of youth. Religion, displayed in such a character, strikes the beholders, as at once amiable and venerable. They revere its power, when they see it adding so much grace to the decays of nature, and shedding so pleasing a lustre over the evening of life. The young wish to tread in the same steps, and to arrive at the close of their days with equal honour. They listen with attention to counsels which are mingled with tenderness, and rendered respectable by gray hairs. For, notwithstanding all its presumption, youth naturally bends before superior knowledge and years. Aged wisdom, when joined with acknowledged virtue, exerts an authority over the human mind, greater even than that which arises from power and station. It can check the most forward, abash the most profligate, and strike with awe the most giddy and unthinking.

In the midst of their endeavours to be useful to others, let not the aged forget those religious employments which their own state particularly requires. The first of these, is reflection on their past behaviour, with a view to discover the errors which they have committed; and, as far as remaining life allows, to apply themselves to repentance and amendment.—Long has the world bewildered you in its maze, and imposed upon you by its arts. The time has now come, when this great seducer should mislead you no more. From the calm station at which you are arrived, sequestered from the crowd of the deceiving and the deceived, review your conduct with the eye of Christians and immortal beings. After all the tumult of life is over, what now remains to afford you solid satisfaction? Have you served God with fidelity, and discharged your part to your fellow-creatures with integrity and a good conscience? Can you look forward without terror to that day which is to dissolve your connection with this world, and to bring you into the presence of him who made you, in order to give account of your actions?—The retrospect of life is seldom wholly unattended by uneasiness and shame. Though to the good and the bad it presents a very different scene; yet to all men, it recalls much guilt incurred, and much time mis-spent. It too much resembles the review which a traveller takes from some eminence, of a barren country, through which he has passed, where the heath and the desert form the chief prospect; diversified only by a few scattered spots of imperfect cultivation.

Turn then your thoughts to the proper methods of making your peace with God through Jesus Christ, and implore, from Divine grace, that *new heart*, and *right spirit*, which will fit you for a better world. Let devotion fill up many of those hours which are now vacant from worldly business and care. Let your affections dwell among divine and immortal objects. In silent

and thoughtful meditation, walk as on the shore of that vast ocean, upon which you are soon to embark. Summon up all the considerations, which should reconcile you to your departure from life; and which may prepare you for going through its last scene with firmness and decency. Often let your thanksgiving ascend to God, for that watchful care with which he hath hitherto conducted you, through the long journey of life. Often let your prayers be heard, that in what remains of your pilgrimage, he may not forsake you; and that, when you enter into the *valley of the shadow of death*, he may there support you with *his staff*, and defend you with *his rod*.—Amidst such thoughts and cares, let old age find you employed, betaking yourselves to a prudent and timely retreat; disengaged both from the oppressive load of business, and from the unseasonable pursuit of pleasure; applying yourselves to form the succeeding race, by your counsels, to virtue and wisdom; reviewing seriously your past life; by repentance and devotion, preparing yourselves for a better; and, with humble and manly composure, expecting that hour, which Nature cannot now long delay. It remains,

III. To suggest the consolations which belong to old age, when thus *found in the way of righteousness*.

I must introduce them with observing, That nothing is more reasonable in itself, than to submit patiently to those infirmities of Nature which are brought on by the increase of years. You knew before-hand what you had to expect, when you numbered the successive summers and winters which were passing over your heads. Old age did not attack you by surprise, nor was it forced upon you against your choice. Often, and earnestly, did you wish to *see long life and many days*. When arrived at the desired period, have you any just cause to complain, on account of enduring what the constitution of our being imposes on all? Did you expect, that for your sake, Providence was to alter its established order? Throughout the whole vegetable, sensible, and rational world, whatever makes progress towards maturity, as soon as it has passed that point, begins to verge towards decay. It is as natural for old age to be frail, as for the stalk to bend under the ripened ear, or for the autumnal leaf to change its hue. To this law all who went before you have submitted; and all who shall come after you must yield. After they have flourished for a season, they shall fade, like you, when the period of decline arrives, and bow under the pressure of years.

During the whole progress of the human course, the principal materials of our comfort or uneasiness lie within ourselves. Every age will prove burdensome to those who have no fund of happiness in their own breast. Preserve them, if you could, from infirmity of frame; bestow upon them, if it were possible, perpetual youth; still they would be restless and miserable,

through the influence of ill governed passions. It is not surprising, that such persons are peevish and querulous when old. Unjustly they impute to their time of life, that misery with which their vices and follies embitter every age. Whereas, to good men, no period of life is unsupportable, because they draw their chief happiness from sources which are independent of age or time. Wisdom, piety, and virtue, grow not old with our bodies. They suffer no decay from length of days. To them only belongs unalterable and unfading youth. *Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.**

You can now, it is true, no longer relish many of those pleasures which once amused you. Your sensations are less quick than formerly; your days more languishing. But if you have quitted the region of pleasure, in return you possess that of tranquillity and repose. If you are strangers to the vivacity of enjoyment, you are free, at the same time, from the pain of violent and often disappointed desire. Much fatigue, much vexation, as well as vanity, attend that turbulence of life in which the younger part of mankind are engaged. Amidst those keen pursuits and seeming pleasures, for which you envy them, often they feel their own misery, and look forward with a wishful eye to the season of calmness and retreat. For on all sides of human life, the balance of happiness is adjusted with more equality, than at first appears; and if old age throws some new distresses into the scale, it lightens also the weight of others. Many passions which formerly disturbed your tranquillity, have now subsided. Many competitions which long filled your days with disquiet and strife, are now at an end. Many afflictions which once rent your hearts with violent anguish, are now softened into a tender emotion, on the remembrance of past woe.—In the beginnings of life, there was room for much apprehension, concerning what might befall in its progress. Your security was never untroubled. Your hopes were interrupted by many anxieties and fears. Having finished the career of labour and danger, your anxiety ought of course to lessen. Ready to enter into the harbour, you can look back, as from a secure station, upon the perils you have escaped, upon the tempest by which you was tossed, and upon the multitudes who are still engaged in conflicting with the storm.

If you have acted your part with integrity and honour, you are justly entitled to respect, and you will generally receive it. For rarely, or never, is old age contemned, unless when, by vice or folly, it renders itself contemptible. Though length of time

* Psalm xcii. 13, 14.

may have worn off superficial ornaments, yet what old age looses in grace, it often gains in dignity. The veneration, as was before observed, which gray hairs command, puts in the power of the aged to maintain a very important place in human society. They are so far from being insignificant in the world, that families long holden together by their authority, and societies accustomed to be guided by their counsels, have frequently had cause to regret their loss, more than that of the most vigorous and young. To success of every kind, the head which directs, is no less essential than the hand which executes. Vain, nay often dangerous, were youthful enterprise, if not conducted by aged prudence. *I said, days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.* Therefore, thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear God.†*

Though in old age, the circle of your pleasures is more contracted than it has formerly been; yet within its limits many of those enjoyments remain, which are most grateful to human nature. Temperate mirth is not extinguished by advanced years. The mild pleasures of domestic life still cheer the heart. The entertainments of conversation, and social intercourse, continue unimpaired. The desire of knowledge is not abated by the frailty of the body; and the leisure of old age affords many opportunities for gratifying that desire. The sphere of your observation and reflection is so much enlarged by long acquaintance with the world, as to supply, within itself, a wide range of improving thought. To recal the various revolutions which have occurred since you began to act your part in life; to compare the characters of past and present times; to trace the hand of Providence, in all the incidents of your own lot; to contemplate, with thoughtful eye, the successive new appearances which the world has assumed around you, in government, education, opinions, customs, and modes of living; these are employments, no less entertaining, than instructive to the mind.

While you are engaged in such employments, you are, perhaps, surrounded with your families, who treat you with attention and respect; you are honoured by your friends; your character is established; you are placed beyond the reach of clamour, and the *strife of tongues*; and, free from distracting cares, you can attend calmly to your eternal interests. For such comforts as these, have you not cause most thankfully to acknowledge the goodness of Heaven? Do they not afford you ground to pass the remainder of your days in resignation and peace; disposing yourselves to rise in due time, like satisfied guests, from the banquet that has been set before you; and to praise

* Job, xxii. 7

† Lev. xix. 32.

and bless, when you depart, the great Master of the feast? *To a man that is good in his sight*, whether he be young or old, *God giveth wisdom, and knowledge, and joy*. For every season of life, the benignity of his providence hath prepared its own satisfactions, while his wisdom hath appointed its peculiar trials. No age is doomed to total infelicity; provided that we attempt not to do violence to Nature, by seeking to extort from one age the pleasures of another; and to gather, in the Winter of life, those flowers which were destined to blossom only in its Summer, or its Spring.

BUT perhaps it will be said, That I have considered old age only in its first stages, and in its most favourable point of light; before the faculties are as yet much impaired, and when disease or affliction has laid no additional load on the burden of years. Let us then view it with all its aggravations of distress. Let us suppose it arrived at its utmost verge, worn out with infirmities, and bowed down by sickness and sorrow. Still there remains this consolation, that it is not long ere *the weary shall be at rest*. Having passed through so many of the toils of life, you may now surely, when your pilgrimage touches on its close, bear, without extreme impatience, the hardships of its concluding stage. From the inestimable promises of the Gospel, and from the gracious presence of God, the afflictions of old age cannot seclude you. Though *your heart should begin to faint, and your flesh to fail*, there is One, who can be *the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever*. *Even to your old age, saith the Lord, I am He; and even to hoary hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.* Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.†*

There is undoubtedly a period, when there ought to be a satiety of life, as there is of all other things; and when death shall be viewed, as your merciful dismissal from a long warfare. *To come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in its season,‡* is the natural termination of the human course.—Amidst multiplying infirmities, to prolong life beyond its usual bounds, and draw out your existence here to the last and foulest dregs, ought not to be the wish of any wise man. Is it desirable, to continue lingering on the borders of the grave, after every tie which connects you with life is broken; and to be left a solitary individual, in the midst of a new generation, whose faces you hardly know? The shades of your departed friends rise up before you, and warn you that it is time to depart. Nature and Providence summon you, to be *gathered to your fathers*. Reason admonishes you, that, as your predecessors made way

* Isa. xlv. 4.

† Jer. xlix. 11.

‡ Job, v. 26.

for you, it is just that you should yield your place to those who have arisen to succeed you on this busy stage; who, for a while, shall fill it with their actions and their sufferings, their virtues and their crimes; and then shall, in their turn, withdraw, and be joined to the forgotten multitudes of former ages.

Could death, indeed, be considered in no other view than as the close of life, it would afford only a melancholy retreat. The total extinction of being, is a thought, which human nature, in its most distressed circumstances, cannot bear without dejection. But, blessed be God! far other prospects revive the spirits of the aged, who have spent their life in piety and virtue. To them, death is not the extinction, but the renovation of the living principle; its removal from *the earthly house of his tabernacle, to the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Having fought the good fight; having finished their course, and kept the faith; there is laid up for them the crown of righteousness.* The Saviour of the world hath not only brought *immortality to light*, but placed it within the reach of their hope and trust. By making atonement for their guilt, he hath prepared their way *within the veil*; and secured to them the possession of *an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in the heavens.*—Such are the hopes and prospects which cheer the sorrows of old age, and surmount the fear of death. Faith and piety are the only adequate supports of human nature in all its great emergencies. After they have guided us through the various trials of life, they uphold us, at last, amidst the ruins of this falling frame; and when the *silver cord is just ready to be loosed, and the golden bowl to be broken; when the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern*; they enable us to say, *oh Death! where is thy sting? oh Grave, where is thy victory?*

SERMON XIII.

ON THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE.

And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us; and we would not hear: Therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? Therefore behold also his blood is required.—GENESIS, xlii. 21, 22.

THIS book of Genesis displays a more singular and interesting scene, than was ever presented to the world by any other historical record. It carries us back to the beginning of time, and exhibits mankind in their infant and rising state. It shows us human manners in their primitive simplicity, before the arts of refinement had polished the behaviour, or disguised the characters of men; when they gave vent to their passions without dissimulation, and spoke their sentiments without reserve. Few great societies were, as yet, formed on the earth. Men lived in scattered tribes. The transactions of families made the chief materials of history; and they are related in this book, with that beautiful simplicity, which, in the highest degree, both delights the imagination, and affects the heart.

Of all the Patriarchal histories, that of Joseph and his brethren is the most remarkable, for the characters of the actors, the instructive nature of the events, and the surprising revolutions of worldly fortune. As far as relates to the text, and is necessary for explaining it, the story is to the following purpose:—Joseph, the youngest, except one, of the sons of Jacob, was distinguished by his father with such marks of peculiar affection, as excited the envy of his brethren. Having related to them, in the openness of his heart, certain dreams which portended his future advancement above them, their jealousy rose to such a height, that they unnaturally conspired his destruction. Seizing the opportunity of his being at a distance from home, they first threw him into a pit, and afterwards sold him for a

slave; imposing on their father by a false relation of his death. When they had thus gratified their resentment, they lost all remembrance of their crime. The family of Jacob was rich and powerful; and several years passed away, during which they lived in prosperity; without being touched, as far as appears, with the least remorse for the cruel deed which they had committed.

Meanwhile, Joseph was safely conducted by the hand of Providence, through a variety of dangers, until, from the lowest condition, he rose at last to be chief favourite of the king of Egypt, the most powerful monarch at that time in the world.—While he possessed this high dignity, a general famine distressed all the neighbouring countries. In Egypt alone, by means of his foresight and prudent administration, plenty still reigned. Compelled to have recourse to that kingdom for supply of food, the brethren of Joseph, upon this occasion, appeared in his presence, and made their humble application to him, for liberty to purchase corn; little suspecting the governor of the land, before whom they *bowed down their faces to the earth*, to be him, whom long ago they had sold as a slave to the Ishmaelites. But Joseph no sooner saw, than he knew his brethren; and, at this unexpected meeting, his heart melted within him. Fraternal tenderness arose in all its warmth, and totally effaced from his generous breast the impression of their ancient cruelty. Though, from that moment, he began to prepare for them a surprise of joy; yet he so far constrained himself as to assume an appearance of great severity. By this he intended, both to oblige them to bring into Egypt his youngest and most beloved brother, whose presence he instantly required; and also, to awaken within them a due sense of the crime which they had formerly perpetrated. Accordingly, his behaviour produced the designed effect. For while they were in this situation, strangers in a foreign land, where they had fallen, as they conceived, into extreme distress; where they were thrown into prison by the Governor, and treated with rigour, for which they could assign no cause; the reflection mentioned in the text arose in their minds. Conscience brought to remembrance their former sins. It recalled, in particular, their long-forgotten cruelty to Joseph; and, without hesitation, they interpreted their present distress to be a judgment, for this crime, inflicted by Heaven. *They said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us; and we would not hear: Therefore is this distress come upon us.—Behold also his blood is required.*

From this instructive passage of history, the following observations naturally arise. I. That a sense of right and wrong in conduct, or of moral good and evil, belongs to human nature.

II. That it produces an apprehension of merited punishment, when we have committed evil. III. That although this inward sentiment be stifled during the season of prosperity, yet in adversity it will revive. And, IV. That, when it revives, it determines us to consider every distress which we suffer, from what cause soever it has arisen, as an actual infliction, of punishment by Heaven. The consideration of these particulars will lead us to a very serious view of the nature of man, and of the government of God.

I. THERE belongs to human nature a sense of moral good and evil, or a faculty which distinguishes right from wrong, in action and conduct. *They said one to another, We are verily guilty.*—In an age, when the law was not yet given, when no external revelation of the divine will subsisted, except what had been handed down among the patriarchs, from one generation to another; the brethren of Joseph reasoned concerning their conduct, upon the same moral principles, and were affected by the same feelings, of which we are conscious at this day. Such sentiments are coeval with human nature; for they are the remains of a law which was originally *written in our heart*. In the darkest regions of the earth, and among the rudest tribes of men, a distinction has ever been made between just and unjust, between a duty and a crime. Throughout all the intercourse of human beings these distinctions are supposed. They are the foundation of the mutual trust which the transactions of life require; nay, the very entertainments of society constantly appeal to them. The Historian, who studies to magnify his hero, by representing him as just and generous; the Poet, who seeks to interest the world in his fictions, by engaging the heart in behalf of distressed virtue; are sufficient to confute the Sceptic, who denies any natural perception of a distinction in actions.

But though a sense of moral good and evil be deeply impressed on the heart of man, yet it is not of sufficient power to regulate his life. In his present corrupted state, it is both too general to afford him full direction in conduct, and too feeble to withstand the opposition of contrary principles in his nature. It is often perverted by ignorance and superstition; it is too easily overcome by passion and desire. Hence, the importance of that divine revelation, which communicates both light and strength; which, by the instructive discoveries it makes, and by the powerful assistance it supplies, raises man to a station infinitely superior to that which he possesses under the mere light of Nature.

It is of consequence, however, to remark, That this revelation necessarily supposes an antecedent sense of right and wrong to take place in the human mind. It addresses itself to men, as possessed of such a faculty; and, when it commands them, in

general terms, to pursue *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely, or of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise*, it plainly appeals to the native dictates of their heart. Nay, unless men were endowed by nature with some sense of duty or of moral obligation, they could reap no benefit from revelation; they would remain incapable of all religion whatever. For, in vain were a system of duty prescribed to them by the word of God; allegiance were in vain required towards their Creator, or love and gratitude enjoined towards their Redeemer; if, previously, there was no principle in their nature, which made them feel the obligations of duty, of allegiance, and of gratitude. They could have no ideas corresponding to such terms; nor any conviction, that, independently of fear or interest, they were bound to regard, either him who made, or him who redeemed them.—This, therefore, is to be held as a principle fundamental to all religion. That there is in human nature, an approving or condemning sense of conduct; by means of which, *they who have not the law, are a law unto themselves*.^{*} They who, from a mistaken zeal for the honour of Divine revelation, either deny the existence, or vilify the authority of natural religion, are not aware, that by disallowing the sense of obligation, they undermine the foundation on which revelation builds its power of commanding the heart.

The text leads us to observe, That one of the cases in which the natural sense of good and evil operates most forcibly, is when men have been guilty of injustice or inhumanity. *We saw the anguish of our brother's soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear*. An inward principle prompts us to do good to others; but with much greater authority, it checks and condemns us, when we have done them injuries. This part of the human constitution deserves to be remarked as a signal proof of the wisdom of its Author, and of the gracious provision which he has made for the welfare of mankind. We are all committed, in some measure, to the care and assistance of one another. But our mutual influence reaches much farther with respect to the evils, than with respect to the enjoyments, of those around us. To advance their prosperity, is often beyond our ability; but to inflict injuries, is almost always within our power: And, at the same time, self-interest very frequently tempts us to commit them. With the utmost propriety, therefore, we are so framed, that the influence of the moral principle should be most authoritative, in cases where its aid is most needed; that to promote the happiness of others, should appear to us as praise-worthy, indeed, and generous; but that,

* Rom. ii. 14.

to abstain from injuring them, should be felt as matter of the strictest duty.—Amidst the distress which the Patriarchs suffered in Egypt, had only this suggestion occurred, “We saw our brother beginning to prosper, and we contributed not to his advancement,” their minds would have been more easily quieted. But, when their reflection was, *We saw his anguish, when he besought us, and we would not hear*, then compunction turned upon them its sharpest edge. I proceed to observe,

II. THAT our natural sense of right and wrong, produces an apprehension of merited punishment when we have committed a crime. When it is employed in surveying the behaviour of others, it distinguishes some actions, as laudable and excellent; and disapproves of others, as evil and base. But when it is directed upon our own conduct, it assumes a higher office, and exercises the authority of a judge. It is then properly termed Conscience; and the sentiments which it awakens, upon the perpetration of a crime, are styled, Remorse. *Therefore*, said the brethren of Joseph, *is this distress come upon us; behold also his blood is required*. They acknowledge, not only that they had committed a wrong, but a wrong for which they were justly doomed to suffer.

Did not conscience suggest this natural relation between guilt and punishment, the mere principle of approbation, or disapprobation, with respect to moral conduct, would prove of small efficacy. For disapprobation attends, in some degree, every conviction of impropriety, or folly. When one has acted unsuitably to his interest, or has trespassed against the rules of prudence or decorum, he reflects upon his conduct with pain, and acknowledges that he deserves blame. But the difference between the sense of misconduct, and the sense of guilt, consists in this, that the latter penetrates much deeper into the heart.—It makes the criminal feel, that he is not only blameable, but justly punishable, for the part which he has acted. With reference to this office of conscience, the inspired writers frequently speak of it, in terms borrowed from the awful solemnities of judicial procedure; as, *bearing witness for or against us; accusing or excusing, judging and condemning*. It will be found, that, in the language of most nations, terms of the same import are applied to the operations of conscience; expressing the sense which all mankind have, of its passing sentence upon them, and pronouncing rewards or punishments to be due to their actions.

The sense of punishment merited, you are further to observe, can never be separated from the dread, that, at some time or other, punishment shall be actually inflicted. This dread is not confined to the vengeance of man. For let the sinner's evil deeds be ever so thoroughly concealed from the knowledge of the

world, his inward alarms are not quieted by that consideration. Now, punishment is the sanction of a law. Every law supposes a rightful superior: And, therefore, when conscience threatens punishment to secret crimes, it manifestly recognizes a supreme Governor, from whom nothing is hidden. The belief of our being accountable to him, is what the most hardened wickedness has never been able to eradicate. It is a belief which arises, not merely from reasoning, but from internal sentiment. Conscience is felt to act as the delegates of an invisible ruler; both anticipating his sentence, and foreboding its execution.

Hence arise the terrors, which so often haunt guilt, and rise in proportion to its atrocity. In the history of all nations, the tyrant and the oppressor, the bloody and the flagitious, have been ever pointed out as fearful, unquiet, and restless; subject to alarms and apprehensions of an unaccountable kind. And surely, to live under such disquietude, from the dread of merited punishment, is already to undergo one of the most severe punishments which human nature can suffer. When the world threatens us with any of its evils, we know the extent, and discern the limits of the danger. We see the quarter on which we are exposed to its attack. We measure our own strength with that of our adversary; and can take precautions, either for making resistance or for contriving escape. But when an awakened conscience places before the sinner the just vengeance of the Almighty, the prospect is confounding, because the danger is boundless. It is a dark unknown which threatens him. The arm that is stretched over him, he can neither see nor resist— On every side he dreads it, and on every object which surrounds him, he looks with terror, because he is conscious that every object can be employed against him as an instrument of wrath.— No wonder that the lonesome solitude, or the midnight hour, should strike him with horror. His troubled mind beholds forms, which other men see not; and hears voices, which sound only in the ear of guilt. A hand appears to come forth and to write upon the wall over against him, as it did of old, in the sight of an impious monarch, *He shall find no ease nor rest. For the Lord shall give him a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And his life shall hang in doubt before him; and he shall fear day and night, and have none assurance of his life. In the morning he shall say, Would to God it were even: and at even he shall say, Would to God it were morning, for the fear of his heart wherewith he shall fear, and for the sight which his eyes shall see. His life shall be grievous unto him.** Adversity! how blunt are all the arrows of thy quiver, in compa-

* Deut. xxviii. 65, 66, 67. Isa. xv. 4.

rison with those of guilt!—But if such be the power of conscience, whence, it may be asked, comes it to pass, that its influence is not more general, either in restraining men from the commission of sin, or in leading them to a timely repentance? This brings me to observe,

III. THAT, during a course of prosperity, the operations of conscience are often suspended: and that adversity is the season which restores them to their proper force. At the time when crimes are committed, the mind is too much heated by passion, and engrossed by the object of its pursuit, to be capable of proper reflection. After this tumult of spirits had subsided, if a train of new passions be at hand to employ its activity, or a succession of pleasurable objects occur to engage its attention, it may for a while remain, though not entirely free from inward misgivings, yet unconscious of the degree of its guilt. Dissipated among the amusements of life, the sinner escapes, in some measure, from his own view. If he reflects upon himself at all, the continuance of prosperity seems to him a strong justification of his conduct. For it will be found that, in the hearts of all men, there is a natural propensity to judge of the favour of the Supreme Being, from the course of external events. When they are borne with a smooth gale along the stream of life, and behold every thing proceeding according to their wish, hardly can they be brought to believe, that Providence is their enemy. Basking in the sunshine of prosperity, they suppose themselves to enjoy the smile of indulgent Heaven; and fondly conclude, that they are on terms of friendship, with all above, and with all below. Easy they find it, then, to spread over the grossest crimes a covering, thin, indeed, and slight, yet sufficient to conceal them from a superficial view.

Of this we have a very remarkable instance, in those brethren of Joseph, whose history we now consider. Not only from the silence of the inspired writer, we have ground to believe that their remorse was stifled, while their prosperity remained; but we are able to trace some of the pretences, by which, during that period, they quieted their minds. For when they were contriving the destruction of Joseph, we find Judah saying to his brethren, *What profit is it, if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites; and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, and our flesh: and his brethren were content.** Here you behold them justifying their crime, by a sort of pretended humanity; and making light of selling their brother for a slave, because they did not take away his life. How strangely are the opinions of men altered, by a change

* Gen. xxxvii. 26, 27.

in their condition ! How different is this sentiment of the Patriarchs, from that which they afterwards entertained of the same action, when, as you see in the text, the remembrance of it wrung their hearts with anguish.

But men, in truth, differ as much from themselves, in prosperity and in adversity, as if they were different creatures. In prosperity every thing tends to flatter and deceive. In adversity, the illusions of life vanish. Its avocations, and its pleasures, no longer afford the sinner that shelter he was wont to find from conscience. Formerly he made a part of the crowd. He now feels himself a solitary individual, left alone with God, and with his own mind. His spirits are not supported, as before, by fallacious views of the favour of Heaven. *The candle of the Lord* shines not on his head ; his pride is humbled ; and his affections are softened for receiving every serious impression. In this situation, a man's *iniquity is sure to find him out*. Whatever has been notoriously criminal in his former conduct, rises as a spectre, and places itself before him. The increased sensibility of his mind renders him alive to feelings which lately were faint ; and wounds which had been ill healed bleed afresh. *When men take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ, they say, What is the Almighty that we should serve him? But when they are holden in the cords of affliction, then he showeth them their work, and their transgression, that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ears to discipline ; and commandeth that they return from iniquity.*

Hence, we may perceive the great usefulness and propriety of that interchange of conditions, which takes place in human life. By prosperity, God gives scope to our passions, and makes trial of our dispositions. By adversity, he revives the serious principle within. Neither the one, nor the other, could be borne entire and unmixed. Man, always prosperous, would be giddy and insolent ; always afflicted, would be sullen and despondent. Hopes and fears, joy and sorrow, are, therefore, so blended in his life, as both to give room for worldly pursuits, and to recall, from time to time, the admonitions of conscience. Of the proportion in which they should be mixed for this purpose, we are very incompetent judges. From our ignorance of the degree of discipline which the spiritual state of others requires, we often censure Providence unjustly, for its severity towards them : And, from the vanity and rashness of our wishes, we complain, without reason, of its rigour to ourselves. While we consult nothing but our ease, God attends to our spiritual improvement. When we seek what is pleasing, he sends what is useful. When, by drinking too deep of worldly prosperity, we draw in a secret poison, he mercifully infuses a medicine, at the time

that he troubles and embitters the waters. It remains now to observe,

IV. THAT when conscience is thoroughly awakened, it determines the sinner to consider every calamity which he suffers as a positive infliction of punishment by Heaven. As it had before alarmed him with threatenings of Divine displeasure, it tells him when he falls under distress, that the threatened day of account is come. Afflictions, on some occasions, rise directly out of our sins. Thus diseases are brought on by intemperance; poverty springs from idleness; and disgrace from presumption. In such cases, the punishment is so closely connected with the crime, that it is impossible to avoid discerning the relation which the one bears to the other. But the appointment of Providence, which we now consider, reaches farther than this. God has framed us so, that distresses, which have no perceivable connection with our former crimes, are nevertheless interpreted by conscience, to be inflicted on their account. They force themselves upon our apprehension under this view. They are made to carry, not only that degree of pain which properly belongs to themselves, but that additional torment also, which arises from the belief of their being the vengeance of the Almighty.

Let a man fall unexpectedly into some deep calamity. Let that calamity be brought upon him, either by means which the world calls fortuitous; or by a train of incidents, in which his own misconduct or guilt has apparently had no part; yet one of the first questions, which, in such a situation, he puts to himself, is, What have I done to deserve this? His reflection is, almost instinctively, drawn back upon his former life; and if, in the course of that retrospect, any flagrant guilty deed occur to smite his conscience, on this he cannot avoid resting with anxiety and terror, and connecting it in his imagination with what he now suffers. He sees, or thinks that he sees, a Divine arm lifted up; and what, in other circumstances, he would have called a reverse of fortune, he now views as a judgment of Heaven.

When the brethren of Joseph, confined in the Egyptian prison, were bewailing the distress into which they had fallen, there was no circumstance which pointed out any relation between their present misfortune, and their former cruelty to their brother.—A long course of years had intervened, during which they flourished in wealth and ease. They were now far from the scene of their crime; in a foreign land where they believed themselves utterly unknown, and where they had done nothing to offend.—But conscience formed a connection between events, which, according to the ordinary apprehension of men, were entirely independent of each other. It made them recollect, that they, who once had been deaf to the supplications of a brother, were now

left friendless and forlorn, imploring pity in vain from an unrelenting governor ; and that they who had first conspired to kill their brother, and afterwards sold him for a slave, were themselves deprived of liberty, and threatened with an ignominious death. How undeservedly soever these evils befell them on the part of men, they confessed them to be just on the part of Providence. They concluded the hour of retribution to be arrived ; and in the person of the governor of Egypt, they beheld the Ruler of the world calling them to account for guilt. *Therefore is this distress come upon us. Behold also his blood is required.*

Similar sentiments on like occasions will be found not uncommon among mankind. Pious men, there is no doubt, are at all times disposed to look up to God, and to acknowledge his hand in every event of life. But what I now observe is, That where no habitual acknowledgment of God takes place ; nay, where a daring contempt of his authority has prevailed, conscience, nevertheless, constrains men, in the day of their distress, to recognize God, under the most awful of all characters, The avenger of past guilt.

Herein the wisdom of God appears in such a light, as justly to claim our highest admiration. The ordinary course of his Providence is carried on by human means. He has settled a train of events, which proceed in a regular succession of causes and effects, without his appearing to interpose, or to act. But these, on proper occasions, are made to affect the human mind in the same manner as if he were beheld descending from his throne, to punish the sinner with his own hand. Were God to suspend the laws of Nature, on occasion of every great crime that was committed on earth, and to govern the world by frequent interpositions of a miraculous kind, the whole order of human affairs would be unhinged ; no plans of action could be formed ; and no scope would be given for the probation and trial of men. On the other hand, were the operation of second causes allowed to conceal a Divine hand totally from view, all sense of superior government would be lost ; the world would seem to be void of God ; the sinner would perceive nothing but chance and fortune in the distresses which he suffered. Whereas, by its being so ordered, that several incidents of life shall carry the same force, and strike the mind with the same impression, as if they were supernatural interpositions, the fear of God is kept alive among men, and the order of human affairs is, at the same time, preserved unbroken. The sinner sees his distress to be the immediate effect of human violence or oppression ; and is obliged, at the same moment, to consider it as a Divine judgment. His conscience gives to an ordinary misfortune all the edge and the sting of a visitation from Heaven.

FROM the train of thought which the text has suggested, several inferences naturally follow. But I shall confine myself to two, which claim your particular attention.

The first is, the clear evidence which the preceding observations afford, of a Divine government now exercised over mankind. This most important and awful of all truths, cannot be too often presented to our view, or too strongly impressed on our mind. To the imperfect conviction of it, which obtains in the world, must be ascribed, in a great measure, the prevalence of sin. Did men firmly believe that the Almighty Being, who formed them, is carrying on a system of administration which will not leave guilt unpunished, it is impossible that they could remain so inattentive, as we often behold them, to their moral conduct. But the bulk of mankind are giddy and thoughtless. Struck by the superficial appearances of pleasure, which accompany licentiousness, they enquire no farther; and deliver themselves up to their senses, and their passions. Whereas, were they to reflect, but for a moment, upon that view which has now been given of human nature, they might soon be satisfied, that the moral government of God is no matter of doubtful discussion. It is a fact, no less obvious and incontestible, than the government exercised by those earthly rulers whom we behold with the ensigns of their office before our eyes.

To govern; is to require a certain course of action, or to prescribe a law; and to enforce that law, by a suitable distribution of rewards and punishments. Now, God has not only invested conscience, as we have seen, with authority to promulgate, but endowed it also with power to enforce, his law. By placing inward approbation and peace on the side of virtue, he gave it the sanction of reward. But this was not enough. Pain is a more powerful principle than pleasure. To escape misery, is a stronger motive for action, than to obtain good. God, therefore, so framed human nature, that the painful sense of ill-desert should attend the commission of crimes; that this sense of ill-desert should necessarily produce the dread of punishment; and that this dread should so operate on the mind, in the time of distress, as to make the sinner conceive Providence to be engaged against him, and to be concerned in inflicting the punishment which he suffers. All these impressions he hath stamped upon the heart with his own hand. He hath made them constituent parts of our frame; on purpose that, by the union of so many strong and pungent sentiments, he might enforce repentance and reformation, and publish to the human race his detestation of sin. Were he to speak to us from the clouds, his voice could not be more decisive. What we discern to be interwoven with the contexture of human nature, and to pervade the whole course of human af-

fairs, carries an evidence not to be resisted. We might, with as much reason, doubt whether the sun was intended to enlighten the earth, or the rain to fertilize it; as whether he who has framed the human mind, intended to announce righteousness to mankind, as his law.

THE second inference which I make from the foregoing discourse, respects the intimate connection, which those operations of conscience have, with the peculiar and distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel of Christ. They will be found to accord with them so remarkably, as to furnish an answer to some of those objections, which superficial reasoners are apt to raise against the Christian revelation. In particular, they coincide with that awful view which the gospel gives us, of the future consequences of guilt. If the sinner is now constrained by conscience, to view the Almighty as pursuing him with evil for long-forgotten crimes, how naturally must he conclude, that, in a subsequent period of existence, the Divine administration will proceed upon the same plan, and complete what has been left imperfect here? If, during this life, which is only the time of trial, the displeasure of Providence at sin is displayed by tokens so manifest, what may be apprehended to follow, when justice, which at present only begins to be executed, shall be carried to its consummation? What conscience forebodes revelation verifies; assuring us that a day is appointed when *God will render to every man according to his works; to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without the law, shall also perish without the law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.**

While the threatenings of conscience thus strengthen the evidence of the scripture doctrine concerning future punishments, they likewise pave the way for the belief of what is revealed concerning the method of our deliverance by Christ. They suggest to the sinner, some deep and dark malignity contained in guilt, which has drawn upon his head such high displeasure from Heaven. They call forth his most anxious efforts, to avert the effects of that displeasure; and to propitiate his offended Judge. Some atonement, he is conscious, must be made; and the voice of nature has, in every age, loudly demanded suffering, as the proper atonement for guilt. Hence, mankind have constantly

* Rom. ii. 7—13.

fled for refuge to such substitutions as they could devise, to place in the room of the offender; and as by general consent, victims have every where been slain, and expiatory sacrifices have been offered up on innumerable altars. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, and calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Or, shall I give my first-born for my transgression; the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul?** These perplexities and agitations of a guilty conscience, may be termed preludes, in some measure, to the Gospel of Christ. They are the pointings of unenlightened nature, towards that method of relief, which the grace of God has provided. Nature felt its inability to extricate itself from the consequences of guilt: The Gospel reveals the plan of Divine interposition and aid. Nature confessed some atonement to be necessary: The Gospel discovers, that the necessary atonement is made. The remedy is no sooner presented, than its suitableness to the disease appears; and the great mystery of redemption, though it reaches, in its full extent, beyond our comprehension, yet, as far as it is revealed, holds a visible congruity with the sentiments of Conscience, and of Nature.

Natural and revealed religion proceed from the same Author; and of course, are analogous and consistent. They are part of the same plan of Providence. They are connected measures of the same system of government. The serious belief of the one, is the best preparation for the reception of the other. Both concur in impressing our mind with a deep sense of one most important truth, which is the result of this whole discourse, That as we *sow now we must reap*; that under the government of God, no one shall be permitted, with impunity, to gratify his criminal passions, and to make light of the great duties of life.

* Micah, vi, 6, 7.

SERMON XIV.

ON THE MIXTURE OF JOY AND FEAR IN RELIGION.

Rejoice with trembling.—PSALM ii. 11.

JOY and Fear are two great springs of human action. The mixed condition of this world gives scope for both; and, according as the one or the other predominates, it influences the general tenor of our conduct. Each of them possesses a proper place in religion. To *serve the Lord with gladness* is the exhortation of the psalmist David.* To *serve him with reverence and godly fear*, is the admonition of the apostle Paul.† But under the present imperfection of human nature, each of these principles may be carried to a dangerous extreme. When the whole of religion is placed in joy, it is in hazard of rising into unwarrantable rapture. When it rests altogether on fear, it degenerates into superstitious servility. The text enjoins a due mixture of both; and inculcates this important maxim, That joy tempered with fear, is the proper disposition of a good man. In discoursing of this subject, I shall endeavour to show, first, that joy is essential to religion; and next, That, for various reasons, this joy ought to be mixed with fear; whence we shall be able to ascertain the nature of that steady and composed spirit, which is most suitable to our present condition, and most acceptable to God.

I. Joy is essential to religion, in two respects; as religion inspires joy, and as it requires it. In other words: To rejoice is both the privilege, and the duty, of good men.

In the first place, Religion inspires joy. It affords just ground of gladness to all who firmly believe its doctrines, and sincerely study to obey its laws. For it confers on them the two most material requisites of joy; a favourable situation of things without, and a proper disposition of mind within, to relish that favourable situation.

* Psalm c. 2.

† Heb. xii. 28.

When they examine their situation without, they behold themselves placed in a world which is full of the influence of a gracious Providence; where beauty and good are every where predominant; where various comforts are bestowed; and where, if any be withheld, they have reason to believe that they are withheld by parental wisdom. Among the crowd that encompass them, they may be at a loss to discern who are their friends, and who their enemies. But it is sufficient to know, that they are under the protection of an invisible Guardian, whose power can keep them from every evil. All the steps of his conduct, they may be unable to trace. Events may befall them, of which they can give no account. But as long as they are satisfied that the system of Divine government is founded on merey, no present occurrences are able to destroy their peace. *For he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for them, how shall he not with him freely give them all things?* If their nature is frail, Divine assistance is promised to strengthen it. If their virtue is imperfect, a dispensation is opened, which gives them the hope of pardon. If their external circumstances be in any respect unfavourable, it is because a higher interest is consulted. *All things, they are assured, shall work together for their good.* On their prosperity rests the blessing; on their adversity, the sanctifying Spirit of the Almighty. Old age may advance, and life decay; but beyond those boundaries of nature, faith opens the prospect of their lasting felicity. Without anxiety they pass through the different periods of their present existence, because they know it to be no more than an introduction to immortality.

As such a situation of things without, lays a solid foundation for joy; so the disposition which religion forms within, promotes the relish of it. It is indeed from within, that the chief sources of enjoyment or trouble rise. The minds of bad men are always disorderly; and hence their lives are so generally uneasy. In vain *they take the timbrel and the harp, and endeavour to rejoice at the sound of the organ.* Spleen and disgust pursue them through all the haunts of amusement. Pride and ill-humour torment them. Oppressed with discontent, their spirits flag; and their worn-out pleasures afford them entertainment no more.—But religion subdues those malignant passions, which are the troubles of human repose; which either overcast the mind with the gloom of peevishness, or disquiet it by the violence of agitation. It infuses, in their room, those mild and gentle dispositions, whose natural effect is to smooth the tenor of the soul.—Benevolence and candour, moderation and temperance, wherever they reign, produce cheerfulness and serenity. The consciousness of integrity gives ease and freedom to the mind. It enables good men to extract from every object, the whole satisfac-

tion which it is capable of yielding; and adds the flavour of innocence, to all their external pleasures.

In the second place, As religion naturally inspires joy; so what it inspires it commands us to cherish. As a necessary proof of our sincerity, it requires cheerfulness in the performance of our duty; because, if this be wanting, our religion discovers itself not to be genuine in principle, and in practice it cannot be stable.

Religious obedience, destitute of joy, is not genuine in its principle. For, did either faith or hope, the love of God or the love of goodness, rule the heart, they could not fail to produce satisfaction in piety and virtue. All those causes of joy which I have mentioned would then operate; and their native effect on the mind, would follow. The prospects which religion opens, would gladden, and the affections which it inspires, would soothe the heart. We serve, with pleasure, the benefactor whom we love. We rejoice in every study and pursuit to which we are sincerely attached. If we serve not God with pleasure, it is because we know him not, or love him not. If we rejoice not in virtue, it is because our affection is alienated from it, and our inclinations are depraved. We give too evident proof, that either we believe not the principles of religion, or that we feel not their power. Exclude joy from religion, and you leave no other motives to it, except compulsion and interest. But are these suitable grounds on which to rest the whole of our obedience to the Supreme Being? *My son, give me thy heart*, is the call of God. Surely if there be no pleasure in fulfilling his commands, the heart is not given him; and, in that case, *the multitude of sacrifices and burnt offerings* is brought to his altar in vain.

As religion, destitute of joy, is imperfect in its principle; so, in practice it must be unstable. In vain you endeavour to fix any man to the regular performance of that in which he finds no pleasure. Bind him ever so fast by interest or fear, he will contrive some method of eluding the obligation. Ingenuity is never so fertile of evasions as where pleasure is all on the one side, and mere precept on the other. He may study to save appearances. He may dissemble and constrain himself. But his heart revolts in secret; and the weight of inclination will, in the end, draw the practice after it. If perseverance is not to be expected, still less can zeal be looked for from him, who in his religious duties, trembles without rejoicing. Every attempt towards virtue which he forms, will be feeble and awkward. He applies to it as a task; he dreads the task-master; but he will labour no more than necessity enjoins. To escape from punishment is his sole aim. He bargains for immunity, by every duty

which he performs; and all beyond, he esteems superfluous toil. Such religion as this, can neither purify the heart, nor prepare for heavenly bliss. It is the refuge of an abject mind. It may form the ritual of the monk, or prescribe the penance of the idolater; but has no concern with the homage of him, who *worships the Father in spirit and in truth*. His character is, that the *joy of the Lord is his strength*.^{*} It attaches his heart to religion. It inspires his zeal. It supports his constancy; and accelerates his progress.

There is no man but has some object to which he cleaves for enjoyment; somewhat that flatters him with distant hope, or affords him present pleasure. Joy is the end towards which all rational beings tend. For the sake of it they live: It resembles the air they breathe, which is necessary for the motion of the heart, and all the vital functions. But as the breathing of infected air proves fatal to life; in the same manner joy, drawn from a corrupted source, is destructive both of virtue and of true happiness. When you have no pleasure in goodness, you may with certainty conclude the reason to be, that your pleasure is all derived from an opposite quarter. You have exhausted your affection upon the world. You have drunk too much of its poisoned waters to have any relish for a pure spring.

Estimate, therefore, the genuineness of your religious principles; estimate the degree of your stability in religious practice, by the degree of your satisfaction in piety and virtue. Be assured, that where your treasure is, there will your delight be also. The worldly man rejoices in his possessions; the voluptuous in his pleasures; the social in his friends and companions. The truly good man rejoices in *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Lord his God*. He is happy, when employed in the regular discharge of the great duties of life. Spontaneous they flow from the affections of a pure heart. Not only from the keeping of the divine commandments he expects, but *in the keeping of them*, he enjoys a great reward. Accordingly, in the sentiments of holy men recorded in scripture, we find this spirit every where prevalent. Their language was; *Thy statutes have I taken as mine heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart. They are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. They are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. They did not receive the spirit of bondage, but the spirit of adoption. They were filled with peace and joy in believing. They rejoice in hope of the glory of God*. As soon as the Æthiopian eunuch received from Philip the light of the Gospel, that light revived and cheered his heart. A new sun

* N-h. viii 10.

seemed to arise; a new glory to shine around him. Every object brightened; *and he went on his way rejoicing.*^a After the same manner should every good man proceed in his journey through life, with a serene and cheerful spirit. Consternation and dejection let him leave to the slaves of guilt; who have every thing to dread, both from this world and the next. If he appear before others with a dispirited aspect, he dishonours religion; and affords ground for suspicion, that he is either ignorant of its nature, or a stranger to its power.

Thus I have shown joy to be essential to religion. It is the spirit which it inspires, and which it requires in good men. But in our present state, the best principles may be carried to a dangerous excess; and joy, like other things, has its due limits. To serve God with unmixed delight, belongs to more advanced spirits in a happier world. In this region of imperfection, some infusions from a different cup must of necessity tincture our joy. Let us then,

II. TURN to the other side of the argument, and consider the reasons which render it proper, that when we rejoice, we should *rejoice with trembling.*

In the first place, Because all the objects of religion, which afford ground for joy, tend to inspire, at the same time, reverence and fear. We serve a Benefactor, it is true, in whom we have reason to delight; whose purposes are gracious; whose law is the plan of our happiness. But this Benefactor, is the *King eternal, immortal, and invisible*; at whose presence the mountains shake, and Nature trembles. *Every good, and every perfect gift, come down from him.* But the hand which confers them, we cannot see. Mysterious obscurity rests upon his essence. He dwelleth *in the secret place of thunder*; and clouds and darkness surround him. He is the *Hearer of prayer*; but we lift our voice to him from afar. Into his immediate presence no access is permitted. Our warmest devotion admits no familiarity with him. *God is in Heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore, let thy words be few.* If his omniscience administers comfort in our secret distress, it likewise fills with awe the heart that is conscious of guilt. For, if he *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust; our iniquities, also, are ever before him; our secret sins in the light of his countenance.*

Throughout all his dispensations, greatness, in conjunction with goodness, strikes our view; and wherever we behold the Parent, we behold the Legislator also. The death of Christ, in behalf of a guilty world, is the chief ground of religious hope and joy. But it is no less the ground of reverence; when, in this high transaction, we contemplate God, as at once strict in

^a Acts, viii. 39.

justice, and great in mercy. *I the Lord keep mercy for thousands of them that fear me. I forgive their iniquity, transgression, and sin; but I will by no means clear the guilty.* When we open the book of the law, we find promises and threatenings mingled in the same page. On the one side, we see Heaven displayed in all its glory: On the other, Hell opening its terrors. In short, in whatever light we view religion, it appears solemn and venerable. It is a temple full of majesty, to which the worshippers may approach with comfort, in the hope of *obtaining grace, and finding mercy*; but where they cannot enter without being impressed with awe. If we may be permitted to compare spiritual with natural things, religion resembles not those scenes of natural beauty where every object smiles. It cannot be likened to the gay landscape, or the flowery field. It resembles more the august and sublime appearances of Nature; the lofty mountain, the expanded ocean, and the starry firmament; at the sight of which the mind is at once overawed and delighted; and, from the union of grandeur with beauty, derives a pleasing, but a serious emotion.

In the second place, As joy, tempered by fear, suits the nature of religion, so it is requisite for the proper regulation of the conduct of man. Let his joy flow from the best and purest source; yet, if it remain long unmixed, it is apt to become dangerous to virtue. As waters which are never stirred nor troubled, gather a sediment, which putrifies them; so the undisturbed continuance of placid sensations engenders disorders in the human soul. It is wisely ordered in our present state, that joy and fear, hope and grief, should act alternately as checks and balances upon each other, in order to prevent an excess in any of them, which our nature could not bear. If we were subject to no alarms of danger, the wisest would soon become improvident; and the most humble, presumptuous. Man is a pilgrim on earth. Were his path to be always smooth and flowery, he would be tempted to relinquish his guide, and to forget the purpose of his journey. Caution and fear are the shields of happiness. Unguarded joy begets indolence; indolence produces security; security leads to rashness; and rashness ends in ruin. In order to rejoice long, it is necessary that we *rejoice with trembling*. Had our first parents observed this rule, man might have been still in paradise. He who saith in his heart, *My mountains stand strong; I shall never be moved*; may be assured, that his state already begins to totter. Religion, therefore, performs a kind office, in giving us the admonition of the text. It inspires cheerfulness in the service of God. It proposes joy as our chief spring of action. But it supports joy, by guarding it with fear; not suppressing, but regulating its indulgence; requiring us to rejoice, like persons who have obtained

a treasure, which, through want of vigilance, they are exposed to lose. Dependent beings are formed for submission; and to submit, is to stand in awe. *Because the Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad.* We are the subjects of God; and therefore may justly rejoice. But still we are subjects; and therefore, trembling must mix itself with our joy.

IN the third place, The unstable condition of all human things naturally inspires fear in the midst of joy. The spirit to which religion forms us, must undoubtedly correspond to the state in which we are placed, and to the part which is assigned us to act. Now the first view under which our present state appears, is that of fallen creatures, who are undergoing, in this world, probation and trial for their recovery; and are commanded to *work out their salvation with fear and trembling.* This view of our condition infers not habitual dejection of mind. It requires not melancholy abstraction from the affairs, or total contempt of the amusements, of life. But it inspires humility. It enforces dependence on divine aid; and calls forth the voice of supplication to Heaven. In a situation so critical, and where interests so important are at stake, every reasonable person must confess, that seriousness ought to temper rejoicing.

Were there in human life any fixed point of stability and rest, attainable by man; could we, at any one moment, assure ourselves that there remained no latent source of danger either to our temporal or our spiritual state; then I admit we might lay trembling aside, and rejoice in full security. But, alas! no such safe station, no such moment of confidence, is allowed to man during his warfare on earth. Vicissitudes of good and evil, of trials and consolations, fill up his life. The best intentioned are sometimes betrayed into crimes; the most prudent overwhelmed with misfortunes. The world is like a wheel incessantly revolving, on which human things alternately rise and fall. What is past of our life has been a chequered scene. On its remaining periods, uncertainty and darkness rest. Futurity is an unknown region, into which no man can look forward without awe, because he cannot tell what forms of danger or trial may meet him there. This we know well, that in every period of our life, the path of happiness shall be found steep and arduous; but swift and easy the descent to ruin. What, with much exertion of care and vigilance, we had built up, one unwary action may, in an evil hour, overthrow. The props of human confidence are, in general, insecure. The sphere of human pleasures is narrow. While we form schemes for strengthening the one, and for enlarging the other, death, meanwhile, advances. Life, with a swift, though insensible course, glides away; and, like a river which undermines its banks, gradually impairs our state. Year after year steals something from us; till the decaying fabric totter

of itself, and crumble at length into dust. So that, whether we consider life or death, time or eternity, all things appear to concur in giving to man the admonition of the text, *rejoice with trembling.*

I HAVE NOW shown, in what respects religion both promotes joy, and inspires seriousness. It places us in the most favourable situation, which human life affords, for joy; and it gives us every assistance, for relishing that joy. It renders it our duty to cultivate the satisfaction which it yields. It demands a cheerful spirit, in order to ascertain the sincerity of our principles, and to confirm us in good practice. At the same time the joy which it inspires, is tempered with fear by the genius of religion itself; by the danger to which unguarded joy would expose us; and by the impropriety of indulging it, in a situation so mixed as the present. The *trembling* which is here enjoined, is not to be understood as signifying a pusillanimous dejection. It imports no more than that caution and sobriety, which prudence dictates, as belonging to our state. By connecting such trembling with our joy, religion means to recommend to us a cheerful, but a composed spirit, equally remote from the humiliating depression of fear, and the exulting levity of joy. Always to rejoice, is to be a fool. Always to tremble, is to be a slave. It is a modest cheerfulness, a chastened joy, a manly seriousness, which becomes the servant of God.

But is this, it may perhaps be said, the whole amount of that boasted satisfaction which religion bestows? Is this all the compensation which it makes, for those sacrifices it exacts? Are not the terms which vice holds out far more enticing, when it permits us to gratify every desire; and, in return for our surmounting the timorous scruples of conscience, promises us a life of gaiety, festivity, and unrestrained joy?—Such promises vice may indeed make; but how far it fulfils them, we may safely refer to the determination of the greatest sensualist, when he has finished his career, and looks back on what he has enjoyed. Ask him, whether he would recommend to his children and his friends, to hold the same course; and whether, with his dying breath, he dare assure them, that the gratifications of licentiousness afford the greatest enjoyment of life? Whatever hopes vice may at the beginning inspire, yet, after the trial is made, it has been always found that criminal pleasures are the bane of happiness, the poison, not the cordial, of our present state. They are pleasures compensated by an infinite overbalance of pain; moments of delight, succeeded by years of regret; purchased at the expense of injured reputation, broken health, and ruined peace. Even abstracting from their pernicious consequences, they are, for most part, in themselves treacherous pleasures; unsound and disturbed in the moments of enjoyment. *In the midst of such*

laughter, the heart is sorrowful. Often is the smile of gaiety assumed while the heart aches within : And though folly may laugh, guilt will sting. Correcting this pernicious phrenzy of pleasure, and reducing it to a more sober and regulated state, religion is, in truth, no other than wisdom, introducing peace and order into the life of man.

While religion condemns such pleasures as are immoral, it is chargeable with no improper austerity in respect to those which are of an innocent kind. Think not, that by the cautious discipline which it describes, it excludes you from all gay enjoyment of life, within the compass of that sedate spirit, to which it forms you, all that is innocently pleasing will be found to lie. It is a mistake to imagine, that in constant effusions of giddy mirth or in that flutter of spirits which is excited by a round of diversions, the chief enjoyment of our state consists. Were this the case, the vain and the frivolous would be on better terms for happiness, than the wise, the great, and the good. To arrange the plans of amusement, or to preside in the haunts of jollity, would be more desirable, than to exert the highest effort of mental powers for the benefit of nations. A consequence so absurd, is sufficient to explode the principle from which it flows. To the amusements and lesser joys of the world, religion assigns their proper place. It admits of them, as relaxations from care, as instruments of promoting the union of men, and of enlivening their social intercourse.—But though as long as they are kept within due bounds, it does not censure nor condemn them ; neither does it propose them as rewards to the virtuous, or as the principal objects of their pursuit. To such it points out nobler ends of action. Their felicity engages them to seek in the discharge of an useful, an upright, and honourable part in life ; and, as the habitual tenor of their mind, it promotes cheerfulness, and discourages levity.

Between these two there is a wide distinction ; and the mind which is most open to levity, is frequently a stranger to cheerfulness. It has been remarked, that transports of intemperate mirth, are often no more than flashes from the dark cloud ; and that in proportion to the violence of the effulgence is the succeeding gloom. Levity may be the forced production of folly or vice ; cheerfulness is the natural offspring of wisdom and virtue only. The one is an occasional agitation ; the other a permanent habit. The one degrades the character ; the other is perfectly consistent with the dignity of reason, and the steady and manly spirit of religion. To aim at a constant succession of high and vivid sensations of pleasure, is an idea of happiness altogether chimerical. Calm and temperate enjoyment is the utmost that is allotted to man. Beyond this, we struggle in vain

to raise our state ; and, in fact, depress our joys by endeavouring to heighten them. Instead of those fallacious hopes of perpetual festivity, with which the world would allure us, religion confers upon us a cheerful tranquillity. Instead of dazzling us with meteors of joy which sparkle and expire, it sheds around us a calm and steady light. By mixing *trembling* with our joy, it renders that joy more solid, more equal, and more lasting.

In this spirit, then, let us serve God, and hold our course through life. Let us approach to the Divine Being, as to a sovereign of whom we stand in awe, and to a father in whom we trust. In our conduct, let us be cautious and humble, as those who have ground to fear ; well pleased and cheerful, as those who have cause to rejoice. Let us show the world that a religious temper, is a temper sedate, not sad ; that a religious behaviour, is a behaviour regulated, not stiff and formal. Thus we shall *use the world as not abusing it* ; we shall pass through its various changes, with the least discomposure ; and we shall vindicate religion from the reproaches of those who would attribute to it either enthusiastic joys, or slavish terrors. We shall show, that it is a rational rule of life, worthy of the perfection of God, and suited to the nature and state of man.

SERMON XV.

ON THE MOTIVES TO CONSTANCY IN VIRTUE.

And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.—GALAT. vi. 9.

DISCONTENT is the most general of all the evils which trouble the life of man. It is a disease which every where finds materials to feed itself; for, if real distresses be wanting, it substitutes such as are imaginary in their place. It converts even the good things of the world, when they have been long enjoyed, into occasions of disgust. In the midst of prosperity, it disposes us to complain; and renders tranquillity tiresome, only because it is uniform. There is no wonder that this spirit of restlessness and dissatisfaction, which corrupts every terrestrial enjoyment, should have sometimes penetrated into the region of virtue. Good men are not without their frailties; and the perverseness incident to human nature too readily leads us, who become weary of all other things, to *be weary, also, in well-doing.*

Let me put a case, which, perhaps, will be found not unfrequent in ordinary life. Suppose a person, after much commerce with the world, to be convinced of its vanity. He has seen its most flattering hopes to be fallacious. He has felt its most boasted pleasures to be unsatisfactory. He resolves, therefore, to place his happiness in virtue; and, disregarding all temptations from interest, to adhere to what is right and honourable in conduct. He cultivates acquaintance with religion. He performs, with seriousness, the offices of devotion. He lays down to himself, a rational and useful plan of life; and, with satisfaction, holds on for a while in this reformed course. But, by degrees, discouragements arise. The peace which he hoped to enjoy, is interrupted, either by his own frailties, or by the vices of others. Passions, which had not been thoroughly subdued, struggle for their accustomed gratification. The pleasure which he expected to find in devotion, sometimes fails him; and the injustice of the world often sours and frets him. Friends prove ungrateful; enemies misrepresent, rivals supplant him: And part, at least,

of the mortifications which he suffers, he begins to ascribe to virtue.—Is this all the reward of my serving God, and renouncing the pleasures of sin? *Verily, in vain I have cleansed my heart and washed my hands in innocency. Behold, the ungodly prosper in the world, and have more than heart can wish; while all the day long I am plagued, and chastened every morning.*—To such persons as these, and all who are in hazard of being infected with their spirit, I now address myself. In reply to their complaints, I purpose to show, That in no state can they choose on earth, by no plan of conduct they can form, is it possible for them to escape uneasiness and disappointment; that in a life of virtue, they will suffer less uneasiness, and fewer disappointments, than in a course of vice; they will possess much higher resources and advantages; and they will be assured of complete reward at the end. From these considerations, I hope to make it appear, that there is no sufficient reason for our being *weary in well-doing*; and that, taking human life upon the whole, Virtue is far the most eligible portion of man.

I. UNEASINESS and disappointment are inseparable, in some degree, from every state on earth. Were it in the power of the world, to render those who attach themselves to it, satisfied and happy, you might then, I admit, have some title to complain if you found yourselves placed upon worse terms in the service of God. But this is so far from being the case, that among the multitude who devote themselves to earthly pleasure, you will not find a single person who has completely attained his aim. Enquire into the condition of the high and the low, of the gay and the serious, of the men of business and the men of pleasure, and you shall behold them all occupied in supplying some want, or in removing some distress. No man is pleased with being precisely what he is. Every where there is a void; generally, even in the most prosperous life, there is some corner possessed by sorrow. He who is engaged in business pines for leisure. He who enjoys leisure, languishes for want of employment. In a single state, we envy the comforts of a family. In conjugal life, we are chagrined with domestic cares. In a safe station, we regret the want of objects for enterprise. In an enterprising life, we lament the want of safety. It is the doom of man that his sky should never be free from all clouds. He is, at present, in an exiled and fallen state. The objects which surround him, are beneath his native dignity. God has tinged them all with vanity, on purpose to make him feel, that this is not his rest; that here he is not in his proper place, nor arrived at his true home.

If, therefore, you aim at a condition which shall be exempted from every disquiet, you pursue a phantom; you increase the

vanity and vexation of life, by engaging in a chase so fruitless. If you complain of virtue, because there is incident to it a portion of that uneasiness which is found in every other state, your complaint is most unreasonable. You claim an immunity from evil, which belongs not to the lot of man. Reconcile yourselves, then, to your condition; and, instead of looking for perfect happiness any where on earth, gladly embrace that state which contains the fewest sorrows.

II. **THOUGH** no condition of human life is free from uneasiness, I contend, That the uneasiness belonging to a sinful course, is far greater than what attends a course of well-doing. If you be weary of the labours of virtue, be assured, that the world, whenever you try the exchange, will lay upon you a much heavier load. It is the outside only of a licentious life, which is gay and smiling. Within, it conceals toil, and trouble, and deadly sorrow. For vice poisons human happiness in the spring, by introducing disorder into the heart. Those passions which it seems to indulge, it only feeds with imperfect gratifications; and thereby strengthens them for preying, in the end, on their unhappy victims.

It is a great mistake to imagine that the pain of self-denial is confined to virtue. He who follows the world as much as he who follows Christ, must *take up his cross*; and to him, assuredly, it will prove a more oppressive burden. Vice allows all our passions to range uncontrolled; and where each claims to be superior, it is impossible to gratify all. The predominant desire can only be indulged at the expense of its rival. No mortifications which virtue exacts, are more severe than those which ambition imposes upon the love of ease, pride upon interest, and covetousness upon vanity. Self-denial, therefore, belongs in common, to vice and virtue; but with this remarkable difference, that the passions which virtue requires us to mortify, it tends to weaken; whereas, those which vice obliges us to deny, it, at the same time, strengthens. The one diminishes the pain of self-denial, by moderating the demand of passion; the other increases it, by rendering those demands imperious and violent. What distresses, that occur in the calm life of virtue, can be compared to those tortures which remorse of conscience inflicts on the wicked; to those severe humiliations, arising from guilt combined with misfortunes, which sink them to the dust; to those violent agitations of shame and disappointment, which sometimes drive them to the most fatal extremities, and make them abhor their existence? How often, in the midst of those disastrous situations, into which their crimes have brought them, have they cursed the seductions of vice; and with bitter regret, looked back to the day on which they first forsook the path of innocence?

But, perhaps, you imagine, that to such miseries as these, great criminals only are exposed; and that, by a wary and cautious management, it is possible to avoid them. Take vice and virtue, then, in the most general point of view. Compare God and the world as two masters, the one or other of whom you must obey; and consider fairly in whose service there will be reason for your being weary soonest, and repenting most frequently. The world is both a hard and a capricious master. To submit to a long servitude, in the view of a recompense from which they are excluded in the end, is known to be often the fate of those who are devoted to the world. They sacrifice their present ease to their future prospects. They court the great, and flatter the multitude. They prostitute their conscience, and dishonour their character: And, after all their efforts, how uncertain is their success? Competitors jostle, and outstrip them. The more artful deceive, the more violent, overthrow, them. Fair prospects once smiled: but clouds soon gather; the sky is darkened; the scene changes; and that fickle world, which, a moment before, had flattered, the next moment forgets them.

God is never mistaken in the character of his servants; for *he seeth their hearts, and judgeth according to the truth*. But the world is often deceived in those who court its favour; and, of course, is unjust in the distribution of its rewards. Flattery gains the ear of power. Fraud supplants innocence; and the pretending and assuming occupy the place of the worthy and the modest. In vain you claim any merit with the world, on account of your good intentions. The world knows them not; regards them not. It judges of you solely by your actions; and what is worse, by the success of your actions, which often depends not on yourselves. But in the sight of the Supreme Being, good intentions supply the place of good deeds, which you had not the opportunity of performing. The well-meant endeavours of the poor find the same acceptance with him as the generous actions of the rich. The *widow's mite* is, in his eye, a costly offering; and even he *who giveth to a disciple a cup of cold water*, when he can give him no more, *goeth not without his reward*.

As the world is unjust in its judgments, so it is ungrateful in its requitals. Time speedily effaces the memory of the greatest services; and when we can repeat them no more, we are neglected and thrown aside. It was the saying of a noted great man of the world, on the fall of his fortunes, "Had I served God as faithfully as I have done my King, he would not have forsaken me in my old age." Unfaithfulness and ingratitude are unknown to God. With him no new favourites arise, to usurp the place, or to bear off the rewards of his ancient servants.—*Even to your old age, I am He; and even to hoary hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear: even I will carry, and*

will deliver you, saith the Lord Almighty.*—Since, then, in our several departments, we must labour, what comparison is there between labouring for God, and for the world? How unjust are they who become weary so much sooner in the service of God, than they do in that of the most severe and imperious of all masters.

III. THE resources of virtue are much greater than those of the world; the compensations which it makes for our distresses, far more valuable. Perpetual success belongs neither to the one nor the other. But under disappointments, when they occur, virtue bears us up; the world allows us to sink. When the mind of a good man is hurt by misfortunes, religion administers the cordial, and infuses the balm. Whereas, the world inflicts wounds, and then leaves them to fester. It brings sorrows, but it provides no consolation. Consolation is entirely the province of religion. Supposing religion to be inferior to vice in external advantages, it must be allowed to possess internal peace in a much higher degree. This is so certain, that almost all men, at some period or other of their life, look forward to it, as to a desirable retreat. When the ends of their present pursuit shall be accomplished, they propose to themselves much satisfaction in an honourable discharge of the duties of their station, amidst those moderate passions and temperate pleasures, which innocence allows. That which all men agree in holding to be second in importance to the pursuit which they follow, may be safely esteemed to be the first in real worth; and it may be concluded that, if they were not blinded by some prevailing passion, they would discern and adopt it as such.

It is the peculiar effect of virtue, to make a man's chief happiness arise from himself and his own conduct. A bad man is wholly the creature of the world. He hangs upon its favour, lives by its smiles, and is happy or miserable, in proportion to its success. But to a virtuous man, success in worldly undertakings is but a secondary object. To discharge his own part with integrity and honour is his chief aim. If he has done properly what was incumbent on him to do, his mind is at rest; to Providence he leaves the event. *His witness is in Heaven, and his record is on high.* Satisfied with the approbation of God, and the testimony of a good conscience, he enjoys himself, and despises the triumphs of guilt. In proportion as such manly principles rule your heart, you will become independent of the world; and will forbear complaining of its discouragements. It is the imperfection of your virtue, which occasions you to *be weary in well-doing.* It is because your hearts remain divided between God and the world, that you are so often discontented;

* Isaiah. xlvi. 4.

partly wishing to discharge your duty, and partly seeking your happiness from somewhat that is repugnant to your duty. Study to be more consistent in principle, and more uniform in practice, and your peace will be more unbroken.

Though virtue may appear, at first sight, to contract the bounds of enjoyment, you will find, upon reflection, that, in truth, it enlarges them. If it restrains the excess of some pleasures, it favours and increases others. It precludes you from none, but such as are either fantastic and imaginary, or pernicious and destructive. Whatever is truly valuable in human enjoyment, it allows to a good man, no less than to others. It not only allows him such pleasures, but heightens them, by that grateful relish which a good conscience gives to every pleasure. It not only heightens them, but adds to them, also, the peculiar satisfactions which flow from virtuous sentiments, from devout affections, and religious hopes. On how much worse terms is the sinner placed, in the midst of his boasted gratifications? His portion is confined to this world. His good things are all of one sort only; he has neither knowledge, nor relish, of any thing beyond them. His enjoyment, therefore, rests on a much narrower basis, than that of the servants of God. Enlarge as much as you please, the circle of worldly gratifications; yet, if nothing of the mind and heart, nothing of a refined and moral nature, enter into that circle, and vary the enjoyment, languor and weariness soon succeed. Among whom do you hear more peevish expressions of discontent, or more frequent complaints of low spirits, than among the professed votaries of worldly pleasure?

Vice and virtue, in their progress, as in every other respect, hold an opposite course. The beginnings of vice are enticing. The first steps of worldly advancement, are flattering and pleasing. But the continuance of success blunts enjoyment, and flattens desire. Whereas the beginnings of virtue are labourious. But, by perseverance, its labours diminish, and its pleasures increase. As it ripens into confirmed habit, it becomes both smoother in practice, and more complete in its reward. In a worldly life, the termination of our hopes always meets our view. We see a boundary before us, beyond which we cannot reach. But the prospects of virtue are growing and endless. *The righteous shall hold on in his way; and he that hath clean hands, shall wax stronger and stronger. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* This brings me to consider,

IV. The assured hope which good men enjoy, of a full reward at last. I have endeavoured by several considerations, to correct your impatience under the present discouragements of virtue. I have shown many high advantages, which it already possesses. But now, laying all these aside; supposing virtue to have brought

you no advantage, but to have only engaged you in perpetual struggles with an evil world; the text suggests what is sufficient to answer every objection, and to silence every complaint; *In due season you shall reap, if you faint not.* It is not a loose encouragement, or a dubious hope, which is held forth to us. A direct and explicit declaration is made by the spirit of God, that piety and virtue, how discouraged soever, or oppressed they may be for a while, shall not be frustrated of their reward; but that *in due season*, when the period which is fixed by the Divine decree shall come, all who have not been *weary in well-doing*, though they may *have sown in tears, shall reap in joy.* As this great principle of faith is so essential to our present argument, and is indeed the foundation of all religion, it will be proper that we now take a view of the grounds on which it rests. By fixing our attention both on the proofs which reason suggests, and on the discoveries which revelation has made, of a state of future retribution, we shall take an effectual method of confirming our adherence to religion, and of baffling those temptations which might lead us to *be weary in well-doing.*

THE first, and most obvious presumption, which reason affords in behalf of future rewards to the righteous, arises from the imperfect distribution of good and evil in our present state. Notwithstanding what I have advanced concerning the pleasures and advantages of virtue, it cannot be denied, that the happiness of good men is often left incomplete. The vicious possess advantages, to which they have no right; while the conscientious suffer for the sake of virtue, and groan under distresses which they have not merited from the world. Indeed, were the distribution of good and evil, in this life, altogether promiscuous; could it be said, with truth, that the moral condition of men had no influence whatever upon their happiness or misery; I admit, that from such a state of things, no presumption would arise of any future retribution being intended. They who delight to aggravate the miseries of life, and the distresses of virtue, do no service to the argument in behalf of Providence. For if total disorder be found to prevail now, suspicions may, too justly, arise, of its prevailing for ever. If he who rules the universe, entirely neglects virtue here, the probability must be small, of his rewarding it hereafter. But this is far from being the true state of the fact. What human life presents to the view of an impartial observer, is by no means a scene of entire confusion; but a state of order, begun and carried on a certain length. Virtue is so far from being neglected by the governor of the world, that from many evident marks it appears to be a chief object of his care. In the constitution of human nature, a foundation is laid, for comfort to the righteous, and for internal punishment to the wicked.

Throughout the course of divine government, tendencies towards the happiness of the one, and the misery of the other, constantly appear. They are so conspicuous, as not to have escaped the notice of the rudest nations. Over the whole earth they have diffused the belief, that Providence is propitious to virtue, and averse to guilt. Yet these tendencies are, sometimes, disappointed of their effect, and that which Providence visibly favours, is left, at present, without an adequate reward.

From such an imperfect distribution of happiness, what are we to conclude, but that this system is the beginning, not the whole, of things; the opening only of a more extensive plan, whose consummation reaches into a future world? If God has already *set his throne for judgment*; if he has visibly begun to reward and to punish, in some degree, on earth, he cannot mean to leave the exercise of government incomplete. Having laid the foundation of a great and noble structure, he will in due time rear it up to perfection. The unfinished parts of the fabric evidently show, that a future building is intended. All his other works are constructed according to the most full and exact proportion. In the natural world, nothing is deficient, nothing redundant. It is in the moral world only that we discover irregularity and defect. It falls short of that order and perfection which appear in the rest of the creation. It exhibits not, in its present state, the same features of complete wisdom, justice, or goodness. But can we believe, that, under the government of the Supreme Being, those apparent disorders shall not be rectified at the last? Or, that from his conduct towards his rational creatures, the chief of his works, the sole objection against his perfection shall be allowed to rise, and shall continue unremoved for ever?

On the supposition of future rewards and punishments, a satisfying account can be given, of all the disorders which at present take place on earth. Christianity explains their origin, and traces them to their issue. Man, fallen from his primeval felicity, is now undergoing probation and discipline for his final state. Divine justice remains, for a season, concealed; and allows men to act their parts with freedom on this theatre, that their characters may be formed and ascertained. Amidst discouragements and afflictions, the righteous give proof of their fidelity, and acquire the habits of virtue. But if you suppose the events of this life to have no reference to another, the whole state of man becomes not only inexplicable, but contradictory and inconsistent. The powers of the inferior animals are perfectly suited to their station. They know nothing higher than their present condition. In gratifying their appetites, they fulfil their destiny, and pass away. Man alone, comes forth to act a part which carries no meaning, and tends to no end. Endowed with capacities which extend far beyond his present sphere;

fitted by his rational nature for running the race of immortality, he is stopped short in the very entrance of his course. He squanders his activity on pursuits, which he discerns to be vain. He languishes for knowledge, which is placed beyond his reach. He thirsts after a happiness, which he is doomed never to enjoy. He sees and laments the disasters of his state; and yet, upon this supposition, can find nothing to remedy them.—Has the eternal God any pleasure in sporting himself with such a scene of misery and folly, as this life, if it had no connection with another, must exhibit to his eye? Did he call into existence this magnificent universe, adorn it with so much beauty and splendor, and surround it with those glorious luminaries which we behold in the heavens, only that some generations of mortal men might arise to behold these wonders, and then disappear for ever? How unsuitable, in this case, were the habitation to the wretched inhabitant! How inconsistent the commencement of his being, and the mighty preparation of his powers and faculties, with his despicable end! How contradictory, in fine, were every thing which concerns the state of man, to the wisdom and perfection of his Maker!

Throughout all ages, and among all nations, the persuasion of a future life has prevailed. It sprung not from the refinements of science, or the speculations of philosophy; but from a deeper and stronger root, the natural sentiments of the human heart. Hence it is common to the philosopher and the savage, and is found in the most barbarous, as well as in the most civilized regions. Even the belief of the being of a God, is not more general on the earth than the belief of immortality. Dark, indeed, and confused, were the notions which men entertained concerning a future state. Yet still, in that state, they looked for retribution, both to the good and the bad; and in the perfection of such pleasures as they knew best and valued most highly, they placed the rewards of the virtuous. So universal a consent seems plainly to indicate an original determination given to the soul by its Creator. It shows this great truth to be native and congenial to man.

When we look into our own breasts, we find various anticipations and presages of future existence. Most of our great and high passions extend beyond the limits of this life. The ambitious and the self-denied, the great, the good, and the wicked, all take interest in what is to happen after they shall have left the earth. That passion for fame, which inspires so much of the activity of mankind, plainly is animated by the persuasion, that consciousness is to survive the dissolution of the body. The virtuous are supported by the hope, the guilty tormented with the dread, of what is to take place after death. As death approaches, the hopes of the one, and the fears of the

other, are found to redouble. The soul, when issuing hence, seems more clearly to discern its future abode. All the operations of conscience proceed upon the belief of immortality. The whole moral conduct of men refers to it. All legislators have supposed it. All religions are built upon it. It is so essential to the order of society, that, were it erased, human laws would prove ineffectual restraints from evil, and a deluge of crimes and miseries would overflow the earth. To suppose this universal and powerful belief to be without foundation in truth, is to suppose, that a principle of delusion was interwoven with the nature of man; is to suppose, that his Creator was reduced to the necessity of impressing his heart with a falsehood, in order to make him answer the purposes of his being.

BUT though these arguments be strong, yet all arguments are liable to objection. Perhaps this general belief, of which I have spoken, has been owing to inclination and desire, more than to evidence. Perhaps, in our reasonings on this subject from the divine perfections, we flatter ourselves with being of more consequence, than we truly are, in the system of the universe. Hence, the great importance of a discovery proceeding from God himself, which gives full authority to all that reason had suggested, and places this capital truth beyond the reach of suspicion or distrust.

The method which Christianity has taken to convey to us the evidence of a future state, highly deserves our attention. Had the Gospel been addressed, like a system of philosophy, solely to the understanding of men; had it aimed only at enlightening the studious and reflecting, it would have confined itself to abstract truth; it would have simply informed us, that the righteous are hereafter to be rewarded, and sinners to be punished.—Such a declaration as that contained in the text, would have been sufficient: *Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not.* But the Gospel has not stopped, at barely announcing life and immortality to mankind. It was calculated for popular edification. It was intended to be the religion not merely of the few, whose understanding was to be informed; but of the many, also, whose imagination was to be impressed, and whose passions were to be awakened, in order to give the truth its due influence over them. Upon this account it not only reveals the certainty of a future state, but, in the person of the great Founder of our religion, exhibits a series of acts relating to it; by means of which, our senses, our imaginations, and passions, all become interested in this great object.

The resurrection of Christ from the grave was designed to be a sensible evidence, that death infers not a final extinction of the living principle. He rose, in order to show, that, in our name, he had conquered death, and was *become the first fruits of them*

that sleep. Nor did he only rise from the grave, but, by ascending to heaven in a visible form, before many witnesses, gave an ocular specimen of the transition from this world into the region of the blessed. The employments which now occupy him there, are fully declared. *As our forerunner he hath entered within the veil. He appears in the presence of God for us. He maketh perpetual intercession for his people. I go,* saith he, *to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.* The circumstances of his coming again, are distinctly foretold. The sounding of the last trumpet, the resurrection of the dead, the appearance of the Judge, and the solemnity with which he shall discriminate the good from the bad, are all described. The very words in which he shall pronounce the final sentence, are recited in our hearing: *Come, ye blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* Then shall the holy and the just be *caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.* They shall enter with him into the *city of the living God.* They shall possess the *new earth and new heavens, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. They shall behold his face in righteousness, and be satisfied with his likeness for ever.*—By recording such a train of striking circumstances and facts, the Gospel familiarizes us in some measure with a future state.—By accommodating this great discovery, in so useful a manner, to the conceptions of men, it furnishes a strong intrinsic evidence of its divine origin.

Thus, upon the whole, whether you consult your reason, or listen to the discoveries of revelation, you behold our argument confirmed; you behold a life of piety and virtue issuing in immortal felicity. Of what worldly pursuit can it be pronounced, that its reward is certain? Look every where around you, and you shall see, that *the race is far from being always to the swift, or the battle to the strong.* The most diligent, the most wise, the most accomplished, may, after all their labours, be disappointed in the end; and be left to suffer the regret of having *spent their strength for nought.* But for the righteous is *laid up the crown of life.* Their final happiness is prepared in the eternal plan of Providence, and secured by the labours and sufferings of the Saviour of the world.

Cease, then, from your unjust complaints against virtue and religion. Leave discontent and peevishness to worldly men. In no period of distress, in no moment of disappointment, allow yourselves to suspect that piety and integrity are fruitless. In every state of being, they lead to happiness. If you enjoy not at present their full rewards, it is because the season of recom-

pense is not yet come. For, *in due season you shall reap*. There is a time which is proper for reward, and there is a period which belongs to trial. How long the one should last, and when the other should arrive, belongs not to you to determine. It is fixed by the wise, though unknown, decree of the Almighty. But be assured, that *He that cometh shall come, and will not tarry*. He shall come *in due season*, to restore perfect order among his works; to bring rest to the weary, comfort to the afflicted, and just retribution to all men. *Behold*, saith the faithful and true Witness, *I come quickly, and my reward is with me*. *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God*. *I will give him the morning star*. *I will make him a pillar in my temple*. *He shall be clothed in white raiment; and shall sit down with me on my throne*.*

* Rev. xxii. 12—ii. 7. 28.—iii. 12. 5. 21.

SERMON XVI.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDER IN CONDUCT.

Let all things be done—in order.—1 CORINTH. xiv. 40.

RELIGION, like every regular and well conducted system, is composed of a variety of parts; each of which possesses its separate importance, and contributes to the perfection of the whole. Some graces are essential to it; such as faith and repentance, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour; which, for that reason, must be often inculcated on men. There are other dispositions and habits, which, though they hold not so high a rank, yet are necessary to the introduction and support of the former; and, therefore, in religious exhortations, these also justly claim a place. Of this nature is that regard to order, method, and regularity, which the apostle enjoins us in the text to carry through the whole of life. Whether you consider it as, in itself, a moral duty, or not, yet I hope soon to convince you that it is essential to the proper discharge of almost all duties; and merits, upon that account, a greater degree of attention than is commonly paid to it in a religious view.

If you look abroad into the world, you may be satisfied at the first glance, that a vicious and libertine life is always a life of confusion. Thence it is natural to infer, that order is friendly to religion. As the neglect of it coincides with vice, so the preservation of it must assist virtue. By the appointment of Providence, it is indispensably requisite to worldly prosperity. Thence arises the presumption, that it is connected also with spiritual improvement. When you behold a man's affairs, through negligence and misconduct, involved in disorder, you naturally conclude that his ruin approaches. You may at the same time justly suspect, that the causes which affect his temporal welfare, operate also to the prejudice of his moral interests. The apostle teaches us in this chapter, that *God is not the author of confusion.** He is a lover of order; and all his works are full of

* Ver. 33.

order. But, *where confusion is, there is, its close attendant, every evil work.** In the sequel of this discourse, I shall point out some of those parts of conduct wherein it is most material to virtue that order take place; and then shall conclude with showing the high advantages which attend it. Allow me to recommend to you, order in the conduct of your affairs; order in the distribution of your time; order in the management of your fortune; order in the regulation of your amusements; order in the arrangement of your society. Thus *let all things be done in order.*

I. MAINTAIN order in the conduct of your worldly affairs.—Every man, in every station of life, has some concerns, private, domestic, or public, which require successive attention; he is placed in some sphere of active duty. Let the employments which belong to that sphere be so arranged, that each may keep its place without jostling another; and that which regards the world may not interfere with what is due to God. In proportion to the multiplicity of affairs, the observance of order becomes more indispensable. But scarcely is there any train of life so simple and uniform, but what will suffer through the neglect of it. I speak not now of suffering in point of worldly interest. I call upon you to attend to higher interests; to remember that the orderly conduct of your temporal affairs, forms a great part of your duty as Christians.

Many, indeed, can hardly be persuaded of this truth. A strong propensity has, in every age, appeared among men, to sequester religion from the commerce of the world. Seasons of retreat and devotion they are willing to appropriate to God. But the world they consider as their own province. They carry on a sort of separate interest there. Nay, by the respect which, on particular occasions, they pay to religion, they too often imagine that they have acquired the liberty of acting in worldly matters, according to what plan they choose. How entirely do such persons mistake the design of Christianity!—In this world you are placed by Providence as on a great field of trial. By the necessities of your nature, you are called forth to different employments. By many ties you are connected with human society. From superiors and inferiors, from neighbours and equals, from friends and enemies, demands arise, and obligations circulate through all the ranks of life. This active scene was contrived by the wisdom of Heaven, on purpose that it might bring into exercise all the virtues of the Christian character; your justice, candor, and veracity, in dealing with one another; your fidelity to every trust, and your conscientious discharge of every office which is committed to you; your affection for your friends; your forgiveness of enemies; your charity to the distressed;

* James, iii. 16.

your attention to the interests of your family. It is by fulfilling all these obligations, in proper succession, that you show *your conversation to be such as becometh the gospel of Christ*. It is thus you make *your lights to shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*. It is thus you are rendered *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*.—But how can those various duties be discharged by persons who are ever in that hurry and perplexity which disorder creates? You wish, perhaps, to perform what your character and station require. But from the confusion in which you have allowed yourselves to be involved, you find it to have become impossible. What was neglected to be done in its proper place, thrusts itself forward at an inconvenient season. A multitude of affairs crowd upon you together. Different obligations distract you; and this distraction is sometimes the cause, sometimes the pretence, of equally neglecting them all, or, at least, of sacrificing the greater to the lesser.

Hence arise so many inconsistent characters, and such frequent instances of partial and divided goodness, as we find in the world; appearances of generosity without justice, honour without truth, probity to men without reverence of God. He who conducts his affairs with method and regularity, meets every duty in its proper place, and assigns it its due rank. But where there is no order in conduct, there can be no uniformity in character. The natural connection and arrangement of duties are lost. If virtue appear at all, it will only be in fits and starts. The authority of conscience may occasionally operate, when our situation affords it room for exertion. But in other circumstances of equal importance, every moral sentiment will be overpowered by the tumultuous bustle of worldly affairs. Fretfulness of temper, too, will generally characterize those who are negligent of order. The hurry in which they live, and the embarrassments with which they are surrounded, keep their spirits in perpetual ferment. Conflicting with difficulties which they are unable to overcome, conscious of their own misconduct, but ashamed to confess it, they are engaged in many a secret struggle; and the uneasiness which they suffer within, recoils in bad humour on all who are around them. Hence the wretched resources to which, at last, they are obliged to fly, in order to quiet their cares. In despair of being able to unravel what they have suffered to become so perplexed, they sometimes sink into supine indolence, sometimes throw themselves into the arms of intemperance and loose pleasure; by either of which they aggravate their guilt, and accelerate their ruin. To the end that order may be maintained in your affairs, it is necessary,

II. THAT you attend to order in the distribution of your time. Time you ought to consider as a sacred trust committed to you

by God, of which you are now the depositaries, and are to render account at the last. That portion of it which he has allotted you, is intended partly for the concerns of this world, partly for those of the next. Let each of these occupy, in the distribution of your time, that space which property belongs to it. Let not the hours of hospitality and pleasure interfere with the discharge of your necessary affairs; and let not what you call necessary affairs, encroach upon the time which is due to devotion. *To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven.** If you delay till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day, you overcharge the morrow with a burden which belongs not to it. You load the wheels of time, and prevent it from carrying you along smoothly. He who every morning plans the transactions of the day, and follows out the plan, carries on a thread which will guide him through the labyrinth of the most busy life. the orderly arrangement of his time is like a ray of light which darts itself through all his affairs. But where no plan is laid, where the disposal of time is surrendered merely to the chance of incidents, all things lie huddled together in one chaos, which admits neither of distribution nor review.

The first requisite for introducing order into the management of time, is to be impressed with a just sense of its value. Consider well how much depends upon it, and how fast it flies away. The bulk of men are in nothing more capricious and inconsistent than in their appreciation of time. When they think of it as the measure of their continuance on earth, they highly prize it, and with the greatest anxiety seek to lengthen it out. But when they view it in separate parcels, they appear to hold it in contempt, and squander it with inconsiderate profusion. While they complain that life is short, they are often wishing its different periods at an end. Covetous of every other possession, of time only they are prodigal. They allow every idle man to be master of this property, and make every frivolous occupation welcome that can help them to consume it. Among those who are so careless of time, it is not to be expected that order should be observed in its distribution. But, by this fatal neglect, how many materials of severe and lasting regret are they laying up in store for themselves! The time which they suffer to pass away in the midst of confusion, bitter repentance seeks afterwards in vain to recall. What was omitted to be done at its proper moment, arises to be the torment of some future season. Manhood is disgraced by the consequences of neglected youth. Old age, oppressed by cares that belonged to a former period, labours under a burden not its own. At the close of life, the dying man beholds with anguish that his days are finishing, when his prepa-

* Eccles. iii. 1.

ration for eternity is hardly commenced. Such are the effects of a disorderly waste of time, through not attending to its value. Every thing in the life of such persons is misplaced. Nothing is performed aright, from not being performed in due season.

But he who is orderly in the distribution of his time, takes the proper method of escaping those manifold evils. He is justly said to *redeem the time*. By proper management he prolongs it. He lives much in little space; more in a few years than others do in many. He can live to God and his own soul, and at the same time attend to all the lawful interests of the present world. He looks back on the past, and provides for the future. He catches and arrests the hours as they fly. They are marked down for useful purposes, and their memory remains. Whereas, those hours fleet by the man of confusion like a shadow. His days and years are either blanks of which he has no remembrance, or they are filled up with such a confused and irregular succession of unfinished transactions, that though he remembers he has been busy, yet he can give no account of the business which has employed him. Of him, more than of any other, it may with justice be pronounced, that *he walketh in a vain show; he is disquieted in vain*.

III. INTRODUCE order into the management of your fortune. Whatever it be, let the administration of it proceed with method and economy. From time to time examine your situation; and proportion your expense to your growing or diminishing revenue. Provide what is necessary before you indulge in what is superfluous. Study to do justice to all with whom you deal, before you affect the praise of liberality. In a word, fix such a plan of living as you find that your circumstances will fairly admit and adhere to it invariably against every temptation to improper excess.

No admonition respecting morals is more necessary than this, to the age in which we live; an age manifestly distinguished by a propensity to thoughtless profusion; wherein all the different ranks of men are observed to press with forward vanity on those who are above them; to vie with their superiors in every mode of luxury and ostentation; and to seek no farther argument for justifying extravagance, than the fashion of the times, and the supposed necessity of living like others around them. This turn of mind begets contempt for sober and orderly plans of life. It overthrows all regard to domestic concerns and duties. It pushes men on to hazardous and visionary schemes of gain; and unfortunately unites the two extremes of grasping with rapaciousness, and of squandering with profusion. In the midst of such disorder, no prosperity can be of long continuance. While confusion grows upon men's affairs, and prodigality at the same time wastes their substance, poverty makes its advances *like an arm-*

ed man. They tremble at the view of the approaching evil ; but have lost the force of mind to make provision against it. Accustomed to move in a round of society and pleasures disproportioned to their condition, they are unable to break through the enchantments of habit ; and with their eyes open sink into the gulph which is before them. Poverty enforces dependence ; and dependence increases corruption. Necessity first betrays them into mean compliances ; next, impels them to open crimes ; and, beginning with ostentation and extravagance, they end in infamy and guilt. Such are the consequences of neglecting order in our worldly circumstances. Such is the circle in which the profuse and the dissolute daily run.—To what cause, so much as to the want of order, can we attribute those scenes of distress which so frequently excite our pity ; families that once were flourishing reduced to ruin ; and the melancholy widow and neglected orphan thrown forth, friendless, upon the world ? What cause has been more fruitful in engendering those atrocious crimes which fill society with disquiet and terror ; in training the gamester to fraud, the robber to violence, and even the assassin to blood ?

Be assured then, that order, frugality, and economy are the necessary supports of every personal and private virtue. How humble soever these qualities may appear to some, they are, nevertheless, the basis on which liberty, independence, and true honour, must rise. He who has the steadiness to arrange his affairs with method and regularity, and to conduct his train of life agreeably to his circumstances, can be master of himself in every situation into which he may be thrown. He is under no necessity to flatter or to lie, to stoop to what is mean, or to commit what is criminal. But he who wants the firmness of mind which the observance of order requires, is held in bondage to the world ; he can neither act his part with courage as a man, nor with fidelity as a Christian. From the moment you have allowed yourselves to pass the line of economy, and live beyond your fortune, you have entered on the path of danger.—Precipices surround you on all sides. Every step which you take may lead to mischiefs, that, as yet, lie hidden ; and to crimes that will end in your everlasting perdition.

IV. OBSERVE order in your amusements ; that is, allow them no more than their proper place ; study to keep them within due bounds ; mingle them in a temperate succession with serious duties, and the higher business of life. Human life cannot proceed to advantage without some measure of relaxation and entertainment. We require relief from care. We are not formed for a perpetual stretch of serious thought. By too intense and continued application, our feeble powers would soon be worn out. At the same time, from our propensity to ease and

pleasure amusement proves, among all ranks of men, the most dangerous foe to order. For it tends incessantly to usurp and encroach, to widen its territories, to thrust itself into the place of more important concerns, and thereby to disturb and counteract the natural course of things. One frivolous amusement indulged out of season, will often carry perplexity and confusion through a long succession of affairs.

Amusements, therefore, though they be of an innocent kind, require steady government, to keep them within a due and limited province. But such as are of an irregular and vicious nature, are not to be governed, but to be banished from every orderly society. As soon as a man seeks his happiness from the gaming-table, the midnight revel, and the other haunts of licentiousness, confusion seizes upon him as its own. There will no longer be order in his family, nor order in his affairs, nor order in his time. The most important concerns of life are abandoned. Even the order of nature is by such persons inverted; night is changed into day, and day into night. Character, honour, and interest itself, are trampled under foot. You may with certainty prognosticate the ruin of these men to be just at hand. Disorder, arisen to its height, has nearly accomplished its work. The spots of death are upon them. Let every one who would escape the pestilential contagion, fly with haste from their company.

V. PRESERVE order in the arrangement of your society; that is, entangle not yourselves in a perpetual and promiscuous crowd; select with prudence and propriety those with whom you choose to associate; let company and retreat succeed each other at measured intervals. There can be no order in his life, who allots not a due share of his time to retirement and reflection. He can neither prudently arrange his temporal affairs, nor properly attend to his spiritual interests. He lives not to himself, but to the world. By continual dissipation, he is rendered giddy and thoughtless. He unavoidably contracts from the world, that spirit of disorder and confusion which is so prevalent in it.

It is not a sufficient preservative against this evil, that the circles of society in which you are engaged are not of a libertine and vicious kind. If they withdraw you from that attention to yourselves, and your domestic concerns, which becomes a good man, they are subversive of order, and inconsistent with duty. What is innocent in itself, degenerates into guilt from being carried to excess; an idle, trifling society is near akin to such as is corrupting: One of the first principles of order is, to learn to be happy at home. It is in domestic retreat that every wise and virtuous man finds his chief satisfaction. It is there he forms the plans which regulate his public conduct. He who knows not how to enjoy himself when alone, can never be

long happy abroad. To his vacant mind, company may afford a temporary relief; but when forced to return to himself, he will be so much more oppressed and languid. Whereas, by a due mixture of public and private life, we keep free from the snares of both, and enjoy each to greater advantage.

WHEN we review those different parts of behaviour to which I have shown that order is essential, it must necessarily occur to you, that they are all mutually connected, and hang upon each other. Throughout your affairs, your time, your expense, your amusements, your society, the principle of order must be equally carried, if you expect to reap any of its happy fruits. For if into any one of those great departments of life you suffer disorder to enter, it will spread through all the rest. In vain, for instance, you purpose to be orderly in the conduct of your affairs, if you be irregular in the distribution of your time. In vain, you attempt to regulate your expense, if into your amusements, or your society, disorder has crept. You have admitted a principle of confusion which will defeat all your plans; and perplex and entangle what you sought to arrange. Uniformity is above all things necessary to order. If you desire that any thing should proceed according to method and rule, let *all things*, as the text exhorts, *be done in order*.

I must also admonish you, that in small as well as in great affairs, a due regard to order is requisite. I mean not, that you ought to look on those minute attentions which are apt to occupy frivolous minds, as connected either with virtue or wisdom. But I exhort you to remember, that disorder, like other immoralities, frequently takes rise from inconsiderable beginnings. They who, in the lesser transactions of life, are totally negligent of rule, will be in hazard of extending that negligence, by degrees, to such affairs and duties as will render them criminal. Remissness grows on all who study not to guard against it; and it is only by frequent exercise, that the habits of order and punctuality can be thoroughly confirmed.

FROM what has been said, the great importance of this principle to moral and religious conduct must already be evident.—Let us, however, conclude with taking a summary view of the advantages which attend it.

First, the observance of order serves to correct that negligence which makes you omit some duties, and that hurry and precipitancy which make you perform others imperfectly. Your attention is thereby directed to its proper objects. You follow the straight path which Providence has pointed out to man; in the course of which all the different business of life presents itself regularly to him on every side. God and man, time and eternity, possess their proper stations, arise in succession to his view, and attract his care. Whereas, he who runs on in a dis-

orderly course, speedily involves himself in a labyrinth, where he is surrounded with intricacy and darkness. The crooked paths into which he strikes, turn him aside from the proper line of human pursuit; hide from his sight the objects which he ought chiefly to regard, and bring others under his view, which serve no purpose but to distract and mislead him.

Next, by attending to order, you avoid idleness, that most fruitful source of crimes and evils. Acting upon a plan, meeting every thing in its own place, you constantly find innocent and useful employment for time. You are never at a loss how to dispose of your hours, or to fill up life agreeably. In the course of human actions there are two extremes equally dangerous to virtue; the multiplicity of affairs, and the total want of them.—The man of order stands in the middle between these two extremes, and suffers from neither. He is occupied, but not oppressed. Whereas, the disorderly, overloading one part of time, and leaving another vacant, are at one period overwhelmed with business, and at another, either idle through want of employment, or indolent through perplexity. Those seasons of indolence and idleness which recur so often in their life, are their most dangerous moments. The mind, unhappy in its situation, and clinging to every object which can occupy or amuse it, is then aptest to throw itself into the arms of every vice and every folly.

Farther; by the preservation of order, you check inconstancy and levity. Fickle by nature is the human heart. It is fond of change; and perpetually tends to start aside from the straight line of conduct. Hence arises the propriety of bringing ourselves under subjection to method and rule; which, though at first it may prove constraining, yet by degrees, and from the experience of its happy effects, becomes natural and agreeable. It rectifies those irregularities of temper and manners to which we give the name of caprice; and which are distinguishing characteristics of a disorderly mind. It is the parent of steadiness of conduct. It forms consistency of character. It is the ground of all the confidence we repose in one another. For, the disorderly we know not where to find. In him only can we place any trust who is uniform and regular; who lives by principle, not by humour; who acts upon a plan, and not by desultory motions.

The advantages of order hitherto mentioned belong to rectitude of conduct. Consider also how important it is to your self-enjoyment and felicity. Order is the source of peace; and peace is the highest of all temporal blessings. Order is indeed the only region in which tranquillity dwells. The very mention of confusion imports disturbance and vexation. Is it possible for that man to be happy, who cannot look into the state of his af-

fairs, or the tenor of his conduct, without discerning all to be embroiled; who is either in the midst of remorse for what he has neglected to do, or in the midst of hurry to overtake what he finds, too late, was necessary to have been done? Such as live according to order, may be compared to the celestial bodies, which move in regular courses, and by stated laws; whose influence is benificent; whose operations are quiet and tranquil. The disorderly resemble those tumultuous elements on earth, which, by sudden and violent irruptions, disturb the course of nature. By mismanagement of affairs, by excess in expense, by irregularity in the indulgence of company and amusement, they are perpetually creating molestation both to themselves and others. They depart from their road to seek pleasure; and instead of it, they every where raise up sorrows. Being always found out of their proper place, they of course interfere and jar with others. The disorders which they raise never fail to spread beyond their own line, and to involve many in confusion and distress; whence they necessarily become the authors of tumult and contention, of discord and enmity. Whereas, order is the foundation of union. It allows every man to carry on his own affairs without disturbing his neighbour. It is the golden chain, which holds together the societies of men in friendship and peace.

In fine, the man of order is connected with all the higher powers and principles in the universe. He is the follower of God. He walks with him, and acts upon his plan. His character is formed on the spirit which religion breathes. For religion in general, and the religion of Christ in particular, may be called the great discipline of order. To *walk sinfully*, and to *walk disorderly*, are synonymous terms in Scripture. From *such as walk disorderly*, we are commanded, *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to withdraw ourselves*.* The kingdom of Satan is the reign of disorder and darkness. To restore order amongst the works of God, was the end for which the Son of God descended to the earth. He requires order to be observed in his church. His undertaking is to be consummated in that perfect order which he shall introduce at the last day. In the *new earth and the new heavens*, undisturbed order shall forever prevail among the *spirits of the just made perfect*; and whatever farther preparation may be requisite for our being admitted to join their society, it is certain that we shall never share in it, unless we make it now our study to *do all things decently, and in good order*.

* 2 Thess. iii. 6.

SERMON XVII.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE HEART.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.—PROVERBS, iv. 23.

AMONG the many wise counsels given by this inspired writer, there is none which deserves greater regard than that contained in the text. Its importance however, is too seldom perceived by the generality of men. They are apt to consider the regulation of external conduct as the chief object of religion. If they can act their part with decency, and maintain a fair character, they conceive their duty to be fulfilled. What passes in the mean time within their mind, they suppose to be of no great consequence, either to themselves, or to the world. In opposition to this dangerous plan of morality, the wise man exhorts us *to keep the heart*; that is, to attend not only to our actions, but to our thoughts and desires; and *to keep the heart with all diligence*, that is, with sedulous and unremitting care; for which he assigns this reason, that *out of the heart are the issues of life*.—In discoursing on this subject I purpose to consider, separately, the government of the thoughts, of the passions, and of the temper. But before entering on any of these, let us begin with enquiring, in what sense *the issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart*; that we may discern the force of the argument which the text suggests, to recommend this great duty of *keeping the heart*.

The issues of life are justly said to be out of the heart, because the state of the heart is what determines our moral character, and what forms our chief happiness or misery.

First, It is the state of the heart which determines our moral character. The tenor of our actions will always correspond to the dispositions that prevail within. To dissemble, or to suppress them, is a fruitless attempt. In spite of our efforts, they will perpetually break forth in our behaviour. On whatever side the weight of inclination hangs, it will draw the practice after it. In vain, therefore, you study to preserve your hands clean, unless you resolve at the same time to keep your heart pure.

*Make the tree good, as our Saviour directs, and then its fruits will be good also. For out of the heart proceed not only evil thoughts, but murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.** If that fountain be once poisoned, you can never expect that salubrious streams will flow from it. Throughout the whole of their course, they will carry the taint of the parent spring.

But it is not merely from its influence on external action that the importance of the heart to our moral character arises. Independent of all action, it is, in truth, the state of the heart itself which forms our character in the sight of God. With our fellow-creatures, actions must ever hold the chief rank; because, by these only we can judge of one another; by these we effect each other's welfare; and therefore to these alone the regulation of human law extends. But in the eye of that Supreme Being, to whom our whole internal frame is uncovered, dispositions hold the place of actions; and it is not so much what we perform, as the motive which moves us to performance, that constitutes us good or evil in his sight. Even among men, the morality of actions is estimated by the principle from which they are judged to proceed; and such as the principle is, such is the man accounted to be. One, for instance, may spend much of his fortune in charitable actions; and yet, if he is believed to be influenced by mere ostentation, he is deemed not charitable, but vain. He may labour unweariedly to serve the public; but if he is prompted by the desire of rising into power, he is held not public-spirited, but ambitious: and if he bestows a benefit, purely that he may receive a greater in return, no man would reckon him generous, but selfish and interested. If reason thus clearly teaches us to estimate the value of actions by the dispositions which give them birth, it is an obvious conclusion, that according to those dispositions, we are all ranked and classed by him who seeth into every heart. The rectification of our principles of action, is the primary object of religious discipline; and, in proportion as this is more or less advanced, we are more or less religious. Accordingly, the regeneration of the heart is every where represented in the Gospel as the most essential requisite in the character of a Christian.

SECONDLY, The state of the heart not only determines our moral character, but forms our principal happiness or misery. External situations of fortune are no farther of consequence, than as they operate on the heart; and their operation there is far from corresponding to the degree of worldly prosperity or adversity. If, from any internal cause, a man's peace of mind be disturbed, in vain you load him with all the honours or rich-

* Matth. xv. 19.

es which the world can bestow. They remain without, like things at a distance from him. They reach not the source of enjoyment. Discomposed thoughts, agitated passions, and a ruffled temper, poison every ingredient of pleasure which the world holds out; and overcasts every object which presents itself, with a melancholy gloom. In order to acquire a capacity of happiness, it must be our first study to rectify such inward disorders. Whatever discipline tends to accomplish this purpose, is of greater importance to man, than the acquisition of the advantages of fortune. These are precarious, and doubtful in their effect; internal tranquillity is a certain good. These are only means, but that is the end. These are no more than instruments of satisfaction; that is, satisfaction itself.

Justly it is said by the Wise Man, that *he who hath no rule over his spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.** All is waste; all is in disorder and ruins within him. He possesses no defence against dangers of any sort. He lies open to every insurrection of ill-humour, and every invasion of distress. Whereas he who is employed in regulating his mind, is making provision against all the accidents of life. He is erecting a fortress, into which, in the day of danger he can retreat with safety. And hence, amidst those endeavours to secure happiness, which incessantly employ the life of man, the careful regulation, or the improvident neglect of the inward frame forms the chief distinction between wisdom and folly.

THUS it appears with how much propriety the *issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart*. Here rise those great springs of human conduct whence the main currents flow of our virtue, or our vice; of our happiness or our misery. Besides this powerful argument for *keeping the heart with all diligence*, I must mention another important consideration taken from the present state of human nature. Think what your heart now is, and what must be the consequence of remitting your vigilance of watching over it. With too much justice it is said in Scripture, to be *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. Its bias of innate corruption gives it a perpetual tendency downwards into vice and disorder. To direct and impel it upwards, requires a constant effort. Experience may convince you, that almost every desire has a propensity to wander into an improper direction; that every passion tends to excess; and that around your imagination there perpetually crowds a whole swarm of vain and corrupting thoughts. After all the care that can be bestowed by the best men on the regulation of the heart, it frequently baffles their efforts to keep it under proper discipline. Into what universal tumult then must it rise, if no vigilance be employed, and no govern-

* Prov. xvi. 23.

ment be exercised over it? Inattention and remissness are all that the great adversary of mankind desires, in order to gain full advantage. While you *sleep, he sows his tares in the field.* The house which he finds vacant and unguarded, he presently *garnishes with evil spirits.*

Add to this, that the human temper is to be considered as a system, the parts of which have a mutual dependence on each other. Introduce disorder into any one part, and you derange the whole. Suffer but one passion to go out of its place, or to acquire an unnatural force, and presently the balance of the soul will be broken; its powers will jar among themselves, and their operations become discordant.—*Keep thy heart, therefore, with all diligence,* for all thy diligence is here required. And though thine own keeping alone will not avail, unless the assistance of a higher power concur, yet of this be well assured, that no aid from heaven is to be expected, if thou shalt neglect to exert thyself in performing the part assigned thee.

HAVING NOW shown the importance of exercising government over the heart, I proceed to consider more particularly in what the government consists, as it respects the thoughts, the passions, and the temper.

I begin with the thoughts, which are the prime movers of the whole human conduct. All that makes a figure on the great theatre of the world, the employments of the busy, the enterprises of the ambitious, and the exploits of the warlike, the virtuous which form the happiness, and the crimes which occasion the misery of mankind, originate in that silent and secret recess of thought which is hidden from every human eye. The secrecy and silence which reign there, favour the prejudice, entertained by too many, that thought is exempted from all control. Passions, they perhaps admit, require government and restraint, because they are violent emotions, and disturb society. But with their thoughts, they plead, no one is concerned. By these, as long as they remain in their bosom, no offence can be given, and no injury committed. To enjoy unrestrained the full range of imagination, appears to them the native right and privilege of man.

Had they to do with none but their fellow-creatures, such reasoning might be specious. But they ought to remember, that in the sight of the Supreme Being, thoughts bear the character of good or evil as much as actions; and that they are, in especial manner, the subjects of Divine jurisdiction because they are cognizable at no other tribunal. The moral regulation of our thoughts, is the particular test of our reverence for God. If we restrain our passions from breaking forth into open disorders, while we abandon our imagination in secret to corruption, we show that virtue rests with us upon regard to men; and that

however we may act a part in public with propriety, there is before our eyes no fear of that God who *searcheth the heart, and requireth truth in the inward parts.*

But, even abstracting from this awful consideration, the government of our thoughts must appear to be of high consequence, from their direct influence on conduct. It is plain, that thought gives the first impulse to every principle of action. Actions are, in truth, no other than thoughts ripened into consistency and substance. So certain is this, that to judge with precision of the character of any man, and to foretel with confidence what part he will act, no more were requisite, than to be rendered capable of viewing the current of thought which passes most frequently within him. Though by such a method we have no access to judge of one another, yet thus it is always in our power to judge of ourselves. Each of us, by impartially scrutinizing his indulged and favourite thoughts, may discover the whole secret of his real character. This consideration alone is sufficient to show of what importance the government of thought is to the *keeping of the heart.*

BUT, supposing us convinced of its importance, a question may arise, how far it is within our power, and in what degree thoughts are subject to the command of the will? It is plain that they are not always the offspring of choice. Often they are inevitably impressed upon the mind by surrounding objects. Often they start up, as of themselves, without any principle of introduction which we are able to trace. *As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth,* equally rapid in its transition, and inscrutable in its progress, is the course of thought. Moving along a train of connections which are too delicate for our observation, it defeats all endeavours either to explore or to stop its path. Hence vain and fantastic imaginations sometimes break in upon the most settled attention, and disturb even the devout exercises of pious minds. Instances of this sort must be placed to the account of human frailty. They are misfortunes to be deplored, rather than crimes to be condemned; and our gracious Creator, who *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*: will not be severe in marking every such error, and wandering of the mind. But, after these allowances are made, still there remains much scope for the proper government of thought; and a multitude of cases occur, in which we are no less accountable for what we think, than for what we do.

As, first, when the introduction of any train or thought depends upon ourselves, and is our voluntary act; by turning our attention towards such objects, awakening such passions, or engaging in such employments, as we know must give a peculiar determination to our thoughts. Next, when thoughts, by

whatever accident they may have been originally suggested, are indulged with deliberation and complacency. Though the mind has been passive in their reception, and therefore free from blame; yet, if it be active in their continuance, the guilt becomes its own. They may have intruded at first, like unbidden guests; but if, when entered, they are made welcome, and kindly entertained, the case is the same as if they had been invited from the beginning. If we be thus accountable to God for thoughts either voluntarily introduced or deliberately indulged, we are no less so, in the last place, for those which find admittance into our hearts from supine negligence, from total relaxation of attention, from allowing our imagination to rove with entire licence, *like the eyes of the fool, towards the ends of the earth*. Our minds are, in this case, thrown open to folly and vanity. They are prostituted to every evil thing which pleases to take possession. The consequences must all be charged to our account; and in vain we plead excuse from human infirmity. Hence it appears, that the great object at which we are to aim in governing our thoughts, is, to take the most effectual measures for preventing the introduction of such as are sinful, and for hastening their expulsion, if they shall have introduced themselves without consent of the will.

But when we descend into our breasts, and examine how far we have studied to keep this object in view, who can tell *how oft he hath offended*? In no article of religion or morals are men more culpably remiss, than in the unrestrained indulgence they give to fancy; and that too, for most part, without remorse.—Since the time that Reason began to exert her power, Thought, during our waking hours, has been active in every breast, without a moment's suspension or pause. The current of ideas has been always flowing. The wheels of the spiritual engine have circulated with perpetual motion. Let me ask, what has been the fruit of this incessant activity with the greatest part of mankind? Of the innumerable hours that have been employed in thought, how few are marked with any permanent or useful effect! How many have either passed away in idle dreams, or have been abandoned to anxious discontented musings; to unsocial and malignant passions, or to irregular and criminal desires! Had I power to lay open that store-house of iniquity, which the hearts of too many conceal; could I draw out and read to them a list of all the imaginations they have devised, and all the passions they have indulged in secret; what a picture of men would I present to themselves! What crimes would they appear to have perpetrated in fancy, which to their most intimate companions they durst not reveal!

Even when men imagine their thoughts to be innocently employed, they too commonly suffer them to run out into extravagance

gant imaginations, and chimerical plans of what they could wish to attain, or choose to be, if they could frame the course of things according to their desire. Though such employments of fancy come not under the same description with those which are plainly criminal, yet wholly unblameable they seldom are. Besides the waste of time which they occasion, and the misapplication which they indicate of those intellectual powers that were given to us for much nobler purposes, such romantic speculation leads us always into the neighbourhood of forbidden regions. They place us on dangerous ground. They are for the most part connected with some one bad passion; and they always nourish a giddy and frivolous turn of thought. They unfit the mind for applying with vigour to rational pursuits, or for acquiescing in sober plans of conduct. From that ideal world in which it allows itself to dwell, it returns, to the commerce of men, unbent and relaxed, sickly and tainted, averse from discharging the duties, and sometimes disqualified even for relishing the pleasures of ordinary life. *Oh Jerusalem! wash thine heart from wickedness. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?**—In order to guard against all such corruption and abuses of thought as I have mentioned, it may be profitable to attend to the following rules:

IN the first place, study to acquire the habit of attention to thought. No study is more important, for in proportion to the degree in which this habit is possessed, such commonly is the degree of intellectual improvement. It is the power of attention which in a great measure distinguishes the wise and the great from the vulgar and trifling herd of men. The latter are accustomed to think, or rather to dream without knowing the subject of their thoughts. In their unconnected roving, they pursue no end; they follow no track. Every thing floats loose and disjointed on the surface of their mind; like leaves scattered and blown about on the surface of their waters.

In order to lead your thoughts into any useful direction, your first care must be, to acquire the power of fixing them, and of restraining their irregular motions. Inure yourself to form a plan of proper meditation; to pursue it steadily; and with severe authority to keep the door shut against intrusions of wandering fancy. Let your mind, for this purpose, become a frequent object to itself. Let your thoughts be made the subject of thought and review.—“To what is my attention at present directed? Could I disclose it without a blush to the world? Were God instantly to call me into judgment, what account could I give of it to him? Shall I be the wiser or the better for dwelling on such thoughts as now fill my mind? Are

* Jerem. iv. 15.

“they entirely consistent with my innocence, and with my present and future peace? If they are not, to what purpose do I indulge such unprofitable or dangerous musings?”—By frequent exercise of this inward scrutiny, we might gradually bring imagination under discipline, and turn the powers of thought to their proper use as means of improvement, instead of suffering them to be only the instruments of vanity and guilt.

IN the second place, in order to the government of thought, it is necessary to guard against idleness. Idleness is the great fomenter of all corruptions in the human heart. In particular, it is the parent of loose imaginations and inordinate desires. The ever active and restless power of thought, if not employed about what is good, will naturally and unavoidably engender evil.—Imagine not that mere occupation, of whatever kind it be, will exempt you from the blame and danger of an idle life. Perhaps the worst species of idleness is a dissipated, though seemingly busy life, spent in the haunts of loose society, and in the chace of perpetual amusement. Hence a giddy mind, alternately elated and dejected with trifles, occupied with no recollection of the past but what is fruitless, and with no plans for the future but what are either frivolous or guilty,

As, therefore, you would govern your thoughts, or indeed as you would have any thoughts that are worthy of being governed, provide honourable employment for the native activity of your minds. Keep knowledge, virtue, and usefulness, ever in view. Let your life proceed in a train of such pursuits as are worthy of a Christian, of a rational and social being. While these are regularly carried on as the main business of life, let amusement possess no more than its proper place in the distribution of your time. Take particular care that your amusements be of an irreproachable kind, and that all your society be either improving or innocent. So shall the stream of your thoughts be made to run in a pure channel. Manly occupations and virtuous principles will expel the taint, which idleness never fails to communicate to the vacant mind.

IN the third place, when criminal thoughts arise, attend to all the proper methods of speedily suppressing them. Take example from the unhappy industry which sinners discover in banishing good ones, when a natural sense of religion forces them on their conscience. How anxiously do they fly from themselves! How studiously do they drown the voice which upbraids them in the noise of company or diversion! What numerous artifices do they employ to evade the uneasiness which returns of reflection would produce!—Where we to use equal diligence in preventing the entrance of vicious suggestions, or in expelling them when entered, why should we not be equally successful in a much better cause? As soon as you are sensible that any dangerous

passion begins to ferment, instantly call in other passions, and other ideas, to your aid. Hasten to turn your thoughts into a different direction. Summon up whatever you have found to be of power for composing and harmonizing your mind. Fly for assistance to serious studies, to prayer, and devotion; or even fly to business, or innocent society, if solitude be in hazard of favouring the seduction. By such means you may stop the progress of the growing evil. You may apply an antidote, before the poison has had time to work its full effect.

In the fourth place, it will be particularly useful to impress your minds with an habitual sense of the presence of the Almighty. When we reflect what a strong check the belief of Divine Omniscience is calculated to give to all criminal thoughts, we are tempted to suspect that even by Christians this article of faith is not received with sincere conviction. For who but must confess, that if he knew a parent, a friend, or a neighbour, to have the power of looking into his heart, he durst not allow himself that unbounded scope which he now gives to his imagination and desire? Whence, then, comes it to pass, that men, without fear or concern, bring into the presence of the awful Majesty of Heaven, that folly and licentiousness of thought which would make them blush and tremble, if one of their own fellow-creatures could descry it? At the same time, no principle is supported by clearer evidence, than the omniscience of God. All religious sects have admitted it, all societies of men, in their oaths and covenants appeal to it. The Sovereign of the universe cannot but know what passes throughout his dominions. He who supports all nature, must needs pervade and fill it. He who formed the heart, is certainly conscious to what passes within it.

Never let this great article of faith escape from your view. In thinking, as well as in acting, accustom yourselves to look up with reverence to that piercing eye of Divine observation, which *never slumbers nor sleeps*. Behold a pen always writing over your head, and making up that great record of your thoughts, words, and actions, from which at last you are to be judged. Think that you are never less alone, than when by yourselves; for then is he stil! with you, whose inspection is of greater consequence than that of all mankind. Let these awful considerations not only check the dissipation of corrupt fancy, but infuse into your spirits that solemn composure which is the parent of meditation and wisdom. Let them not only expel what is evil, but introduce in its stead what is pure and holy; elevating your thoughts to divine and eternal objects, and acting as the counterpoise to those attractions of the world, which would draw your whole attention downwards to sense and vanity.

SERMON XVIII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.—PROVERBS, iv. 23.

HAVING treated, in the foregoing discourse, of the government of the thoughts, I proceed to consider the government of the passions, as the next great duty included in the *keeping of the heart*.

Passions are strong emotions of the mind, occasioned by the view of apprehending good or evil. They are original parts of the constitution of our nature; and therefore to extirpate them is a mistaken aim. Religion requires no more of us, than to moderate and rule them. When our blessed Lord assumed the nature, without the corruption, of man, he was subject to like passions with us. On some occasions, he felt the risings of anger. He was often touched with pity. He was *grieved in spirit*; he sorrowed, and he wept.

Passions, when properly directed, may be subservient to very useful ends. They rouse the dormant powers of the soul. They are even found to exalt them. They often raise a man above himself, and render him more penetrating, vigorous, and masterly, than he is in his calmer hours. Actuated by some high passion, he conceives great designs, and surmounts all difficulties in the execution. He is inspired with more lofty sentiments, and endowed with more persuasive utterance, than he possesses at any other time. Passions are the active forces of the soul. They are its highest powers brought into movement and exertion. But, like all other great powers, they are either useful or destructive, according to their direction and degree; as wind and fire are instrumental in carrying on many of the beneficent operations of nature; but when they rise to undue violence, or deviate from their proper course, their path is marked with ruin.

It is the present infelicity of human nature, that those strong emotions of the mind are become too powerful for the principle which ought to regulate them. This is one of the unhappy consequences of our apostacy from God, that the influence of reason is weakened, and that of passion strengthened within the heart. When man revolted from his Maker, his passions rebelled against himself; and, from being originally the ministers of reason, have become the tyrants of the soul. Hence, in treating of this subject, two things may be assumed as principles: first, that through the present weakness of the understanding, our passions are often directed towards improper objects; and next, that even when their direction is just, and their objects are innocent, they perpetually tend to run into excess; they always hurry us towards their gratification with a blind and dangerous impetuosity. On these two points then turns the whole government of our passions: first, to ascertain the proper objects of their pursuit; and next, to restrain them in that pursuit, when they would carry us beyond the bounds of reason. If there be any passion which intrudes itself unseasonable into our mind, which darkens and troubles our judgment, or habitually discomposes our temper; which unfits for properly discharging the duties, or disqualifies us for cheerfully enjoying the comforts of life, we may certainly conclude it to have gained a dangerous ascendant. The great object which we ought to propose to ourselves is, to acquire a firm and stedfast mind, which the infatuation of passion shall not seduce, nor its violence shake; which, resting on fixed principles, shall, in the midst of contending emotions, remain free and master of itself; able to listen calmly to the voice of conscience, and prepared to obey its dictates without hesitation.

To obtain, if possible, such command of passion, is one of the highest attainments of the rational nature. Arguments to show its importance crowd upon us from every quarter. If there be any fertile source of mischief to human life, it is, beyond doubt, the misrule of passion. It is this which poisons the enjoyment of individuals, overturns the order of society, and strews the path of life with so many miseries, as to render it indeed the valley of tears. All those great scenes of public calamity, which we behold with astonishment and horror, have originated from the source of violent passions. These have overspread the earth with bloodshed. These have pointed the assassin's dagger, and filled the poisoned bowl. These, in every age, have furnished too copious materials for the orator's pathetic declamation, and for the poet's tragical song.

When from public life we descend to private conduct, though passion operate not there in such a wide and destructive sphere, we shall find its influence to be no less baneful. I need not mention the black and fierce passions, such as envy, jealousy, and

revenge, whose effects are obviously noxious, and whose agitations are immediate misery. But take any of the licentious and sensual kind. Suppose it to have unlimited scope; trace it throughout its course; and you will find that gradually, as it rises, it taints the soundness, and troubles the peace, of his mind over whom it reigns; that in its progress, it engages him in pursuits which are marked either with danger or with shame; that in the end, it wastes his fortune, destroys his health, or debases his character; and aggravates all the miseries in which it has involved him, with the concluding pangs of bitter remorse.—Through all the stages of this fatal course, how many have heretofore run! What multitudes do we daily behold pursuing it, with blind and headlong steps!

But, on the evils which flow from unrestrained passions, it is needless to enlarge. Hardly are there any so ignorant or inconsiderate as not to admit, that where passion is allowed to reign, both happiness and virtue must be impaired. I proceed therefore to what is of more consequence, to suggest some directions which may be useful in assisting us to preserve the government of our passions.

IN the first place, we must study to acquire just views of the comparative importance of those objects that are most ready to attract desire. The erroneous opinions which we form concerning happiness and misery, give rise to all the mistaken and dangerous passions which embroil our life. We suffer ourselves to be dazzled by unreal appearances of pleasure. We follow, with precipitancy, whithersoever the crowd leads. We admire, without examination, what our predecessors have admired. We fly from every shadow at which we see others tremble. Thus, agitated by vain fears and deceitful hopes, we are hurried into eager contests about objects which are in themselves of no value. By rectifying our opinions, we should strike at the root of the evil. If our vain imaginations were chastened, the tumult of our passions would subside.

It is observed, that the young and the ignorant are always the most violent in pursuit. The knowledge which is forced upon them by longer acquaintance with the world, moderates their impetuosity. Study then to anticipate, by reflection, that knowledge which experience often purchases at too dear a price. Inure yourselves to frequent consideration of the emptiness of those pleasures which excite so much strife and commotion among mankind. Think how much more of true enjoyment is lost by the violence of passion, than by the want of those things which give occasion to that passion. Persuade yourselves, that the favour of God and the possession of virtue form the chief happiness of the rational nature. Let a contented mind, and a peaceful life, hold the next place in your estimation. These are

the conclusion which the wise and thinking part of mankind have always formed. To these conclusions, after having run the race of passion, you will probably come at the last. By forming them betimes, you would make a seasonable escape from that tempestuous region; through which none can pass without suffering misery, contracting guilt, and undergoing severe remorse.

In the second place, in order to attain the command of passion, it is requisite to acquire the power of self-denial. The self-denial of a christian consists not in perpetual austerity of life, and universal renunciation of the innocent comforts of the world. Religion requires no such unnecessary sacrifices, nor is any such foe to present enjoyment. It consists in our being ready, on proper occasions, to abstain from pleasure, or to submit to suffering for the sake of duty and conscience, or from a view to some higher and more extensive good. If we possess not this power, we shall be the prey of every loose inclination that chances to arise. Pampered by continual indulgence, all our passions will become mutinous and headstrong. Desire, not reason, will be the ruling principle of our conduct.

As, therefore, you would keep your passions within due bounds, you must betimes accustom them to know the reins. You must not wait till some critical occasion for the exercise of self-denial occur. In vain you will attempt to act with authority, if your first essay be made when temptation has inflamed the mind. In cooler hours, you must sometimes abridge your enjoyment even of what is innocent. In the midst of lawful pleasure, you must maintain moderation, abstemiousness, and self-command. The observance of this discipline is the only method of supporting reason in its proper ascendent. For if you allow yourselves always to stretch to the utmost point of innocence and safety, beyond that point you will infallibly be hurried, when passion shall arise in its might to shake the heart.

In the third place, impress your minds deeply with this persuasion, that nothing is what it appears to be when you are under the power of passion. Be assured, that no judgment which you then form, can be in the least depended upon as sound or true. The fumes which arise from a heart boiling with violent passions, never fail to darken and trouble the understanding. When the gourd withered, under the shade of which the prophet Jonah reposed, his mind, already ruffled by the disappointment of his predictions, lost, on occasion of this slight incident, all command of itself; and in the midst of his impatience, he *wished to die rather than to live*. Instead of being calmed by that expostulating voice, *Dost thou well, oh Jonah! to be angry because of the gourd?* he replied with great emotion, *I do well to be angry even unto death*. But did Jonah think so when his passion had abated? Do these sentiments bear the least resemblance to

that humble and devout prayer, which on another occasion, when in his calm mind, he put up to God? No two persons can differ more from each other, than the same person differs from himself, when agitated by passion, and when master of his reason. *I do well to be angry*, is the language of every man when his mind is inflamed. Every passion justifies itself. It brings in a thousand pretences to its aid. It borrows many a false colour, to hide its deformity. It possesses a sort of magic, by which it can magnify or diminish objects at pleasure, and transform the appearance of every thing within its sphere.

Let the knowledge of this imposture which passion practises, place you continually on your guard. Let the remembrance of it be ever at hand, to check the extravagant judgments which you are apt to pass in those moments of delusion. Listen to no suggestion which then arises. Form no conclusions on which you are to act. Assure yourselves that every thing is beheld through a false medium. Have patience for a little, and the illusion will vanish; the atmosphere will clear up around you, and objects return to be viewed in their native colours and just dimensions.

In the fourth place, oppose early the beginnings of passion. Avoid particularly all such objects as are apt to excite passions which you know to predominate within you. As soon as you find the tempest rising, have recourse to every proper method either of allaying its violence, or of escaping to a calmer shore. Hasten to call up emotions of an opposite nature. Study to conquer one passion by means of some other which is of less dangerous tendency. Never account any thing small or trivial which is in hazard of introducing disorder in your heart. Never make light of any desire which you feel gaining such progress as to threaten entire dominion. Blandishing it will appear at the first. As a gentle and innocent emotion, it may steal into the heart; but as it advances, it is likely to *pierce you through with many sorrows*. What you indulged as a favourite amusement, will shortly become a serious business; and in the end may prove the burden of your life. Most of our passions flatter us in their rise. But, their beginnings are treacherous; their growth is imperceptible; and the evils which they carry in their train lie concealed, until their dominion is established. What Solomon says of one of them, holds true of them all, that their *beginning is as when one letteth out water*.† It issues from a small chink, which once might have been easily stopped: but, being neglected, it is soon widened by the stream; till the bank is at last totally thrown down and the flood is at liberty to deluge the whole plain.

* See Jonah, ii.

† Prov. xvii. 14.

IN the fifth place, the excess of every passion will be moderated by frequent meditation on the vanity of the world, the short continuance of life, the approach of death, judgment, and eternity. The imaginary degree of importance which the neglect of such meditation suffers us to bestow on temporal things, is one great cause of our vehemence in desire, and our eagerness in pursuit. We attach ourselves to the objects around us, as if we could enjoy them for ever. Higher and more enlarged prospects of the destination of man, would naturally cool his misplaced ardour. For what can appear so considerable in human affairs, as to discompose or agitate the mind of him to whose view eternity lies open, and all the greatness of the universe of God? How contemptible will seem to him this hurry of spirits, this turmoil of passion, about things which are so soon to end? Where are they who once disturbed the world with the violence of their contests, and filled it with the renown of their exploits? What now remains of their designs and enterprises, of their passions and pursuits, of their triumphs and their glory? The flood of time has passed over them, and swept them away, as if they had never been. The *fashion of the world* changes continually around us. We succeed one another in the human course, like troops of pilgrims on their journey. Absurdly we spend our time in contending about the trifles of a day, while we ought to be preparing for a higher existence. Eternity is just at hand to close this introductory scene. It is fast rolling towards us, like the tide of a vast ocean, ready to swallow up all human concerns, and to leave no trace behind it, except the consequences of our good or bad deeds, which shall last forever.——Let such reflections allay the heat of passion. Let them reduce all human things to their proper standard. From frivolous pursuits let them recall our attention to objects of real importance; to the proper business of man; to the improvement of our nature, the discharge of our duty, the rational and religious conduct of human life.

IN the last place, to our own endeavours for regulating our passions, let us join earnest prayer to God. Here, if any where, divine assistance is requisite. For such is the present blindness and imperfection of human nature, that even to discover all the disorders of our heart, is become difficult; much more, to rectify them, is beyond our power. To that superior aid, then, which is promised to the pious and upright, let us look up with humble minds; beseeching the Father of mercies, that while we study to act our own part with resolution and vigilance, he would forgive our returning weakness; would strengthen our constancy in resisting the assaults of passion; and enable us by his grace so to govern our minds, that without considerable interruptions we may proceed in a course of piety and virtue.

IT now remains to treat of the government of temper, as included in the *keeping of the heart*. Passions are quick and strong emotions, which by degrees subside. Temper is the disposition which remains after these emotions are past, and which forms the habitual propensity of the soul. The passions are like the stream when it is swoln by the torrent, and ruffled by the winds. The temper resembles it when running within its bed, with its natural velocity and force. The influence of temper is more silent and imperceptible than that of passion. It operates with less violence; but as its operation is constant, it produces effects no less considerable. It is evident, therefore, that it highly deserves to be considered in a religious view.

Many, indeed, are averse to behold it in this light. They place a good temper upon the same footing with a healthy constitution of body. They consider it as a natural felicity which some enjoy; but for the want of which, others are not morally culpable, nor accountable to God; and hence the opinion has sometimes prevailed, that a bad temper might be consistent with a state of grace. If this were true, it would overturn that whole doctrine, of which the Gospel is so full, that regeneration, or change of nature, is the essential characteristic of a Christian. It would suppose that grace might dwell amidst malevolence and rancour, and that heaven might be enjoyed by such as are strangers to charity and love.—It will readily be admitted, that some, by the original frame of their mind, are more favourably inclined than others towards certain good dispositions and habits. But this affords no justification of those who neglect to oppose the corruptions to which they are prone. Let no man imagine that the human heart is a soil altogether unsusceptible of culture; or that the worst temper may not, through the assistance of grace, be reformed by attention and discipline. Settled depravity of temper is always owing to our own indulgence. If, in place of checking, we nourish that malignity of disposition to which we are inclined, all the consequences will be placed to our account, and every excuse from natural constitution be rejected at the tribunal of Heaven.

The proper regulation of temper affects the character of man in every relation which he bears; and includes the whole circle of religious and moral duties. This, therefore, is a subject of too great extent to be comprehended in one discourse. But it may be useful to take a general view of it; and before we conclude the doctrine of *keeping the heart*, to show what the habitual temper of a good man ought to be, with respect to God, to his neighbour, and to himself.

FIRST, With respect to God, what he ought to cultivate is a devout temper. This imports more than the care of performing the offices of religious worship. It denotes the sensibility

of heart towards the Supreme Being, which springs from a deep impression of his perfection on the soul. It stands opposed, not only to that disregard of God which forms the description of the impious, but to that absence of religious affections which sometimes prevails among those who are imperfectly good. They acknowledge, perhaps, the obligations of duty. They feel some concern to *work out their salvation*. But they apply to their duty through mere constraint; and serve God without affection or complacency. More liberal and generous sentiments animate the man who is of a devout temper. God dwells upon his thoughts as a benefactor and a father, to whose voice he harkens with joy. Amidst the occurrences of life, his mind naturally opens to the admiration of his wisdom, the reverence of his power, the love of his transcendent goodness. All nature appears to his view as stamped with the impress of these perfections. Habitual gratitude to his Maker for mercies past and cheerful resignation to his will in all time to come, are the native effusions of his heart.

Such a temper as this deserves to be cultivated with the utmost attention; for it contributes, in a high degree, both to our improvement and our happiness. It refines, and it exalts human nature. It softens that hardness which our hearts are ready to contract from frequent intercourse with this rugged world. It facilitates the discharge of every duty towards God and man. At the same time it is a temper peaceful and serene, elevated and rejoicing. It forms the current of our affections to flow in a placid tenor. It opens pleasing prospects to the mind. It banishes harsh and bitter passions; and places us above the reach of many of the annoyances of worldly life. When the temper is truly devout, *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keepeth the heart and soul*. I proceed,

SECONDLY, To point out the proper state of our temper with respect to one another. It is evident, in the general, that if we consult either public welfare or private happiness, Christian charity ought to regulate our disposition in mutual intercourse. But as this great principle admits of several diversified appearances, let us consider some of the chief forms under which it ought to show itself in the usual tenor of life. Universal benevolence to mankind, when it rests in the abstract, is a loose indeterminate idea, rather than a principle of real effect; and too often floats as an useless speculation in the head, instead of affecting the temper and the heart.

What first presents itself to be recommended, is a peaceable temper: a disposition averse to give offence, and desirous of cultivating harmony, and amicable intercourse in society. This supposes yielding and condescending manners, unwillingness to contend with others about trifles, and, in contests that are una-

voidable, proper moderation of spirit. Such a temper is the first principle of self-enjoyment. It is the basis of all order and happiness among mankind. The positive and contentious, the rude and quarrelsome, are the bane of society. They seemed destined to blast the small share of comfort which nature has here allotted to man. But they cannot disturb the peace of others, more than they break their own. The hurricane rages first in their own bosom, before it is let forth upon the world. In the tempest which they raise, they are always tost; and frequently it is their lot to perish.

A peaceable temper must be supported by a candid one, or a disposition to view the conduct of others with fairness and impartiality. This stands opposed to a jealous and suspicious temper, which ascribes every action to the worst motive, and throws a black shade over every character. As you would be happy in yourselves, or in your connections with others, guard against this malignant spirit. Study that charity *which thinketh no evil*; that temper, which, without degenerating into credulity, will dispose you to be just; and which can allow you to observe an error, without imputing it as a crime. Thus you will be kept free from that continual irritation which imaginary injuries raise in a suspicious breast; and will walk among men as your brethren, not your enemies.

But to be peaceable, and to be candid, is not all that is required of a good man. He must cultivate a kind, generous, and sympathizing temper, which feels for distress, wherever it is beheld; which enters into the concerns of his friends with ardour; and to all with whom he has intercourse, is gentle, obliging, and humane. How amiable appears such a disposition, when contrasted with a malicious or envious temper, which wraps itself up in its own narrow interest, looks with an evil eye on the success of others, and with an unnatural satisfaction feeds on their disappointments or miseries! How little does he know of the true happiness of life, who is a stranger to that intercourse of good offices and kind affections, which, by a pleasing charm, attach men to one another, and circulate joy from heart to heart!

You are not to imagine, that a benevolent temper finds no exercise, unless when opportunities offer of performing actions of high generosity, or of extensive utility. These may seldom occur. The condition of the greater part of mankind, in a good measure, precludes them. But in the ordinary round of human affairs, a thousand occasions daily present themselves, of mitigating the vexations which others suffer, of soothing their minds, of aiding their interest, of promoting their cheerfulness or ease. Such occasions may relate to the smaller incidents of life. But let us remember, that of small incidents the system of

human life is chiefly composed. The attentions which respect these, when suggested by real benignity of temper, are often more material to the happiness of those around us, than actions which carry the appearance of greater dignity and splendour. No wise or good man ought to account any rules of behaviour as below his regard, which tend to cement the great brotherhood of mankind in comfortable union.

Particularly amidst that familiar intercourse which belongs to domestic life, all the virtues of temper find an ample range. It is very unfortunate, that within that circle, men too often think themselves at liberty to give unrestrained vent to the caprice of passion and humour. Whereas there, on the contrary, more than any where, it concerns them to attend to the government of their heart; to check what is violent in their tempers, and to soften what is harsh in their manners. For there the temper is formed. There the real character displays itself. The forms of the world disguise men when abroad. But within his own family, every man is known to be what he truly is.—In all our intercourse, then, with others, particularly in that which is closest and most intimate, let us cultivate a peaceable, a candid, a gentle and friendly temper. This is the temper to which, by repeated injunctions, our holy religion seeks to form us. This was the temper of Christ. This is the temper of Heaven.

We are now to consider, thirdly, The proper state of temper, as it respects the individual himself. The basis of all the good dispositions which belong to this head, is humility. By this I understand, not that meanness of spirit which leads a man to undervalue himself, and to sink below his rank and character; but what the scripture expresses with great propriety, when it exhorts *every man, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly*.^{*} He who adopts all the flattering suggestions of self-love, and forms claims upon the world proportioned to the imaginary opinion which he has conceived of his merit, is preparing for himself a thousand mortifications. Whereas, by checking the risings of ill-founded vanity, and retreating within those bounds which a moderate estimation of our character prescribes, we escape the miseries which always pursue an arrogant mind, and recommend ourselves to the favour both of god and man.

Hence will naturally arise a contented temper, which is one of the greatest blessings that can be enjoyed by man, and one of the most material requisites to the proper discharge of the duties of every station. For, a fretful and discontented temper renders one incapable of performing aright any part in life. It is unthankful and impious towards God; and towards men.

^{*} Rom. xii. 3

provoking and unjust. It is a gangrene, which preys on the vitals, and infects the whole constitution with disease and putrefaction. Subdue pride and vanity, and you will take the most effectual method of eradicating this distemper. You will no longer behold the objects around you with jaundiced eyes. You will take in good part the blessings which Providence is pleased to bestow, and the degree of favour which your fellow-creatures are disposed to grant you. Viewing yourselves, with all your imperfections and failings, in a just light, you will rather be surprised at your enjoying so many good things, than discontented, because there are many which you want.

From a humble and contented temper will spring a cheerful one. This, if not in itself a virtue, is at least the garb in which virtue should be always arrayed. Piety and goodness ought never to be marked with that dejection which sometimes takes rise from superstition, but which is the proper portion only of guilt. At the same time, the cheerfulness belonging to virtue is to be carefully distinguished from that light and giddy temper which characterizes folly, and is so often found among the dissipated and vicious part of mankind. Their gaiety is owing to a total want of reflection; and brings with it the usual consequences of an unthinking habit, shame, remorse, and heaviness of heart, in the end. The cheerfulness of a well-regulated mind springs from a good conscience and the favour of Heaven, and is bounded by temperance and reason. It makes a man happy in himself, and promotes the happiness of all around him. It is the clear and calm sunshine of a mind illuminated by piety and virtue. It crowns all other good dispositions, and comprehends the general effect which they ought to produce on the heart.

SUCH, on the whole, is the temper, or habitual frame of mind, in a good man: Devout towards God; towards men, peaceable, candid, affectionate, and humane; within himself, humble, contented, and cheerful. To the establishment of this happy temper, all the directions which I before suggested for the due regulation of the thoughts, and for the government of the passions, naturally conduce; in this they ought to issue; and when this temper is thoroughly formed within us, then may the heart be esteemed to have been *kept with all diligence*. That we may be thus enabled to keep it, for the sake both of present enjoyment, and of preparation for greater happiness, let us earnestly pray to Heaven. A greater blessing we cannot implore of the Almighty, than that he who made the human heart, and who knows its frailties, would assist us to subject it to that discipline which religion requires, which reason approves, but which his grace alone can enable us to maintain.

SERMON XIX.

ON THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.—JAMES, i. 17.

THE divine nature, in some views, attracts our love; in others, commands our reverence; in all, is entitled to the highest attention from the human mind. We never elevate our thoughts, in a proper manner, towards the Supreme Being, without returning to our own sphere with sentiments more improved; and if, at any time, his greatness oppresses our thoughts, his moral perfections always afford us relief. His Almighty power, his infinite wisdom, and supreme goodness, are sounds familiar to our ears. In his immutability we are less accustomed to consider him; and yet it is this perfection which, perhaps, more than any other, distinguishes the divine nature from the human; gives complete energy to all its other attributes, and entitles it to the highest adoration. For, hence are derived the regular order of nature, and the steadfastness of the universe. Hence flows the unchanging tenor of those laws which, from age to age, regulate the conduct of mankind. Hence the uniformity of that government, and the certainty of those promises, which are the ground of our trust and security. Goodness could produce no more than feeble and wavering hopes, and power would command very imperfect reverence, if we were left to suspect that the plans which goodness had framed might alter, or that the power of carrying them into execution might decrease. The contemplation of God, therefore, as unchangeable in his nature and in all his perfections, must undoubtedly be fruitful both of instruction and of consolation to man. I shall first endeavour to illustrate, in some degree, the nature of the divine immutability; and then make application of it to our own conduct.

Every good and every perfect gift, cometh down from the Father of Lights. The title which, in the text, is given to the Deity, carries an elegant allusion to the Sun, the source of light, the

most universal benefactor of nature, the most regular and constant of all the great bodies with which we are acquainted in the universe. Yet even with the Sun there are certain degrees of *variableness*. He apparently rises and sets; he seems to approach nearer to us in summer, and to retire farther off in winter; his influence is varied by the seasons, and his lustre is affected by the clouds. Whereas, with him who is the *Father of Lights*, of whose everlasting brightness the glory of the Sun is but a faint image, there is no *shadow of turning*, nor the most distant approach to change. In his being or essence it is plain that alteration can never take place. For as his existence is derived from no prior cause, nor dependant on any thing without himself. his nature can be influenced by no power, can be affected by no accident, can be impaired by no time. From everlasting to everlasting, he continues the same. Hence it is said, that *he only hath immortality*; that is, he possesses it in a manner incommunicable to all other beings. Eternity is described as the *high and holy place in which he dwelleth*; it is a habitation in which none but the *Father of Lights* can enter. The name which he taketh to himself is, *I am*. Of other things, some have been and others shall be; but this is he, *which is, which was, and which is to come*. All time is his; it is measured out by him in limited portions to the various orders of created beings; but his own existence fills equally every point of duration; *the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*.

As in his essence, so in his attributes and perfections, it is impossible there can be any change. To imperfect natures only it belongs to improve and to decay. Every alteration which they undergo in their abilities or dispositions, flows either from internal defect, or from the influence of a superior cause. But as no higher cause can bring from without any accession to the divine nature, so within itself it contains no principle of decay. For the same reason that the self-existent Being was from the beginning powerful and wise, just and good, he must continue unalterably so for ever. Hence, with much propriety, the divine perfections are described in Scripture by allusions to those objects to which we ascribe the most permanent stability. *His righteousness is like the strong mountains. His mercy is in the heavens; and his faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.* These perfections of the divine nature differ widely from the human virtues, which are their faint shadows. The justice of men is at one time severe, at another time relenting; their goodness is sometimes confined to a partial fondness for a few, sometimes runs out into a blind indulgence towards all. But goodness and justice are in the Supreme Being calm and steady principles of action, which, enlightened by perfect wisdom, and never either

warped by partiality, or disturbed by passion, persevere in one regular and constant tenour. Among men, they may sometimes break forth with transient splendour, like those wandering fires which illuminate for a little the darkness of the night. But in God, they shine with that uniform brightness, which we can liken to nothing so much as to the untroubled, eternal lustre of the highest heavens.

From this follows what is chiefly material for us to attend to, that in the course of his operations towards mankind, in his councils and decrees, in his laws, his promises and in his threatenings, there is *no variableness nor shadow of turning* with the Almighty. *Known to him from the beginning were all his works*. In the divine idea the whole system of nature existed, long before the foundations of the earth were laid. When he said, *Let there be light*, he only realised the great plan which, from everlasting, he had formed in his own mind. Foreseen by him was every revolution which the course of ages was to produce.—Whatever the counsels of men can effect, was comprehended in his decree. No new emergency can arise to surprise him. No agitations of anger or of sorrow, or fear or of hope, can shake his mind or influence his conduct. He rests in the eternal possession of that Supreme beatitude, which neither the virtues nor the crimes of men can in the least effect. From a motive of overflowing goodness, he reared up the universe. As the eternal lover of righteousness, he rules it. The whole system of his government is fixed; his laws are irrevocable; and, what he once loveth, *he loveth to the end*. In scripture, indeed, he is sometimes said to *be grieved*, and to *repent*. But such expressions, it is obvious, are employed from accommodation to common conception; in the same manner as when bodily organs are, in other passages, ascribed to God. The scripture, as a rule of life addressed to the multitude, must make use of the language of men. The divine nature represented in its native sublimity, would have transcended all human conception. When, upon the reformation of sinners, God is said to *repent of the evil* which he hath threatened against them; this intimates no more than that he suits his dispensations to the alterations which takes place in the characters of men. His disposition towards good and evil continues the same, but varies in its application as its objects vary; just as the laws themselves, which are capable of no change of affection, bring rewards or punishments at different times to the same person, according as his behaviour alters. Immutability is indeed so closely connected with the notion of supreme perfection, that wherever any rational conceptions of a Deity have taken place, this attribute has been ascribed to him. Reason taught the wise and reflecting in every age to believe, that as what is eternal cannot die, so what is perfect can never vary, and that

the great Governor of the universe could be no other than an unchangeable Being.

FROM the contemplation of this obvious, but fundamental truth, let us proceed to the practical improvement of it. Let us consider what effect the serious consideration of it ought to produce on our mind and behaviour.

It will be proper to begin this head of discourse by removing an objection which the doctrine I have illustrated may appear to form against religious services, and in particular against the duty of prayer. To what purpose, it may be urged, is homage addressed to a Being whose purpose is unalterably fixed; to whom *our righteousness extendeth not*; whom by no arguments we can persuade, and by no supplications we can mollify? The objection would have weight, if our religious addresses were designed to work any alteration on God; either by giving him information of what he did not know; or by exciting affections which he did not possess; or by inducing him to change measures which he had previously formed. But they are only crude and imperfect notions of religion which can suggest such ideas. The change which our devotions are intended to make, is upon ourselves not upon the Almighty. Their chief efficacy is derived from the good dispositions which they raise and cherish in the human soul. By pouring out pious sentiments and desires before God, by adorning his perfection, and confessing our own unworthiness by expressing our dependance on his aid, our gratitude for his past favours, our submission to his present will, our trusts in his future mercy, we cultivate such affections as suit our place and station in the universe, and are thereby prepared for becoming objects of the divine grace. Accordingly, frequent assurances are given us in Scripture, that the prayers of sincere worshippers, preferred through the great Mediator, shall be productive of the happiest effects. *When they ask, they shall receive; when they seek, they shall find; when they knock, it shall be opened to them.* Prayer is appointed to be the channel for conveying the divine grace to mankind, because the wisdom of Heaven saw it to be one of the most powerful means of improving the human heart.

When religious homage is considered in this light, as a great instrument of spiritual and moral improvement, all the objections which scepticism can form from the divine immutability, conclude with no more force against prayer, than against every other mean of improvement which reason has suggested to man. If prayer be superfluous, because God is unchangeable, we might upon similar grounds conclude, that it is needless to labour the earth, to nourish our bodies or to cultivate our minds, because the fertility of the ground, the continuance of our life, and the degree of our understanding, depend upon an immutable Sover-

eign, and were from all eternity foreseen by him. Such absurd conclusions reason has ever repudiated. To every plain and sound understanding it has clearly dictated, that to explore the unknown purposes of Heaven belongs not to us; but that He who decrees the end, certainly requires the means; and that, in the diligent employment of all the means; which can advance either our temporal or spiritual felicity, the chief exertions of human wisdom and human duty consists. Assuming it then for an undoubted principle, that religion is a reasonable service, and that, though with the *Father of Lights* there be *no variableness*, the homage of his creatures is nevertheless, for the wisest reasons, required by him, I proceed to show what sentiments the contemplation of divine immutability should raise in our minds, and what duties it should chiefly enforce.

I. LET it excite us to admit and adore. Filled with profound reverence, let us look up to that Supreme Being who sits from everlasting on the throne of the universe; moving all things, but remaining immoveable himself; directing every revolution of the creation, but affected by no revolutions of events or of time. He beholds the heavens and the earth *wax old as a garment, and decay like a vesture*. At their appointed periods he raises up, or he dissolves worlds. But amidst all the convulsions of changing and perishing nature, his glory and felicity remain unaltered.—The view of great and stupendous objects in the natural world strikes the mind with solemn awe. What veneration, then, ought to be inspired by the contemplation of an object so sublime as the eternal and unchangeable Ruler of the universe! The composure and stillness of thought introduced by such a meditation, has a powerful tendency both to purify and to elevate the heart. It effaces, for a time, those trivial ideas, and extinguishes those low passions, which arise from the circle of vain and passing objects around us. It opens the mind to all the sentiments of devotion; and accompanies devotion with that profound reverence, which guards it from every improper excess. When we consider the Supreme Being as employed in works of love; when we think of his condescension to the human race in sending his Son to dwell on the earth; encouraged by favours, and warmed by gratitude, we are sometimes in danger of presuming too much on his goodness, and of indulging a certain fondness of affection, which is unsuitable to our humble and dependent state. It is necessary that he should frequently appear to our minds in all that majesty with which the immutability of his nature clothes him; in order that reverence may be combined with love, and that a mixture of sacred awe may chasten the rapturous effusions of warm devotion. Servile fear, indeed, would crush the spirit of ingenuous and affectionate homage. But that reverence which springs from elevated conceptions of the divine

nature, has a happy effect in checking the forwardness of imagination, restraining our affections within due bounds, and composing our thoughts at the same time that it exalts them.

When, from the adoration of the unchangeable perfection of the Almighty, we return to the view of our own state, the first sentiment which ought naturally to arise, is that of self-abasement. We are too apt to be lifted up by any little distinctions which we possess; and to fancy ourselves great, only because there are others whom we consider as less. But what is man, with all his advantages and boasted powers, before the eternal *Father of Lights*? With God there is no variableness; with man there is no stability. Virtue and vice divide the empire of his mind; and wisdom and folly alternately rule him. Hence he is changeable in his designs, fickle in his friendship, fluctuating in his whole character. His life is a series of contradictions. He is one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; sometimes obliged by experience to alter his purpose, and often led to change it through levity. Variable and unequal himself, he is surrounded with fleeting objects. He is placed as in the midst of a torrent, where all things are rolling by, and nothing keeps its place. He has hardly time to contemplate this scene of vicissitude, before he too is swept away. Thus circumstanced in himself, and in all the objects with which he is connected, let him be admonished to be humble and modest. Let the contemplation of the unchanging glory of his Creator inspire him with sentiments of due submission. Let it teach him to know his proper place; and check that vanity which is so ready to betray him into guilt.

Let the same meditation affect him with a deep sense of what he owes to the goodness of the Deity. His goodness never appears in so striking a light, as when viewed in connection with his greatness. The description which is given of him in the text, calls, in this view, for our particular attention. It presents to us the most amiable union of condescension with majesty, of the moral with the natural perfections of God, which can possibly be exhibited to the imagination of man. *From the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, cometh down every good and perfect gift.* The most independent of all Beings is represented as the most beneficent. He who is eternal and immutable, exalted above all, and incapable of receiving returns from any, is the liberal and unwearied Giver of every thing that is good.—Let such views of the divine nature not only call forth gratitude and praise, but prompt us to imitate what we adore. Let them show us that benevolence is divine; that to stoop from our fancied grandeur in order to assist and relieve one another, is so far from being any degradation of character, that it is our truest honour, and our nearest resemblance to *the Father of Lights.*

II. LET the consideration of the divine immutability convince us, that the method of attaining the favour of Heaven is one and invariable. Where the Almighty a capricious and inconstant Being, like man, we should be at a loss what tenour of conduct to hold. In order to conciliate his grace, we might think of applying sometimes to one supposed principle of his inclination, sometimes to another; and, bewildered amidst various attempts, would be overwhelmed with dismay. The guilty would essay to flatter him. The timid, sometimes by austere mortifications, sometimes by costly gifts, sometimes by obsequious rites, would try to appease him. Hence, in fact, have arisen all the corruptions of religious worship among men; from their forming the divine character upon their own, and ascribing to the Sovereign of the Universe the mutability of human passions. God is represented by the psalmist David as saying to the wicked, *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.** This continues to be the description of all the superstitious and enthusiastic sects, which, since the days of David, have sprung up in the world.

It is our peculiar happiness, under the Gospel, to have God revealed to us in his genuine character; as *without variableness or shadow of turning*. We know that at no time there is any change either in his affections, or in the plan of his administration. One light always shines upon us from above. One clear and direct path is always pointed out to man. The Supreme Being is, and was, and ever will be, the supporter of order and virtue; *the righteous Lord, loving righteousness*. The external forms of religion may vary; but under all dispensations which proceed from God, its substance is the same. It tends continually to one point, the purification of man's heart and life. This was the object of the original law of nature. This was the scope of the Mosaic institution amidst all its sacrifices and rites; and this is unquestionably the end of the Gospel. So invariably constant is God to this purpose, that the dispensation of mercy in Christ Jesus, which admits of the vicarious atonement and righteousness of a Redeemer, makes no change in our obligation to fulfil the duties of a good life. The Redeemer himself hath taught us, that to the end of time the moral law continues in its full force: and that *till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from it.†* This is the only institution known to men, whose authority is unchanging and constant. Human laws rise and fall with the empires that gave them birth. Systems of philosophy vary with the progress of knowledge and light. Manners, sentiments, and opinions, alter with the course of time. But throughout all ages, and amidst all revolutions, the rule of

* Psalm l. 21

† Matth. v. 18

moral and religious conduct is the same. It partakes of that immutability of the divine nature, on which it is founded. Such as it was delivered to the first worshippers of God, it continues to be, at this day, to us ; and such it shall remain to our posterity for ever.

III. LET the contemplation of this perfection of the divine nature, teach us to imitate, as far as our frailty will permit, that constancy and steadfastness which we adore. All the moral attributes of the Supreme Being are standards of character towards which we ought to aspire. But as in all these perfections there are properties peculiar to the divine nature, our endeavours to resemble them are laid under great restrictions by the dissimilarity between our nature and the divine. With respect to that attribute which we now consider, the circumstances are evident which preclude improper imitation. To man it is frequently necessary to correct his errors, and to change his conduct. An attempt, therefore, to continue wholly invariable, would, in our situation, be no other than imprudent and criminal obstinacy. But withal, the immediate rectitude of the Deity should lead us to aspire after fixedness of principle, and uniformity in conduct, as the glory of the rational nature. Impressed with the sense of that supreme excellence which results from unchanging goodness, faithfulness and truth, let us become ashamed of that levity which degrades the human character. Let us *ponder our paths*, act upon a well-regulated plan, and remain consistent with ourselves. Contemplating the glory of the Father of Lights, let us aim at being transformed, in some degree, *into the same image, from glory to glory*. Finally,

IV. LET the divine immutability become the ground of confidence and trust to good men, amidst all the revolutions of this uncertain world. This is one of the chief improvements to be made of the subject, and therefore requires full illustration.—There are three lights in which we may view the benefit redounding to us from that attribute of God which we now consider. It assures us of the constancy of Nature ; of the regular administration of Providence ; of the certain accomplishment of all the divine promises.

First, It gives us ground to depend on the constant and uniform course of Nature. On the unchangeableness of God rests the stability of the universe. What we call the laws of Nature, are no other than the decrees of the Supreme Being. It is because he is *without variableness, or shadow of turning*, that those laws have continued the same since the beginning of the world ; that the Sun so constantly observes his time of rising and going down ; that the seasons annually return ; the tides periodically ebb and flow ; the earth yields its fruit at stated intervals ; and the human body and mental powers advance to maturity by a

regular progress. In all those motions and operations which are incessantly going on throughout nature, there is no stop nor interruption; no change nor innovation; no deflection from their main scope. The same powerful and steady hand which gave the first impulse to the powers of Nature, restrains them from ever exceeding their prescribed line. Hence arises the chief comfort of our present life. We find ourselves in a regular and orderly world. We look forward to a known succession of events. We are enabled to form plans of action. From the cause, we calculate the effect; and from the past, we reason with confidence concerning the future.

Accustomed from our infancy to this constancy in Nature, we are hardly sensible of the blessing. Familiarity has the same effect here, as in many other enjoyments, to efface gratitude.—But let us, for a moment, take an opposite view of things. Let us suppose, that we had any cause to dread capriciousness, or change in the Power who rules the course of Nature; any ground to suspect that, but for one day, the Sun might not rise, nor the current of the waters hold their usual course, nor the laws of motion and vegetation proceed as we have been accustomed to behold them. What dismay would instantly fill all hearts! What horror would seem to overspread the whole face of Nature! What part could we act, or whither could we run, in the midst of convulsions, which overturned all the measures we had formed, for happiness, or for safety? The present abode of man would then become, as Job describes the region of the grave, *a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and the shadow of death; without any order: and where the light is as darkness.** With what joy ought we then to recognize an unvarying and steadfast Ruler, under whose dominion we have no such disasters to dread; but can depend on the course of Nature continuing to proceed as it has ever gone on, until the period shall arrive of its final dissolution!

But though the great laws of Nature be constant like their Author, yet in the affairs of men there is much variety and change. All that regards our present possessions and enjoyments was, for wise reasons, left, in a great measure, uncertain; and from this uncertainty arises the distress of human life. Sensible of the changes to which we lie open, we look round with anxious eyes, and eagerly grasp at every object which appears to promise us security. But in vain is the whole circle of human things explored with this view. There is nothing on earth so stable as to assure us of undisturbed rest, nor so powerful as to afford us constant protection. Time, death, and change, triumph over all the labours of men. What we build up, they in-

* Job, x. 22.

cessantly destroy. The public condition of nations, and the private fortunes of individuals, are alike subject to reverse. Life never retains long the same form. Its whole scenery is continually shifting round us.—Amidst those endless vicissitudes, what can give any firm consolation, any satisfying rest to the heart, except the dominion of a wise and righteous Sovereign, *with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning?* Though all things change, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as there is fixed and permanent goodness at the head of the universe, we are assured that the great interests of all good men shall be safe. That *river* perpetually flows, *the streams whereof make glad the city of God.* We know that the Supreme Being loved righteousness from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to love it to the last. Under his government none of those revolutions happen which have place among the kingdoms of the earth; where princes die, and new sovereigns ascend the throne; new ministers and new counsels succeed; the whole face of affairs is changed; and former plans fall into oblivion. But *the throne of the Lord is established for ever; and the thoughts of his heart endure to all generations.* We serve the same God whom our fathers worshipped, and whom our posterity shall adore. His unchanging dominion comprehends all events and all ages; establishes a connecting principle which holds together the past, the present, and the future; gives stability to things which in themselves are fluctuating, and extracts order from those which appear most confused. Well may *the earth rejoice, and the multitude of isles be glad,* because there reigneth over the universe such an immutable Lord.

Were you to un hinge this great article of faith; were you either to *say with the fool,* that there is *no God,* or to suppose with the superstitious, that the good who rules is variable and capricious; you would, indeed, *lay the axe to the root of the tree,* and cut down with one blow, the hope and security of mankind. For you would then leave nothing in the whole compass of nature, but a round of casual and transitory being; no foundation of trust, no protection to the righteous, no steadfast principle to uphold and to regulate the succession of existence. Instead of that magnificent spectacle which the world now exhibits, when beheld in connection with the divine government, it would then only present to view a multitude of short-lived creatures, springing out of the dust, wandering on the face of the earth without guide or protector, struggling for a few years against the torrent of uncertainty and change; and then sinking into utter oblivion, and vanishing like visions of the night. Mysterious obscurity would involve the beginning of things; disorder would mark their progress; and the blackness of darkness would cover their final result. Whereas, when faith enables us to recover

an universal sovereign, whose power never fails, and whose wisdom and goodness never change, the prospect clears up on every side. A ray from the great source of light seems to illuminate the whole creation. Good men discover a parent and a friend. They attain a fortress in every danger; a refuge amidst all storms; *a dwelling place in all generations.* They are no longer *afraid of evil tidings.* *Their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.*

THOUGH these reasonings, from the unchanging tenor of divine government, cannot but afford much comfort to good men, their satisfaction, however, becomes still more complete, when they consider the explicit promises which are given them in the word of God. The immutability of the divine purpose assures them most perfectly of those promises being fulfilled in due time, how adverse soever circumstances may at present appear to their accomplishment. *The strength of Israel is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said it, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* Men have the command only of the present time. When that is suffered to pass, changes may befall, either in their own state, or in the situation of things around them, which shall defeat their best intentions in our behalf, and render all their promises fruitless. Hence, even setting aside the danger of human inconstancy, the confidence which we can repose on any earthly protector is extremely imperfect. Man, in his highest glory, is but a reed floating on the stream of time, and forced to follow every new direction of the current. But God is *the rock of ages.* All time is equally in his hands. Intervening accidents cannot embarrass him; nor any unforeseen obstacle retard the performance of his most distant promise. *One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.* There is no vicissitude in the human state in which good men cannot take sanctuary with him as a sure and abiding friend; the safe conductor of their pilgrimage here, as well as the eternal rest of their souls hereafter. All their patrons may desert them, and all their friends may die; but *the Lord still lives, who is their rock; and the most high God, who is their Redeemer.* He hath promised that *he will not leave them when they are old, nor forsake them when their strength faileth;* and that even when *their hearts shall faint, and their flesh fail, he will be the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever.* His immutability is not only the ground of trust in him during their own abode on earth, but gives them the satisfaction of looking forward to the same wise and good administration as continued to the end of time. When departing hence, and bidding adieu to life, with all its changeful scenes, they can with comfort and peace leave their family, their friends, and their dearest concerns, in the hands of that God who reigneth forever, and whose *countenance shall ul-*

ways behold the upright with the same complacency. *My days are like a shadow that declineth, and I am withered like the grass. But thou, oh Lord, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance to all generations. The children of thy servants shall continue; and their seed shall be established before thee.**

SUCH are the benefits which good men may derive from meditating on God as *without variableness or shadow of turning*. It inspires them with sentiments of devout, humble, and grateful adoration. It points out to them the unvarying tenor of conduct which they ought to hold; checks their fickleness and inconstancy; and amidst all distresses and fears, affords them comfort. The immutability of God is the surest basis on which their hopes can be built. It is indeed the pillar on which the whole universe rests.—On such serious and solemn meditations let our thoughts often dwell, in order to correct that folly and levity which are so apt to take possession of the human heart. And if our minds be overawed, and even depressed with so high a view of the divine nature, let them be relieved by the reflection, that to this unchangeable God we are permitted to look up, through a gracious Mediator, who, though possessed of divine perfection, is not unconscious of human distress and frailty.

* Psalm, cii 11, 12, 28.

SERMON XX.

ON THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.—HEBREWS, iv. 15.

WHEN we compare the counsels of Providence with the plans of men, we find a like difference obtain, as in the works of nature compared with those of art. The works of art may, at first view, appear the most finished and beautiful; but when the eye is assisted to pry into their contexture, the nicest workmanship is discerned to be rough and blemished. Whereas the works of nature gain by the most accurate examination; and those which on a superficial survey appear defective or rude, the more intimately they are inspected, discover the more exact construction and consummate beauty. In the same manner, the systems of worldly policy, though at first they seem plausible and profound, soon betray in their progress, the narrowness of the human understanding; while those dispensations of Providence, which appeared to furnish objections either against the goodness or the wisdom of Heaven, have, upon a more extensive view of their consequences, frequently afforded the most striking proofs of both.

God manifested in the flesh, was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. It contradicted every prepossession which their confined ideas of religion and philosophy led them to entertain. If a superior Being was to interpose for the restoration of a degenerate world, they concluded that he would certainly appear in celestial majesty. But *the thoughts of God are not as the thoughts of men.* The divine wisdom saw it to be fit that the Saviour of mankind should *in all things be made like unto those whom he came to save.* By living as a man among men, he dispensed instruction in the most winning manner. He added to instruction the grace and the force of his own exam-

ple He accommodated that example to the most trying and difficult situations of human life; and, by suffering a painful death, he both taught men how to suffer and die; and, in that nature which had offended, he offered a solemn expiation to God for human guilt.

Besides these ends, so worthy of God, which were accomplished by the incarnation of Christ, another, of high importance, is suggested in the text. Human life is to good men, as well as to others, a state of suffering and distress. To supply them with proper consolation and encouragement during such a state, was one great purpose of the undertaking of Christ. With this view he assumed the office of their high priest, or mediator with God; and the encouragement which this office affords them, will be proportioned to their assured belief, first of his power, and next of his compassion. His power is set forth in the verse preceding the text, and the proper argument is founded upon it.—*Seeing that we have a great high priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.* But though it be encouraging to know that our high priest is the *Son of God*, and that he is *passed into the heavens*, yet these facts alone are not sufficient to render him the full object of our confidence. For, as the apostle afterwards observes, it belongs to the character of a high priest *to be taken from among men, that he may have compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way, seeing that he himself is compassed with infirmity.* In order then to satisfy us of our high priest's possessing also the qualifications of mercy and compassion, we are told that he is *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are.* The force of this consideration I purpose now to illustrate. I shall first explain the facts which are stated in the text, and then show how from these our Saviour's compassion is to be inferred, and in what manner it may be accommodated to the consolation and hope of good men amidst various exigencies of life.

THE assertion in the text of Christ's being *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*, plainly implies that he had full experience both of the external distresses, and of the internal sorrows of human nature. Assuming a body such as ours, he subjected himself to all the natural consequences of corporeal frailty. He did not choose for himself an easy and opulent condition, in order to glide through the world with the least molestation. He did not suit his mission to the upper ranks of mankind chiefly, by assimilating his state to theirs; but, born in meanness and bred up to labour, he submitted to the inconveniences of that poor and toilsome life which falls to the share of the most numerous part of the human race. Whatever is severe in the disregard of relations or the ingoatitude of friends, in the scorn of the

proud or the insults of the mean, in the virulence of reproach or the sharpness of pain, was undergone by Christ. Though his life was short, he familiarized himself in it with a wide compass of human woe; and there is almost no distressful situation to which we can be reduced, but what he has experienced before us. There is not the least reason to imagine that the eminence of his nature raised him above the sensations of trouble and grief. Had this been the case he would have been a sufferer in appearance only, not in reality; there would have been no merit in his patience, or in the resignation which he expressed. On the contrary it appears, from many circumstances, that the sensibility of his nature was tender and exquisite. He affected none of that hard indifference in which some ancient philosophers vainly glorified. He felt as a man, and he sympathised with the feelings of others. On different occasions we are informed that he was *troubled in spirit*, that *he groaned*, and that *he wept*. The relation of his agony in the garden of Gethsemane exhibits a striking picture of the sensations of innocent nature oppressed with anguish. It discovers all the conflict between the dread of suffering on the one hand, and the sense of duty on the other; the man struggling for a while with human weakness, and in the end recollected in virtue, and rising superior to the objects of dismay which were then in his view. *Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. Thy will be done.* Thus was our Saviour *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*. He was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*.

It is added in the text, that he was *in all points tempted like as we are*. To be tempted is, in the language of Scripture to undergo such trials of virtue as are accompanied with difficulty and conflict. Though our Lord was not liable to any temptations from depravity of nature, yet he was perpetually exposed to such as arise from situations the most adverse to virtue. His whole life was in this respect a course of temptation; that is, a severe trial of his constancy by every discouragement. He suffered repeated provocations both from friends and foes. His endeavours to do good were requited with the most obstinate and perverse opposition. Sometimes by the solicitations of ignorant multitudes he was tempted to accept the proffers of worldly greatness. Oftener, by the insults of multitudes, more blind and brutal, he was tempted to desert an office which exposed him to so much misery. Together with the world, the powers of darkness also combined their efforts against him. We are informed that he was *led into the wilderness*, and amidst the horrors of a wild and dreary solitude, was *tempted of the devil*. The great adversary of mankind seems to have been permitted to exert unusual proofs of his power and malice, on purpose that the trial

of our Saviour's constancy might be more complete and his victory over him more illustrious and distinguished.

From all these circumstances, the conclusion is obvious, that our Lord knows, from personal experience, all the discouragements and temptations which virtue can suffer. Though he participated not of the corruption, yet he felt the weakness of human nature. He felt the strength of passion. He is no stranger to the disturbance and commotion which either the attacks of the world or the powers of darkness, are able to raise within the breast of man. One remarkable difference, indeed takes place between our temptations and those of Christ.— Though he was *tempted like as we are, yet he was without sin*. Though the conflict was the same, the issue was different. We are often foiled; He always overcame. But his disconformity to us in this respect, is far from weakening the strength of our present argument. For sin contracts and hardens the heart. Every degree of guilt incurred by yielding to temptation tends to debase the mind, and to weaken the generous and benevolent principles of human nature. If from our Lord's being *tempted like as we are*, we have any ground to expect his sympathy; from his being tempted, *yet without sin*, we are entitled to hope that his sympathy, unallayed and perfect, will operate with more complete energy.

FROM this view of the facts which are stated in the Text, I proceed to show how justly we may infer our Saviour's compassion, and in what manner it is to be accommodated to the consolation, of good men amidst various exigencies of life.

It has been the universal opinion of mankind, that personal experience of suffering humanizes the heart. In the school of affliction, compassion is always supposed to be most thoroughly learned; and hence in the laws of Moses, when the Israelites are commanded not to oppress the stranger, this reason is given, *for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers yourselves in the land of Egypt*.^{*} The distressed, accordingly, fly for consolation to those who have been their companions in woe. They decline the prosperous, and look up to them with a suspicious eye. They consider them as ignorant of their feelings, and therefore regardless of their complaints. Amidst the manifold sorrows of life, then, how soothing is the thought that our great Intercessor with God was a fellow-sufferer with ourselves, while he passed through this valley of tears.

But was it necessary for Christ, it may be said to assume our nature in order to acquire the knowledge of its infirmity and distress? As a divine person, was he not perfectly acquainted with our frame before he descended to the earth? Did he stand

^{*} Exod. xxiii. 9.

in need of being prompted to compassion by the experience of our sorrows? Could his experimental knowledge of human weakness increase the benevolence of a nature which before was perfect?—No: he submitted to be *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and to be tempted like as we are*; not in order to become acquainted with our nature, but to satisfy us that he knew it perfectly; not in order to acquire any new degree of goodness, but to give us the firmer confidence in the goodness which he possessed, and to convey the sense of it to our hearts with greater force and effect.

Distrust is a weakness peculiarly incident to the miserable. They are apt to reject hope, to indulge fear, and to tinge, with the dark colour of their own minds, every object which is offered for their encouragement. The representations given us of the Deity in Scripture, afforded undoubtedly much ground for trust in his goodness. But the perfection of an Almighty Being, who dwelleth in the secret place of eternity, *whom no man hath seen or can see*, is overwhelming to a timid apprehension. The goodness which it promises is a new and unknown form of goodness. Whatever proceeds from a nature so far superior to our own, is beheld with a degree of awe, which is ready to overpower hope. Upon this account, under the Old Testament dispensation, the Supreme Being is often described with the attributes of a man, in order to give a shade and softening to his greatness, and to accommodate his goodness more to our capacity. The relentings of a friend, the pity of a parent, and the sighs of a mourner, are ascribed to the Almighty. But we easily perceive such attributes to be no more than figures and allusions. The comfort which they afford, is not definite nor precise. They leave the mind under an anxious uncertainty, lest it err in its interpretation of those allegories of mercy. In the person of Jesus Christ, the object of our trust is brought nearer to ourselves; and of course adapted more effectually to our encouragement. Those well-known tender affections, which are only figuratively ascribed to the Divinity, are in our great Mediator thoroughly realized. His goodness is the goodness of human nature exalted and rendered perfect. It is that species of goodness with which we are best acquainted, compassion to the unhappy; and compassion cultivated by that discipline which we know to be the most powerful, the experience of sorrows.

For such reasons as these, *because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, Christ himself likewise took part of the same. In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful as well as a faithful high priest.* When we consider his assumption of our nature in this light, what a mild and amiable aspect does it give to the government of Heaven! What attentive solicitude of goodness is shown in carrying on

the dispensation of our redemption upon a plan so perfectly calculated to banish all distrust, and to revive the most timid and dejected heart! How naturally does that inference follow which the Apostle makes in the verse immediately succeeding the text; *let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need!* Moore particularly, in consequence of the doctrine which I have illustrated, we are taught to hope,

I. THAT, under all our infirmities and errors, regard will be had to human imperfection; that a merciful distinction will be made between what is weak and what is wilfully criminal in our conduct; and that such measures of obedience only will be exacted, as are proportioned to our circumstances and powers. What can more encourage our religious services, than to be assured that the God whom we worship *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*; and that the Mediator, through whom we worship him, *is touched with the feeling of our infirmities?* The most virtuous are the most apt to be dejected with the sense of their frailty. While vain and superficial men are easily flattered with favourable views of themselves and fond hopes of divine acceptance, the slightest apprehension of guilt is ready to alarm the humble and delicate mind; just as on coarse bodies an impression is not easily made, while those of finer contexture are soon hurt; and as on an exquisite polish the least speck is visible. But though religion promotes great sensibility to all feelings of a moral nature, yet it gives no countenance to excessive and superstitious fears. That humility which checks presumption, and that jealousy which inspires vigilance, are favourable to piety; while those suspicions which lead to despondency are injurious to God, hurtful to ourselves, and repugnant to that whole system of mercy which I have been illustrating.

You complain, that when you engage in the solemn exercises of devotion, your spirits are depressed by a load of cares and sorrows; that in your thoughts there is no composure, and in your affections no elevation; that after your utmost essays, you are incapable of fixing your attention steadily on God, or of sending up your prayers to him with becoming warmth and fulness of heart. This debility and wandering of mind you are apt to impute to some uncommon degree of guilt. You consider it as the symptom of incurable hardness of heart, and as a melancholy proof of your being abandoned by God.—Such fears as these in a great measure refute themselves. If you were really obdurate, you would be insensible of guilt. Your complaints of hardness of heart, are an evidence of your heart being at that moment contrite and actually relenting. Are there any circumstances of inward discomposure and perplexity, of which he is unconscious, who at a critical period of his life was *heavy and sore amaz-*

ed;* who was obliged to complain that his soul was *troubled within him*, and to acknowledge that though *the spirit was willing, yet the flesh was weak?* To a superior nature, untouched with human frailty, you might in such situations look up with some degree of terror. But He, who remembers the struggles of his own soul, will not, surely, judge yours like a hard and unfeeling master. Acquainted with the inmost recesses of human nature, he perceives the sincerity of your intentions; he sees the combat you maintain; he knows how much of your present confusion and disorder is to be imputed, not to your inclination and will, but to an infirm, an aged or diseased body, or to a weak and wounded spirit; and therefore will be far from rejecting your attempts to serve him, on account of the infirmities which you lament. He hears the voice of those secret aspirations which you are unable to express in words, or to form into prayer. Every penitential tear which your contrition sheds, pleads your cause more powerfully with him, than all the arguments with which you could fill your mouth.

II. FROM our Saviour's experience of human misery, we may justly hope that he will so compassionately regard our distressed estate as to prevent us from being loaded with unnecessary troubles. He will not wantonly add affliction to the afflicted: nor willingly crush what he sees to be already broken. In the course of that high administration which he now exercises, he may indeed judge certain intermixtures of adversity to be proper for our improvement. These are trials of virtue through which all, without exception, must pass. Rugged was the road by which our divine Mediator himself went before us to glory; and by becoming our companion in distress, he meant to reconcile us to our lot. He ennobled adversity by sharing it with us. He raised poverty from contempt, by assuming it for his own condition. The severity of his trials tends to lighten ours.—When the general of an army lies on the same hard ground, drinks of the same cold stream, carries the same weight of armour with the lowest sentinel, can any of his soldiers repine at what they endure?

Whatever afflictions our Lord may judge to be necessary for us, of this we may rest assured, that he will deal them forth, not with harsh and imperious authority, but with the tenderness of one who knows from experience how deeply the human heart is wounded by every stroke of adversity. He will not lay more upon us than he sees we are able to bear. *Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his tender mercies. He will stay his rough wind in the day of the east wind.* † For it is his state, but not his nature, which is now

* Mark. xiv. 33.

† Isaiah, xxvii. 8.

changed. Notwithstanding his high exaltation, he still retains the compassionate sentiments of *the man of sorrows*. Still, we are assured by an inspired writer, *he is not ashamed to call us brethren*.* And with the heart of a brother, he regards those few and troubled days, such as his own once were, which good men are doomed to pass in this evil world.

From his compassion, indeed, we are not to expect that fond indulgence or unseasonable relief by which the weak pity of men frequently injures its objects. It is to the material interests, more than the present ease, of good men, that he attends. When under the impatience of sorrow, we exclaim, *Hath he forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* we recollect not in whose hands we are. His compassion is not diminished, when its operations are most concealed. It continues equally to flow, though the channels by which it is conducted towards us lie too deep for our observation. Amidst our present ignorance of what is good or ill for us in this life, it is sufficient for us to know, that the immediate administration of universal government is placed in the hands of the most attentive and compassionate friend of mankind. How greatly does this consideration alleviate the burden of human woe! How happily does it connect with the awful dispensations of religion the mildest ideas of tenderness and humanity!

III. THE text leads us to hope, that amidst all the infirmities of our state, both under the temptations and under the distresses of life, our Blessed Lord will afford us a proper measure of assistance and support. *In that he hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them who either suffer or are tempted*; † that is, he is perfectly qualified for discharging this beneficent office; he knows exactly where the wound bleeds, where the burden presses, what relief will prove most seasonable, and how it can be most successfully applied. The manner in which it is conveyed by him to the heart, we may be at a loss to explain; but no argument can be thence drawn against the credibility of the fact. The operations which the power of God carries on in the natural world, are no less mysterious than those which we are taught to believe that his spirit performs in the moral world. If we can give no account of what is every day before our eyes, how a seed becomes a tree, or how the child rises into a man, is it any wonder that we should be unable to explain how virtue is supported, and constancy strengthened by God within the heart? If men by their counsels and suggestions can influence the minds of one another, must not divine suggestion and counsel produce a much greater effect? Surely, the Father of spirits

* Hebrews, ii. 11.

† Heb. ii. 18.

must, by a thousand ways, have access to the spirits which he has made, so as to give them what determination, or impart to them what assistance he thinks proper, without injuring their frame, or disturbing their rational powers.

Accordingly, whenever any notions of religion have taken place among mankind, this belief has in some measure prevailed, that, to the virtuous under distress, aid was communicated from above. This sentiment is so congruous to our natural impressions of the divine benignity, that both among poets and philosophers of ancient times it was a favourite idea, and often occurs in their writings. But what among them was no more than loose conjecture or feeble hope, has received full confirmation from the Gospel of Christ. Not only is the promise of divine assistance expressly given to Christians, but their faith in that promise is strengthened by an argument which must carry conviction to every heart. If Christ had full experience of the insufficiency of human nature to overcome the difficulties where-with it is now surrounded, will he withhold from his followers that grace without which he sees they must perish in the evil day? If, in the season of his temptation and distress, an angel was sent from heaven *to strengthen him*,* shall no celestial messenger be employed by him on the like kind errand to those whom he styles his brethren? Can we believe that he who once *bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows*, will, from that height of glory to which he is now exalted, look down upon us here, contending with the storm of adversity, labouring to follow his steps through the steep and difficult paths of virtue, exposed on every side to arrows aimed against us by the powers of darkness; and that, seeing our distress and hearing our supplications; he will remain an unconcerned spectator, without vouchsafing us either assistance to support our frailty, or protection to screen us amidst surrounding dangers? Where were then the benevolence of a divine Nature? Where, the compassion of that Mediator who was trained to mercy in the school of sorrow?—Far from us be such ungrateful suspicions of the generous friend of human kind! Let us exert ourselves as we can, and we shall be assisted. Let us pray, and we shall be heard; for there is one to present our prayers, whom *the Father heareth always*. These, will he say, are my followers on earth, passing through that thorny path of temptation and sorrow which I once trod. *Now I am no more in the world; but these are in the world. Holy Father! thine they were, and thou gavest them me. Keep them through thine own name. Sanctify them through thy truth. Keep them from the evil one; that they may be where I am, and may behold the glory which thou hast given me.*†

* Luke, xxii. 43.

† John, xvii

Such is the comfort which arises to us from our Saviour's participation of the infirmities of human nature; and thus it may be applied to various situations of anxiety and distress.

WHEN we review what has been said, it is necessary that, in the first place, I guard you against a certain misimprovement which may be made of this doctrine. The amiable view which it gives of our Lord's clemency, may flatter some men with unwarrantable hopes, and lead them to imagine, that in his experience of human weakness an apology is to be found for every crime. Persons of this character must be taught, that his compassion differs widely from that undistinguishing and capricious indulgence which is sometimes found among men. It is the compassion of an impartial mind, enlightened by wisdom, and guided by justice, extending to the frailties of the sincere, but not to the sins of the presumptuous, and least of all, to the crimes of those who encourage themselves in evil from the hope that they shall meet with compassion.

A course of deliberate guilt admits of no apology from the weakness of human nature. For, notwithstanding all the infirmities incident to it, no man is under a necessity of being wicked. So far is our Saviour's experience of our nature from affording any ground of hope to presumptuous offenders, that it ought to fill them with terror. For it shows them how thoroughly qualified he is to discriminate accurately the characters of men, and to mark the boundaries between frailty and perverseness. He who from his own feelings well knows all the workings of the human heart, clearly discerns how different their temper is from what was once his own. He perceives that vice, not virtue, is their choice; and that, instead of resisting temptation, they resist conscience. He sees that infirmity affords them no excuse; and that the real cause of their acting a criminal part, is not because they cannot do better, but, in truth, because they will not. Having forfeited every title to compassion, they are left in the hands of justice; and according *as they have sown*, they must expect to *reap*.

BUT, in the next place, to such as are sincere and upright, the doctrine which I have illustrated affords high encouragement, and powerfully recommends the Christian religion. It places that religion in its proper point of view, as a medicinal plan, intended both for the recovery of mankind from guilt, and for their consolation under trouble. *The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* The Law was a dispensation of a mere authority. The Gospel is a dispensation, not of authority only, but of relief. If it discovers new duties, and imposes new obligations, it opens also sources of comfort which were before unknown to the world.

A Mediator between God and his creatures was an object after

which men in all nations, and under all forms of religion, had long and anxiously sought. The follies of superstition have served to disclose to us, in this instance, the sentiments of nature. The whole religion of Paganism was a system of mediation and intercession. Depressed by a conscious sense of guilt, nature shrunk at the thought of adventuring on a direct approach to the Sovereign of the universe: and laboured to find out some auspicious introducer to that awful presence. With blind and trembling eagerness the nations fled to subordinate deities, to tutelary gods, and to departed spirits, as their patrons and advocates above. Then they studied to sooth with such costly gifts, such pompous rites, or such humble supplications as they thought might incline them to favour their cause, and to support their interests with the Supreme Divinity. While mankind were bewildered in this darkness, the gospel not only revealed the true Mediator, who in this view may be justly called *the desire of all nations*, but placed his character and office in a light most admirably fitted, as has been shown in this discourse, to support the interest of virtue in the world; and to encourage the humble, without flattering the presumptuous. What plan of religion could be more suited to the circumstances of man, or more worthy of the goodness of his Creator? What more animating to the pious worshipper, in performing those solemn acts of devotion to which we are called by the service of this day?

I CANNOT conclude without taking notice how remarkably this dispensation of religion is calculated to promote a spirit of humanity and compassion among men, by those very means which it employs for inspiring devotion towards God. We are now drawing nigh to the Supreme Being through a Mediator, for whose compassion we pray, on account of the experience which he has had of our frailty. We trust, that having been acquainted with distress, he *will not despise nor abhor the affliction of the afflicted*. The argument by which we plead for his compassion, concludes still more strongly for mutual charity, and sympathy, with one another. He, who in the midst of the common sufferings of life, feels not for the distressed; he who relents not at his neighbour's griefs, nor scans his failings with the eye of a brother, must be sensible that he excludes himself from the commiseration of Christ. He makes void the argument by which he pleads for his mercy; nay, he establishes a precedent against himself. Thus, the Christian religion approves itself as worthy of God, by connecting devotion in strict union with charity. As in its precepts the love of God and the love of man are joined, so in its institutions the exercise of both is called forth; and to worship God through the mediation of a compassionate High Priest, necessarily supposes in the worshippers a spirit of compassion towards their own brethren.

SERMON XXI.

ON THE LOVE OF PRAISE.

For they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God.

JOHN, xii. 43.

THE state of man on earth, is manifestly designed for the trial of his virtue. Temptations every where occur; and perpetual vigilance and attention are required. There is no passion, or principle of action in his nature, which may not, if left to itself, betray him into some criminal excess. Corruption gains entrance, not only by those passions which are apparently of dangerous tendency, such as covetousness, and love of pleasure; but by means of those also which are seemingly the most fair and innocent, such as the desire of esteem and praise. Of this the text suggests a remarkable instance. When our Lord appeared in the land of Judea, the purity of his doctrine, and the evidence of his miracles, procured him a considerable number of followers, chiefly among the lower classes of men. But the Pharisees, who were the leading, and fashionable sect, galled with the freedom of his reproofs, decried him as an impostor. Hence it came to pass, that though *some of the rulers believed in him, yet, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him.* Rulers, persons who, by their rank and education, ought to have been superior to any popular prejudice, were so far overawed by the opinions of others, as to stifle their conviction, to dissemble their faith, and to join with the prevailing party, in condemning one whom in their hearts they revered: for which this reason is given, that *they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God.* Since, then, the love of praise can mislead men into such culpable and dishonest conduct, let us, with some attention, examine the nature of this passion. Let us consider how far it is an allowable principle of action; when it begins to be criminal; and upon what accounts we ought to guard against its acquiring the entire ascendant.

We are intended by Providence to be connected with one another in society. Single unassisted individuals could make small advances towards any valuable improvement. By means of society our wants are supplied, and our lives rendered comfortable; our capacities are enlarged, and our virtuous affections called forth into proper exercise. In order to confirm our mutual connection, it was necessary that some attracting power, which had the effect of drawing men together, and strengthening the social ties, should pervade the human system. Nothing could more happily fulfil this purpose, than our being so formed as to desire the esteem, and to delight in the good opinion, of each other. Had such a propensity been wanting, and selfish principles left to occupy its place, society must have proved an unharmonious and discordant state. Instead of mutual attraction, a repulsive power would have prevailed. Among men who had no regard to the approbation of one another, all intercourse would have been jarring and offensive. For the wisest ends, therefore, the desire of praise was made an original and powerful principle in the human breast.

To a variety of good purposes it is subservient, and on many occasions co-operates with the principle of virtue. It awakens us from sloth, invigorates activity, and stimulates our efforts to excel. It has given rise to most of the splendid, and to many of the useful enterprises of men. It has animated the patriot and fired the hero. Magnanimity, generosity, and fortitude are what all mankind admire. Hence, such as were actuated by the desire of extensive fame, have been prompted to deeds which either participated of the spirit, or, at least, carried the appearance of distinguished virtue. The desire of praise is generally connected with all the finer sensibilities of human nature. It affords a ground on which exhortation, counsel, and reproof, can work a proper effect. Whereas to be entirely destitute of this passion, betokens an ignoble mind, on which no moral impression is easily made. Where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach: and if that be extinguished, one of the principle guards of virtue is removed, and the path opened to many opprobrious pursuits. He whose countenance never glowed with shame, and whose heart never beat at the sound of praise, is not destined for any honourable distinction; is likely to grovel in the sordid quest of gain, or to slumber life away in the indolence of selfish pleasures.

Abstracting from the sentiments which are connected with the love of praise as a principle of action, the esteem of our fellow-creatures is an object which, on account of the advantages it brings, may be lawfully pursued. It is necessary to our success in every fair and honest undertaking. Not only our private interest, but our public usefulness, depends in a great

measure upon it. The sphere of our influence is contracted or enlarged in proportion to the degree in which we enjoy the good opinion of the public. Men listen with an unwilling ear to one whom they do not honour; while a respected character adds weight to example, and authority to counsel. To desire the esteem of others for the sake of its effects, is not only allowable, but in many cases is our duty; and to be totally indifferent to praise or censure, is so far from being a virtue, that it is a real defect in character.

BUT while the love of praise is admitted to be a natural, and, in so many respects, a useful principle of action, we are to observe, that it is entitled to no more than our secondary regard. It has its boundary set; by transgressing which, it is at once transformed from an innocent into a most dangerous passion. More sacred and venerable principles claim the chief direction of human conduct. All the good effects which we have ascribed to the desire of praise, are produced by it when remaining in a subordinate station. But when, passing its natural line, it becomes the ruling spring of conduct; when the regard which we pay to the opinions of men, encroaches on that reverence which we owe to the voice of conscience and the sense of duty! the love of praise having then gone out of its proper place, instead of improving, corrupts; and instead of elevating, debases our nature. The proportion which this passion holds to other principles of action, is what renders it either innocent or criminal. The crime with which the Jewish rulers are charged in the text, was not that they loved the praise of men; but that they loved it *more than the praise of God*.

Even in cases where there is no direct competition between our duty and our fancied honour, between the praise of men and the praise of god, the passion for applause may become criminal, by occupying the place of a better principle. When vain-glory usurps the throne of virtue; when ostentation produces actions which conscience ought to have dictated; such actions, however specious, have no claim to moral or religious praise. We know that good deeds, done merely *to be seen of men*, lose their reward with God. If, on occasion of some trying conjecture, which makes us hesitate concerning our line of conduct, the first question which occurs to us be, not whether an action is right in itself, and such as a good man ought to perform, but whether it is such as will find acceptance with the world, and be favourable to our fame, the conclusion is too evident, that the desire of applause has obtained an undue ascendant. What a wise and good man ought to study, is to preserve his mind free from any such solicitude concerning praise, as may be in hazard of overcoming his sense of duty. The approbation of men he may wish to obtain, as far as is consistent with the approbation of

God. But when both cannot be enjoyed together, there ought to be no suspense. He is to retire, contented with the testimony of a good conscience; and to show, by the firmness of his behaviour, that, in the cause of truth and virtue, he is superior to all opinion.—Let us now proceed to consider the arguments which should support such a spirit, and guard us against the improper influence of praise or censure in the course of our duty.

IN the first place, the praise of men is not an object of such value in itself, as to be entitled to become the leading principle of conduct. We degrade our character, when we allow it more than subordinate regard. Like other worldly goods, it is apt to dazzle us with a false lustre; but if we would ascertain its true worth, let us reflect both on whom it is bestowed, and from whom it proceeds. Were the applause of the world, always the reward of merit; were it appropriated to such alone as by real abilities, or by worthy actions, are entitled to rise above the crowd, we might justly be flattered by possessing a rare and valuable distinction. But, how far is this from being the case in fact? How often have the despicable and the vile, by dexterously catching the favour of the multitude, soared upon the wings of popular applause, while the virtuous and the deserving have been either buried in obscurity, or obliged to encounter the attacks of unjust reproach? The laurels which human praise confers, are withered and blasted by the unworthiness of those who wear them. Let the man who is vain of public favour be humbled, by the reflection that, in the midst of his success, he is mingled with a crowd of impostors and deceivers, of hypocrites and enthusiasts, of ignorant pretenders and superficial reasoners, who, by various arts, have attained as high a rank as himself in temporary fame.

We may easily be satisfied that applause will be often shared by the undeserving, if we allow ourselves to consider from whom it proceeds. When it is the approbation of the wise only, and the good, which is pursued, the love of praise may be then accounted to contain itself within just bounds, and to run in its proper channel. But the testimony of the discerning few, modest and unassuming as they commonly are, forms but a small part of the public voice. It seldom amounts to more than a whisper, which amidst the general clamour is drowned. When the love of praise has taken possession of the mind, it confines not itself to an object so limited. It grows into an appetite for indiscriminate praise. And who are they that confer this praise? A mixed multitude of men, who in their whole conduct are guided by humour and caprice, far more than by reason; who admire false appearances, and pursue false gods; who inquire superficially and judge rashly; whose sentiments are for the most part erroneous, always changeable and often inconsistent. Nor let any one ima-

gine, that by looking above the crowd, and courting the praise of the fashionable and the great, he makes sure of true honour.—There are a great vulgar, as well as a small. Rank often makes no difference in the understandings of men, or in their judicious distribution of praise. Luxury, pride and vanity, have frequently as much influence in corrupting the sentiments of the great, as ignorance, bigotry, and prejudice, have in misleading the opinions of the crowd.—And is it to such judges as these that you submit the supreme direction of your conduct? Do you stoop to court their favour as your chief distinction, when an object of so much juster and higher ambition is presented to you *in the praise of God*? God is the only unerring Judge of what is excellent. His approbation alone is the substance, all other praise is but the shadow, of honour. The character which you bear in his sight, is your only real one. How contemptible does it render you, to be indifferent with respect to this, and to be solicitous about a name alone, a fictitious, imaginary character, which has no existence except in the opinions of a few weak and credulous men around you? They see no farther than the outside of things. They can judge of you by actions only; and not by the comprehensive view of all your actions, but by such merely as you have had opportunity of bringing forth to public notice. But the Sovereign of the world beholds you in every light in which you can be placed. The silent virtues of a generous purpose, and a pious heart, attract his notice, equally with the most splendid deeds. From him you may reap the praise of good actions which you had no opportunity of performing. For he sees them in their principle; he judges of you by your intentions; he knows what you would have done. You may be in his eyes a hero or a martyr, without undergoing the labours of the one, or the sufferings of the other. His inspection, therefore, opens a much wilder field for praise, than what the world can afford you; and for praise, too, certainly far more illustrious in the eye of reason. Every real artist studies to approve himself to such as are knowing in his art. To their judgment he appeals. On their approbation he rests his character, and not on the praise of the unskilled and rude. In the highest art of all, that of life and conduct, shall the opinions of ignorant men come into the most distant competition with his approbation, who is the searcher of all hearts, and the standard of all perfection?—The testimony of his praise is not indeed, as yet openly bestowed. But though the voice of the Almighty sound not in your ears, yet by conscience, his sacred vicegerent, it is capable of being conveyed to your heart. The softest whisper of divine approbation is sweeter to the soul of a virtuous man, than the loudest shouts of that tumultuary applause which proceeds from the world.

Consider, farther, how narrow and circumscribed in its limits that fame is, which the vain-glorious man so eagerly pursues.—In order to show him this, I shall not bid him reflect that it is confined to a small district of the earth; and that when he looks a little beyond the region which he inhabits, he will find himself as much unknown as the most obscure person around him. I shall not desire him to consider, that in the gulph of oblivion, where all human memorials are swallowed up, his name and fame must soon be inevitably lost. He may imagine that ample honours remain to gratify ambition, though his reputation extend not over the whole globe, nor last till the end of time, but let him calmly reflect, that within the narrow boundaries of that country to which he belongs, and during that small portion of time which his life fills up, his reputation, great as he may fancy it to be, occupies no more than an inconsiderable corner.—Let him think what multitudes of those among whom he dwells, are totally ignorant of his name and character; how many imagine themselves too important to regard him; how many are too much occupied with their own wants and pursuits, to pay him the least attention; and where his reputation is in any degree spread, how often it has been attacked, and how many rivals are daily rising to abate it: Having attended to these circumstances, he will find sufficient materials for humiliation in the midst of the highest applause.—From all these considerations, it clearly appears, that though the esteem of our fellow-creatures be pleasing, and the pursuit of it, in a moderate degree, be fair and lawful, yet that it affords no such object to desire, as entitles it to be a ruling principle.

In the second place, an excessive love of praise never fails to undermine the regard due to conscience, and to corrupt the heart. It turns off the eye of the mind from the ends which it ought chiefly to keep in view; and sets up a false light for its guide. Its influence is the more dangerous, as the colour which it assumes is often fair; and its garb and appearance are nearly allied to that of virtue. The love of glory, I before admitted, may give birth to actions which are both splendid and useful. At a distance, they strike the eye with uncommon brightness; but, on a nearer and stricter survey, their lustre is often tarnished. They are found to want that sacred and venerable dignity which characterises true virtue. Little passions and selfish interests entered into the motives of those who performed them. They were jealous of a competitor. They sought to humble a rival. They looked round for spectators to admire them. All is magnanimity, generosity, and courage, to public view. But the ignoble source whence these seeming virtues take their rise is hidden. Without, appears the hero; within, is found the man of dust and clay. Consult such as have been intimately con-

nected with the followers of renown ; and seldom or never will you find that they held them in the same esteem with those who viewed them from afar. There is nothing, except simplicity of intention, and purity of principle, that can stand the test of near approach and strict examination.

But supposing the virtue of vain-glorious men not to be always false, it certainly cannot be depended upon as firm or sure. Constancy and steadiness are to be looked for from him only whose conduct is regulated by a sense of what is right ; *whose praise is not of men, but of God* ; whose motive to discharge his duty is always the same. Change as much as you please, the situation of such a man ; let applause or let censure be his lot ; let the public voice, which this day has extolled him, to-morrow as loudly decry him ; on the tenor of his behaviour these changes produce no effect. He moves in a higher sphere. As the sun in his orbit is not interrupted by the mists and storms of the atmosphere below ; so, regardless of the opinions of men, *through honour and dishonour, through good report and bad report, he pursues the path which conscience has marked out.* Whereas, the apparent virtues of that man whose eye is fixed on the world, are precarious and temporary. Supported only by circumstances, occasions, and particular regards, they fluctuate and fall with these. Excited by public admiration, they disappear when it is withdrawn ; like those exhalations which, raised by heat from the earth, glitter in the air with momentary splendour, and then fall back to the ground from whence they sprung.

The intemperate love of praise not only weakens the true principles of probity, by substituting inferior motives in their stead, but frequently also impels men to actions which are directly criminal. It obliges them to follow the current of popular opinion withersoever it may carry them ; and hence *shipwreck* is often made both *of faith and of a good conscience.* According as circumstances lead them to court the acclamations of the multitude, or to pursue the applause of the great, vices of different kinds will stain their character. In one situation, they will make hypocritical professions of religion. In another, they will be ashamed of their Redeemer, and of his words. They will be afraid to appear in their own form, or to utter their genuine Sentiments. Their whole character will become fictitious, opinions will be assumed, speech and behaviour modelled, and even the countenance formed, as prevailing taste exacts. From one who has submitted to such prostitution for the sake of praise, you can no longer expect fidelity or attachment on any trying occasion. In private life, he will be a timorous and treacherous friend. In public conduct, he will be subtle and versatile ; ready to desert the cause which he had espoused, and to veer with every shifting wind of popular favour. In fine, all becomes unsound and hollow

in that heart, where, instead of regard to the divine approbation, there reigns the sovereign desire of pleasing men.

IN the third place, this passion, when it becomes predominant, most commonly defeats its own end, and deprives men of the honour which they are so eager to gain. Without preserving liberty and independence, we can never command respect. That servility of spirit which subjects us to the opinion of others, and renders us tributaries to the world for the sake of applause, is what all mankind despise. They look up with reverence to one who, unawed by their censures, acts according to his own sense of things, and follows the free impulse of an honourable mind.—But him who hangs totally on their judgment, they consider as their vassal. They even enjoy a malignant pleasure in humbling his vanity, and withholding that praise which he is seen to court. By artifice and show, he may shine for a time in the public eye; but it is only as long as he can support the belief of acting from principle. When the inconsistencies into which he falls detect his character, his reputation passes away like the pageant of a day. No man ever obtained lasting fame, who did not, on several occasions, contradict the prejudices of popular opinion.

There is no course of behaviour which will at all times please all men. That which pleases most generally, and which only commands durable praise, is religion and virtue. Sincere piety towards God, kind affection to men, and fidelity in the discharge of all the duties of life; a conscience pure and undefiled; a heart firm to justice and to truth, superior to all terrors that would shake, and insensible of all pleasures that would betray it; unconquerable by the opposition of the world, and resigned to God alone; these are the qualities which render a man truly respectable and great. Such a character may, in evil times, incur unjust reproach. But the clouds which envy or prejudice has gathered around it, will gradually disperse; and its brightness will come forth, in the end, as the noon day. As soon as it is thoroughly known, it finds a witness in every breast. It forces approbation, even from the most degenerate. The human heart is so formed as to be attuned, if we may use the expression, to its praise. In fact, it is this firm and inflexible virtue, this determined regard to principle beyond all opinion, which has crowned the characters of such as now stand highest in the rolls of lasting fame. The truly illustrious are they who did not court the praise of the world, but who performed the actions which deserve it. They were perhaps traduced in their life-time, by those whom they opposed. But posterity has done them ample justice; and they are the men whom the voice of ages now concurs in celebrating. *The memorial of virtue is immortal; because it is approved of God and of men. When it is present, men take example at it; and when it is gone, they desire*

*it. It weareth a crown, and triumpheth forever ; having gotten the victory ; striving for undefiled rewards.**

IN the fourth place, as an immoderate passion for human praise is dangerous to virtue, and unfavourable to true honour ; so it is destructive of self-enjoyment and inward peace. Regard to the praise of God prescribes a simple and consistent tenor of conduct, which in all situations is the same ; which engages us in no perplexities, and requires no artful refinement. *Walking uprightly, we walk surely*, because we tread an even and open path. But he who turns aside from the straight road of duty, in order to gain applause, involves himself in an intricate labyrinth. He will be often embarrassed concerning the course which he ought to hold. His mind will be always on the stretch. He will be obliged to listen with anxious attention to every whisper of the popular voice. The demands of those masters whom he has submitted to serve, will prove frequently contradictory and inconsistent. He has prepared a yoke for his neck, which he must resolve to bear, how much soever it may gall him.

The toils of virtue are honourable. The mind is supported under them by the consciousness of acting a right and becoming part. But the labours to which he is doomed who is enslaved to the desire of praise, are aggravated by reflection both on the uncertainty of the recompense which he pursues, and on the debasement to which he submits. Conscience will, from time to time, remind him of the improper sacrifices which he has made, and of the forfeiture which he has incurred, of the praise of God for the sake of praise from men. Suppose him to receive all the rewards which the mistaken opinion of the world can bestow, its loudest applause will often be unable to drown the upbraidings of an inward voice ; and if a man is reduced to be ashamed of himself, what avails it him to be caressed by others ?

But, in truth, the reward towards which he looks who proposes human praise as his ultimate object, will be always flying, like a shadow, before him. So capricious and uncertain, so fickle and mutable, is the favour of the multitude, that it proves the most unsatisfactory of all pursuits in which men can be engaged. He who sets his heart on it, is preparing for himself perpetual mortifications. If the greatest and best can seldom retain it long, we may easily believe, that from the vain and undeserving it will suddenly escape. There is no character but what on some side is vulnerable by censure. He who lifts himself up to the observation and notice of the world, is, of all men, the least likely to avoid it. For he draws upon himself a thousand eyes, that will narrowly inspect him in every part. Every opportunity will be watched, of bringing him down to the common le-

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 1, 2.

vel. His errors will be more divulged, and his infirmities more magnified, than those of others. In proportion to his eagerness for praise, will be his sensibility to reproach. Nor is it reproach alone that will wound him. He will be as much dejected by silence and neglect. He puts himself under the power of every one to humble him, by withholding expected praise. Even when praise is bestowed, he is mortified by its being either faint or trite. He pines when his reputation stagnates. The degree of applause to which he has been accustomed, grows insipid; and to be always praised from the same topics, becomes at last much the same with not being praised at all.

All these chagrins and inquietudes are happily avoided by him who keeps so troublesome a passion within its due bounds; who is more desirous of being truly worthy, than of being thought so; who pursues the praise of the world with manly temperance, and in subordination to the praise of God. He is neither made giddy by the intoxicating vapour of applause, nor humbled and cast down by the unmerited attacks of censure. Resting on a higher approbation, he enjoys himself, in peace, whether human praise stays with him, or flies away. *With me it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord. My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.*

In the fifth and last place, the advantages which redound from the praise of men, are not such as can bear to be put in competition with those which flow from the praise of God. The former are necessarily confined within the verge of our present existence. The latter follow us beyond the grave, and extend through all eternity. Not only is the praise of men limited in its effects to this life, but also to particular situations of it. In the days of health and ease, it may brighten the sunshine of prosperity. It may then sooth the ear with pleasing accents, and gratify the imagination with fancied triumphs. But when the distressful seasons of life arrive, it will be found altogether hollow and unsubstantial: And surely, the value of any possession is to be chiefly estimated by the relief which it can bring us, in the time of our greatest need. When the mind is cast down with sorrow and grief, when sickness spreads its gloom around us, or death rises in awful prospect to our view, the opinions and the discourses of the world will appear trifling and insignificant. To one who is occupied with nearer and more affecting interests, the praise or the censure of the world will seem like the noise of distant voices, in which he has small concern. But then is the season when the praise of God supports and upholds the labouring soul. Brought home to the heart by the testimony of a good conscience, and by *the divine spirit bearing witness with our spirits*, it inspires fortitude, and produces *a peace which passeth understanding*.

At present, we behold an irregular and disordered state of things. Virtue is often deprived of its proper honours, and vice usurps them in its stead. The characters of men are mistaken; and ignorance and folly dispose of human applause. But the day hastens apace, which shall close this scene of errors, and vindicate the rights of justice and truth. *Then shall be rendered to every man according to his works.* Envy shall no longer have the power of obscuring merit, nor popular prejudices be able to support the undeserving. Hidden worth shall be brought to light, and secret crimes revealed. Many who passed through the world in the silent obscurity of humble but steady goodness, shall be distinguished as the favourites of Heaven; while the proud, the ambitious, and the vain, are left to everlasting dishonour. The great Judge hath declared, that *whosoever hath been ashamed of him and of his words, of that man shall he be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with all the holy angels.* Every departure from duty shall, at the period of final retribution, terminate in ignominy. True honour and true virtue shall be seen to coincide; and when all human fame has passed away like smoke, the only praise which shall be for ever remembered, is that divine testimony, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

THESE arguments clearly show the importance of preserving the love of praise under proper subordination to the principle of duty. In itself, it is an useful motive to action; but when allowed to extend its influence too far, it corrupts the whole character, and produces guilt, disgrace, and misery. To be entirely destitute of it, is a defect. To be governed by it, is depravity. The proper adjustment of the several principles of action in human nature, is a matter that deserves our highest attention. For when any one of them becomes either too weak or too strong, it endangers both our virtue and our happiness. *Keep thy heart therefore with all diligence; pray that God would enable thee to keep it with success; for out of the heart are the issues of life.*

SERMON XXII.

ON THE PROPER ESTIMATE OF HUMAN LIFE.

Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity.
ECCLESIASTES, xii. 8.

NO serious maxim has been more generally adopted, than that of the text. In every age, the vanity of human life has been the theme of declamation, and the subject of complaint. It is a conclusion in which men of all characters and ranks, the high and the low, the young and the old, the religious and the worldly, have more frequently concurred, than in any other.— But how just soever the conclusion may be, the promises which lead to it are often false. For it is prompted by various motives, and derived from very different views of things. Sometimes the language of the text is assumed by a sceptic, who evils at Providence, and censures the constitution of the world. Sometimes it is the complaint of a peevish man, who is discontented with his station, and ruffled by the disappointment of unreasonable hopes. Sometimes it is the style of the licentious, when groaning under miseries in which their vices have involved them. Invectives against the vanity of the world which come from any of these quarters deserve no regard; as they are the dictates of impiety, of spleen, or of folly. The only case in which the sentiment of the text claims our attention is, when uttered, not as an aspersion on Providence, or a reflection on human affairs in general; not as the language of private discontent, or the result of guilty sufferings; but as the sober conclusion of a wise and good man, concerning the imperfection of that happiness which rests solely on worldly pleasures. These, in their fairest form, are not what they seem to be. They never bestow that complete satisfaction which they promise; and therefore, he who looks to nothing beyond them, shall have frequent cause to deplore their vanity.

Nothing is of higher importance to us, as men and as Christians, than to form a proper estimate of human life, without either loading it with imaginary evils, or expecting from it greater advantages than it is able to yield. It shall be my business, therefore, in this discourse, to distinguish a just and religious sense of the vanity of the world, from the unreasonable complaints of it which we often hear. I shall endeavour, I. To show in what sense it is true that all earthly pleasures are vanity. II. To enquire, how this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its great Author. III. To examine, whether there are not some real and solid enjoyments in human life, which fall not under this general charge of vanity. And, IV. To point out the proper improvement to be made of such a state as the life of man shall appear on the whole to be.

I. I AM to show, in what sense it is true that all human pleasures are vanity. This is a topic which might be embellished with the pomp of much description. But I shall studiously avoid exaggeration, and only point out a threefold vanity in human life, which every impartial observer cannot but admit; disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment, uncertainty in possession.

First, disappointment in pursuit. When we look around us on the world, we every where behold a busy multitude, intent on the prosecution of various designs which their wants or desires have suggested. We behold them employing every method which ingenuity can devise, some the patience of industry, some the boldness of enterprise, others the dexterity of stratagem, in order to compass their ends. Of this incessant stir and activity, what is the fruit? In comparison of the crowd who have toiled in vain how small is the number of the successful! Or rather, where is the man who will declare, that in every point he has completed his plan, and attained his utmost wish; No extent of human abilities has been able to discover a path, which, in any line of life, leads unerringly to success. *The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding.* We may form our plans with the most profound sagacity, and with the most vigilant caution may guard against dangers on every side. But some unforeseen occurrence comes across, which baffles our wisdom, and lays our labours in the dust.

Were such disappointments confined to those who aspire at engrossing the higher departments of life, the misfortune would be less. The humiliation of the mighty, and the fall of ambition from its towering height, little concern the bulk of mankind. These are objects on which, as on distant meteors, they gaze from afar, without drawing personal instruction from events so much above them. But, alas! when we descend into the regions

of private life, we find disappointment and blasted hope equally prevalent there. Neither the moderation of our views, nor the justice of our pretensions, can ensure success. But *time and chance happen to all*. Against the stream of events, both the worthy and the undeserving are obliged to struggle; and both are frequently overborne alike by the current.

BESIDES disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment is a farther vanity to which the human state is subject. This is the severest of all mortifications; after having been successful in the pursuit, to be baffled in the enjoyment itself. Yet this is found to be an evil still more general than the former. Some may be so fortunate as to attain what they have pursued; but none are rendered completely happy by what they have attained. Disappointed hope is misery; and yet successful hope is only imperfect bliss. Look through all the ranks of mankind. Examine the condition of those who appear most prosperous; and you will find that they are never just what they desire to be. If retired, they languish for action; if busy, they complain of fatigue. If in middle life, they are impatient for distinction; if in high stations, they sigh after freedom and ease. Something is still wanting to that plenitude of satisfaction which they expected to acquire. Together with every wish that is gratified, a new demand arises. One void opens in the heart, as another is filled. On wishes, wishes grow; and to the end, it is rather the expectation of what they have not, than the enjoyment of what they have, which occupies and interests the most successful.

This dissatisfaction, in the midst of human pleasure, springs partly from the nature of our enjoyments themselves, and partly from circumstances which corrupt them. No worldly enjoyments are adequate to the high desires and powers of an immortal spirit. Fancy paints them at a distance with splendid colours; but possession unveils the fallacy. The eagerness of passion bestows upon them at first a brisk and lively relish.—But it is their fate always to pall by familiarity, and sometimes to pass from satiety into disgust. Happy would the poor man think himself if he could enter on all the treasures of the rich; and happy for a short while he might be; but before he had long contemplated and admired his state, his possessions would seem to lessen, and his cares would grow.

Add to the unsatisfying nature of our pleasures, the attending circumstances which never fail to corrupt them. For, such as they are, they are at no time possessed unmixed. To human lips it is not given to taste the cup of pure joy. When external circumstances show fairest to the world, the envied man groans in private under his own burden. Some vexation disquiets, some passion corrodes him; some distress, either felt or feared,

gnaws like a worm, the root of his felicity. When there is nothing from without to disturb the prosperous, a secret poison operates within. For worldly happiness ever tends to destroy itself, by corrupting the heart. It fosters the loose and the violent passions. It engenders noxious habits; and taints the mind with a false delicacy, which makes it feel a thousand unreal evils.

BUT put the case in the most favourable light. Lay aside from human pleasures both disappointment in pursuit, and deceitfulness in enjoyment; suppose them to be fully attainable, and completely satisfactory; still there remains to be considered the vanity of uncertain possession and short duration. Where there in worldly things any fixed point of security which we could gain, the mind would then have some basis on which to rest. But our condition is such, that every thing wavers and totters around us. *Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It is much if, during its course, thou hearest not of somewhat to disquiet or alarm thee. For life never proceeds long in an uniform train. It is continually varied by unexpected events. The seeds of alteration are every where sown; and the sunshine of prosperity commonly accelerates their growth. If your enjoyments be numerous, you lie more open on different sides to be wounded. If you have possessed them long, you have greater cause to dread an approaching change. By slow degrees prosperity rises; but rapid is the progress of evil. It requires no preparation to bring it forward. The edifice which it cost much time and labour to erect, one inauspicious event, one sudden blow, can level with the dust. Even supposing the accidents of life to leave us untouched, human bliss must still be transitory; for man changes of himself. No course of enjoyment can delight us long. What amused our youth, loses its charm in maturer age. As years advance, our powers are blunted, and our pleasurable feelings decline. The silent lapse of time is ever carrying somewhat from us, till at length the period comes when all must be swept away. The prospect of this termination of our labours and pursuits is sufficient to mark our state with vanity. *Our days are a hand-breadth, and our age is as nothing.* Within that little space is all our enterprise bounded. We crowd it with toils and care, with contention and strife. We project great designs, entertain high hopes, and then leave our plans unfinished, and sink into oblivion.

Thus much let it suffice to have said concerning the vanity of the world. That too much has not been said, must appear to every one who considers how generally mankind lean to the opposite side; and how often, by undue attachment to the present state, they both feed the most sinful passions, and *pierce themselves through with many sorrows.* Let us proceed to enquire.

II. How this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its divine author. This enquiry involves that great difficulty which has perplexed the thoughtful and serious in every age. If God be good, whence the evil that fills the earth? In answer to this interesting question, let us observe,

In the first place, that the present condition of man was not his original or primary state. We are informed by divine revelation, that it is the consequence of his voluntary apostacy from God and a state of innocence. By this, his nature was corrupted; his powers were enfeebled; and vanity and vexation introduced into his life. All nature became involved in the condemnation of man. The earth was cursed upon his account, and the whole creation made to *groan and travail in pain*.

How mysterious soever the account of this fall may appear to us, many circumstances concur to authenticate the fact, and to show that human nature and the human state have undergone an unhappy change. The belief of this has obtained in almost all nations and religions. It can be traced through all the fables of antiquity. An obscure tradition appears to have pervaded the whole earth, that man is not now what he was at first; but that in consequence of some transgression against his great Lord, a state of degradation and exile succeeded to a condition that was more flourishing and happy. As our nature carries plain marks of perversion and disorder, so the world which we inhabit bears the symptoms of having been convulsed in all its frame. Naturalists point out to us every where the traces of some violent change which it has suffered. Islands torn from the continent, burning mountains, shattered precipices, uninhabitable wastes, give it all the appearance of a mighty ruin. The physical and moral state of man in this world mutually sympathize and correspond. They indicate not a regular and orderly structure, either of matter or of mind, but the remains of somewhat that was once more fair and magnificent. Let us observe,

In the second place, that as this was not the original, so is it not intended to be the final, state of man. Though, in consequence of the abuse of the human powers, sin and vanity were introduced into this region of the universe, it was not the purpose of the Creator that they should be permitted to reign for ever. He hath made ample provision for the recovery of the penitent and faithful part of his subjects, by the merciful undertaking of that great Restorer of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. By him *life and immortality were both purchased and brought to light*. *The new heavens and the new earth* are discovered, *wherein dwelleth righteousness*; where, through the divine grace, human nature shall regain its original honours, and man shall return to be what once he was in Paradise. Through those high discoveries of the Gospel, this life appears to good men only in

the light of an intermediate and preparatory state. Its vanity and misery, in a manner, disappear. They have every reason to submit, without complaint, to its laws, and to wait in patience till the appointed time come for *the restitution of all things*. Let us take notice,

In the third place, That a future state being made known, we can account, in a satisfying manner, for the present distress of human life, without the smallest impeachment of divine goodness. The sufferings we here undergo are converted into discipline and improvement. Through the blessing of Heaven good is extracted from apparent evil; and the very misery which originated from sin, is rendered the means of correcting sinful passions and preparing us for felicity. There is much reason to believe that creatures as imperfect as we are, require some such preliminary state of experience before they can recover the perfection of their nature. It is in the midst of disappointments and trials that we learn the insufficiency of temporal things to happiness, and are taught to seek it from God and Virtue. By these the violence of our passions is tamed, and our minds are formed to sobriety and reflection. In the varieties of life occasioned by the vicissitude of worldly fortune, we are inured to habits both of the active and the suffering virtues. How much soever we complain of the vanity of the world, facts plainly show, that if its vanity were less, it could not answer the purpose of salutary discipline. Unsatisfactory as it is, its pleasures are still too apt to corrupt our hearts. How fatal then must the consequences have been, had it yielded us more complete enjoyment? If, with all its troubles, we are in danger of being too much attached to it, how entirely would it have seduced our affections, if no troubles had been mingled with its pleasures!

These observations serve in a great measure to obviate the difficulties which arise from the apparent vanity of the human state, by showing how, upon the Christian system, that vanity may be reconciled with the infinite goodness of the Sovereign of the universe. The present condition of man is not that for which he was originally designed; it is not to be his final state; and during his passage through the world, the distresses which he undergoes are rendered medicinal and improving. After having taken this view of things, the cloud, which in the preceding part of the discourse, appeared to sit so thick upon human life, begins to be dissipated. We now perceive that man is not abandoned by his creator. We discern great and good designs going on in its behalf. We are allowed to entertain better hopes; and are encouraged to enquire, as was proposed for the

III^d HEAD of discourse, Whether there be not, in the present condition of human life, some real and solid enjoyments, which

come not under the general charge of *vanity of vanities*. The doctrine of the text is to be considered as chiefly addressed to worldly men. Them Solomon means to teach, that all expectations of bliss, which rests solely on earthly possessions and pleasures shall end in disappointment. But surely he did not intend to assert, that there is no material difference in the pursuits of men, or that no real happiness of any kind could now be attained by the virtuous. For, besides the unanswerable objection which this would form against the divine administration, it would directly contradict what he elsewhere asserts, that while *God giveth sore travail to the sinner, he giveth to the man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.** It may, it must indeed, be admitted, that unmixed and complete happiness is unknown on earth. No regulation of conduct can altogether prevent passions from disturbing our peace, and misfortunes from wounding our heart. But after this concession is made, will it follow that there is no object on earth which deserves our pursuit, or that all enjoyment becomes contemptible which is not perfect? Let us survey our state with an impartial eye, and be just to the various gifts of Heaven. How vain soever this life, considered in itself, may be, the comforts and hopes of religion are sufficient to give solidity to the enjoyments of the righteous. In the exercise of good affections, and the testimony of an approving conscience; in the sense of peace and reconciliation with God through the great Redeemer of mankind; in the firm confidence of being conducted through all the trials of life by infinite wisdom and goodness; and in the joyful prospect of arriving in the end at immortal felicity; they possess a happiness which, descending from a purer and more perfect region than this world, partakes not of its vanity.

Besides the enjoyments peculiar to religion, there are other pleasures of our present state, which, though of an inferior order, must not be overlooked in the estimate of human life. It is necessary to call attention to these, in order to check that repining and unthankful spirit to which man is always too prone. Some degree of importance must be allowed to the comforts of health, to the innocent gratifications of sense, and to the entertainment afforded us by all the beautiful scenes of nature; some to the pursuits and amusements of social life; and more to the internal enjoyments of thought and reflection, and to the pleasures of affectionate intercourse with those whom we love.—These comforts are often held in too low estimation, merely because they are ordinary and common; although that be the circumstance which ought, in reason, to enhance their value. They

* Eccles. ii. 26.

lie open, in some degree, to all; extend through every rank of life, and fill up agreeably many of those spaces in our present existence which are not occupied with higher objects, or with serious cares.

We are in several respects unjust to Providence in the computation of our pleasures and our pains. We number the hours which are spent in distress or sorrow; but we forget those which have passed away, if not in high enjoyment, yet in the midst of those gentle satisfactions and placid emotions which make life glide smoothly along. We complain of the frequent disappointments which we suffer in our pursuits. But we recollect not, that it is in pursuit, more than in attainment, that our pleasure now consists. In the present state of human nature, man derives more enjoyment from the exertion of his active powers in the midst of toils and efforts, than he could receive from a still and uniform possession of the object which he strives to gain. The solace of the mind under all its labours, is hope; and there are few situations which entirely exclude it. Forms of expected bliss are often gleaming upon us through a cloud, to revive and exhilarate the most distressed. If pains be scattered through all the conditions of life, so also are pleasures. Happiness, as far as life affords it, can be engrossed by no rank of men to the exclusion of the rest; on the contrary, it is often found where, at first view, it would have been least expected. When the human condition appears most depressed, the feelings of men, through the gracious appointment of Providence, adjust themselves wonderfully to their state, and enable them to extract satisfaction from sources that are totally unknown to others. Were the great body of men fairly to compute the hours which they pass in ease, and even with some degree of pleasure, they would be found far to exceed the number of those which are spent in absolute pain either of body or mind. But in order to make a still more accurate estimation of the degree of satisfaction which, in the midst of earthly vanity, man is permitted to enjoy, the three following observations claim our attention:

THE first is, that many of the evils which occasion our complaints of the world are wholly imaginary. They derive their existence from fancy and humour, and childish subjection to the opinion of others. The distress which they produce, I admit, is real; but its reality arises not from the nature of things, but from that disorder of imagination which a small measure of reflection might rectify. In proof of this, we may observe that the persons who live most simply, and follow the dictates of plain unadulterated nature, are most exempted from this class of evils. It is among the higher ranks of mankind that they chiefly abound; where fantastic refinements, sickly delicacy, and

eager emulation, open a thousand sources of vexation peculiar to themselves. Life cannot but prove vain to them who affect a disrelish of every pleasure that is not both exquisite and new; who measure enjoyment, not by their own feelings, but by the standard of fashion; who think themselves miserable if others do not admire their state. It is not from wants or sorrows that their complaints arise; but, though it may appear a paradox, from too much freedom from sorrow and want; from the languor of vacant life, and the irritation occasioned by those stagnating humours which ease and indulgence have bred within them. In their case, therefore, it is not the vanity of the world, but the vanity of their minds, which is to be accused. Fancy has raised up the sceptres which haunt them. Fancy has formed the cloud which hangs over their life. Did they allow the light of reason to break forth, the spectres would vanish, and the cloud be dispelled.

THE second observation on this head is that, of those evils which may be called real, because they owe not their existence to fancy, nor can be removed by rectifying opinion, a great proportion is brought upon us by our own misconduct. Diseases, poverty, disappointment, and shame, are far from being, in every instance, the unavoidable doom of men. They are much more frequently the offspring of their own misguided choice. Intemperance engenders disease, sloth produces poverty, pride creates disappointment, and dishonesty exposes to shame. The ungoverned passions of men betray them into a thousand follies, their follies into crimes; and their crimes into misfortunes. Yet nothing is more common than for such as have been the authors of their own misery, to make loud complaints of the hard fate of man, and to take revenge upon the human condition by arraigning its supposed vanity. *The foolishness of man first perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

I do not, however, maintain, that it is within our power to be altogether free of those self-procured evils. For perfection of any kind is beyond the reach of man. Where is the wisdom that never errs? where the just man that offendeth not? Nevertheless, much is here left to ourselves; and, imperfect as we are, the consequences of right or of wrong conduct make a wide difference in the happiness of men. Experience every day shows, that a sound, a well-governed, and virtuous mind, contributes greatly to smooth the path of life; and that *wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble. But the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his ways; and he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.* The tendency of the one is towards a plain and safe region. The course of the other leads him amidst snares and precipices. The one occasionally may, the

other unavoidably must, incur much trouble. Let us not then, confound, under one general charge, those evils of the world which belong to the lot of humanity, and those which, through divine assistance, a wise and good man may, in a great measure, escape.

THE third observation which I make respects those evils which are both real and unavoidable; from which neither wisdom nor goodness can procure our exemption. Under these this comfort remains, that if they cannot be prevented, there are means, however, by which they may be much alleviated. Religion is the great principle which acts under such circumstances, as the corrective of human vanity. It inspires fortitude, supports patience, and, by its prospects and promises, darts a cheering ray into the darkest shade of human life. If it cannot secure the virtuous from disappointment in their pursuits, it forms them to such a temper as renders their disappointments more light and easy than those of other men. If it does not banish dissatisfaction from their worldly pleasures, it confers spiritual pleasures in their stead. If it insures them not the possession of what they love, it furnishes comfort under the loss. As far as it establishes a contented frame of mind, it supplies the want of all that worldly men covet to possess. Compare the behaviour of the sensual and corrupted with that of the upright and holy, when both are feeling the effects of human vanity, and the difference of their situation will be manifest. Among the former, you are likely to find a querulous and dejected, among the latter, a composed and manly spirit. The lamentations of the one excite a mixture of pity and contempt; while the dignity which the other maintains in distress, commands respect. The sufferings of the former settle into a peevish and fretful disposition; those of the latter soften the temper, and improve the heart. These consequences extend so far as to give ground for asserting that, a good man enjoys more happiness in the course of a seemingly unprosperous life, than a bad man does in the midst of affluence and luxury. What a conspicuous proof of this is afforded by the Apostle Paul, who from the very depth of affliction could send forth such a triumphant voice as proclaims the complete victory which he had gained over the evils of life! *Troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair: persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. For, though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed, day by day.** Such though perhaps in an inferior degree, will be the influence of a genuine religious principle upon all true Christians. It begins to perform that office to them here, which

* Corinth. iv. 8, 9, 16.

hereafter it will more completely discharge, of *wiping away the tears from their eyes*.

SUCH, upon the whole, is the estimate which we are to form of human life. Much vanity will always belong to it; though the degree of its vanity will depend, in a great measure, on our own character and conduct. To the vicious, it presents nothing but a continued scene of disappointment and dissatisfaction. To the good, it is a mixed state of things; where many real comforts may be enjoyed; where many resources under trouble may be obtained; but where trouble, in one form or other, is to be expected as the lot of man. From this view of human life,

THE first practical conclusion which we are to draw is, that it highly concerns us not to be unreasonable in our expectations of worldly felicity. Let us always remember where we are, from what causes the human state has become subject to depression; and upon what account it must remain under its present law. Such is the infatuation of self-love, that though in the general doctrine of the vanity of the world all men agree, yet almost every one flatters himself that his own case is to be an exception from the common rule. He rests on expectations which he thinks cannot fail him; and though the present be not altogether according to his wish, yet with the confidence of certain hope he anticipates futurity. Hence the anguish of disappointments fills the world; and evils, which are of themselves sufficiently severe, oppress with double force the unprepared and unsuspecting mind. Nothing, therefore, is of greater consequence to our peace, than to have always before our eyes such views of the world as shall prevent our expecting more from it than it is destined to afford. We destroy our joys by devouring them before-hand with too eager expectation. We ruin the happiness of life when we attempt to raise it too high. A tolerable and comfortable state is all that we can propose to ourselves on earth. Peace and contentment, not bliss nor transport, is the full portion of man. Perfect joy is reserved for Heaven.

BUT while we repress too sanguine hopes formed upon human life, let us, in the second place, guard against the other extreme of repining and discontent. Enough has been already said to show, that, notwithstanding the vanity of the world, a considerable degree of comfort is attainable in the present state. Let the recollection of this serve to reconcile us to our condition, and to check the arrogance of complaints and murmers.—What art thou, oh son of man! who having sprung but yesterday out of the dust, darest to lift up thy voice against thy Maker, and to arraign his providence, because all things are not ordered according to thy wish? What title has thou to find fault with the order of the universe, whose lot is so much beyond what they

virtue or merit gave thee ground to claim? Is it nothing to thee to have been introduced into this magnificent world; to have been admitted as a spectator of the divine wisdom and works; and to have had access to all the comforts which Nature, with a bountiful hand, has poured forth round thee? Are all the hours forgotten which thou hast passed in ease, in complacency, or joy? Is it a small favour in thy eyes, that the hand of divine mercy has been stretched forth to aid thee, and, if thou reject not its proffered assistance, is ready to conduct thee into a happier state of existence? When thou comparest thy condition with thy desert, blush, and be ashamed of thy complaints. Be silent, be grateful, and adore. Receive with thankfulness the blessings which are allowed thee. Revere that government which at present refuses thee more. Rest in this conclusion, though there be evils in the world, its Creator is wise and good, and has been bountiful to thee.

In the third place, the view which we have taken of human life should naturally direct us to such pursuits as may have most influence for correcting its vanity. There are two great lines of conduct which offer themselves to our choice. The one leads towards the goods of the mind; the other towards those of fortune. The former, which is adopted only by the few, engages us chiefly in forming our principles, regulating our dispositions, improving all our inward powers. The latter, which in every age has been followed by the multitude, points at no other end but attaining the conveniences and pleasures of external life. It is obvious, that, in this last pursuit, the vanity of the world will encounter us at every step. For this is the region in which it reigns, and where it chiefly displays its power. At the same time, to lay the world totally out of view, is a vain attempt. The numberless ties by which we are connected with external things, put it out of our power to behold them with indifference. But though we cannot wrap ourselves up entirely in the care of the mind, yet the more we make its welfare our chief object, the nearer shall we approach to that happy independence on the world, which places us beyond the reach of suffering from its vanity.

That discipline, therefore, which corrects the eagerness of worldly passions, which fortifies the heart with virtuous principles, which enlightens the mind with useful knowledge, and furnishes to it matter of enjoyment from within itself, is of more consequence to real felicity, than all the provision which we can make of the goods of fortune. To this let us bend our chief attention. Let us *keep the heart with all diligence, seeing out of it are the issues of life*. Let us account our minds the most important province which is committed to our care; and if we cannot rule fortune, study at least to rule ourselves. Let us

propose for our object, not worldly success, which it depends not on us to obtain; but that upright and honourable discharge of our duty, in every conjuncture, which, through the divine assistance, is always within our power. Let our happiness be sought where our proper praise is found; and that be accounted our only real evil, which is the evil of our nature; not that, which is either the appointment of Providence, or which arises from the evil of others.

BUT, in order to carry on with success this rational and manly plan of conduct, it is necessary, in the last place, that to moral we join religious discipline. Under the present imperfection of our minds, and amidst the frequent shocks which we receive from human evils, much do we stand in need of every assistance for supporting our constancy. Of all assistance to which we can have recourse, none is so powerful as what may be derived from the principles of the Christian faith. He who builds on any other foundation, will find in the day of trial that he had built his house on the sand. Man is formed by his nature to look up to a superior Being, and to lean upon a strength that is greater than his own. All the considerations which we can offer for confirming his mind, presuppose this resource, and derive from it their principal efficacy.

Never then let us lose sight of those great objects which religion brings under our view, if we hope to stand firm and erect amidst the dangers and distresses of our present state. Let us cultivate all that connection with the great Father of Spirits which our condition admits; by piety and prayer; by dependence on his aid, and trust in his promises; by a devout sense of his presence, and a continual endeavour to acquire his grace and favour. Let us, with humble faith and reverence, commit ourselves to the blessed Redeemer of the world; encouraged by the discoveries which he has made to us of the divine mercy, and by the hopes which he has afforded us of being raised to a nobler and happier station in the kingdom of God. So shall virtue, grounded upon piety, attain its full strength.

Inspired with a religious spirit, and guided by rational principles, we shall be enabled to hold a steady course through this mixed region of pleasure and pain, of hope and fears; until the period arrive when that cloud which the present vanity of the world throws over human affairs, shall entirely disappear, and eternal light be diffused over all the works and ways of God.

SERMON XXIII.

ON DEATH.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy
staff they comfort me.—PSALM, xxiii. 4.*

THIS Psalm exhibits the pleasing picture of a pious man rejoicing in the goodness of Heaven. He looks around him on his state, and his heart overflows with gratitude. When he reviews the past part of his life, he contemplates God as his *shepherd, who hath made him lie down in green pastures, and led him beside the still waters.* When he considers the present, he beholds his divine benefactor *preparing a table for him in the presence of his enemies, and making his cup run over.* When he looks forward to the future, he confides in the same goodness, as continuing to *follow him all the days of his life, and bringing him to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* Amidst these images of tranquillity and happiness, one object presents itself, which is sufficient to overcast the minds and to damp the joy of the greatest part of men; that is, the approach of death. But on the Psalmist it produced no such effect. With perfect composure and serenity, he looks forward to the time when he is to pass through *the valley of the shadow of death.* The prospect, instead of dejecting him, appears to heighten his triumph, by that security which the presence of his Almighty Guardian afforded him. *I will fear no evil, for thou art with me;* and pursuing the allusion with which he had begun, exults in the hope that the shepherd who had hitherto conducted him, would support him with his *staff*, while he passed through that dark and perilous region, and with his rod, or pastoral crook, would guard him from every danger.

Such is the happy distinction which good men enjoy, in a situation the most formidable to human nature. That threatening spectre which appals others, carries no terror to them. While worldly men are justly said *through fear of death to be all their life-time subject to bondage*, to the righteous only it belongs to look on death, and smile. Since then it is in the power of religion to confer upon us so high a privilege, let us adventure to contemplate steadily this last foe whom we must all encounter. Let us consider what death is in itself, and by what means good men are enabled to meet it with fortitude. Though the subject may be reckoned gloomy, it must be admitted to be interesting. The close of life is a solemn and important event, to which every wise man will have regard in the general tenour of his conduct. No one can act his part with propriety, who considers not how it is to terminate; and to exclude from our thoughts what we cannot prevent from actually taking place, is the refuge of none but the timorous and weak. We are more encouraged to enter on this meditation, by reflecting on the superior advantages which, as Christians we enjoy for overcoming the fear of death, beyond that holy man whose sentiment is now before us. Those great objects, which he beheld through the medium of types and figures, are clearly revealed to us. That dispensation of grace, which in his days began to open, is now completed. That life and immortality, which then only dawned on the world, have now shone forth with full light and splendour.

DEATH may be considered in three views: as the separation of the soul from the body; as the conclusion of the present life; as the entrance into a new state of existence. In the first view, it is regarded as painful and agonizing. In the second, it is melancholy and dejected. In the third it is awful and alarming. One of the first inquiries which occurs concerning it is, for what purposes it was clothed with all these terrors? Why under the government of a gracious Being, the termination of life was loaded with so much sorrow and distress? We know that, in consequence of the fall, death was inflicted as a punishment upon the human race. But no unnecessary severities are ever exercised by God, and the wisdom and goodness of the divine plan will be much illustrated, by observing that all the formidable circumstances which attend death are, in the present situation of mankind, absolutely requisite to the proper government of the world. The terrors of death are, in fact, the great guardians of life. They excite in every individual that desire of self-preservation, which is Nature's first law. They reconcile him to bear the distresses of life with patience. They prompt him to undergo its useful and necessary labours with alacrity; and they restrain him from many of those evil courses by which his safety would be endangered. While they are in so many respects

beneficial to the individual, they are, at the same time, the safeguard of society. If death were not dreaded and abhorred as it is by men, no public order could be preserved in the world.—The sword of authority were lifted up in vain. The sanctions of law would loose their effect. The scaffold and the executioner would be derided; and the violent left to trample unrestrained on the rights of the peaceful. If, notwithstanding the restraints which self-preservation imposes, society is so often disturbed by the crimes of the wicked, what a scene of confusion would it become, if capital punishments, which are the last resource of government, were of no influence to deter offenders!

For such important ends the conclusion of life has, by the appointment of Providence, been made an awful object. The valley of death has been planted with terrors to the apprehension of men. Here, as in many other instances, what seemed at first to arraign the goodness of the Deity, is, upon inquiry found to confirm it. But though, for the most salutary purposes, it was requisite that the fear of death should be a powerful principle in human nature, yet like our other propensities, it is apt, when left to itself, to run into excess. Over many it usurps such an ascendent as to debase their character, and to defeat the chief ends of living. To preserve it within such bounds that it shall not interrupt us in performing the proper offices and duties of life, is the distinction of the brave man above the coward; and to surmount it in such a degree, that it shall not, even in near prospect, deject our spirit, or trouble our peace, is the great preference which virtue enjoys above guilt. It has been the study of the wise and reflecting in every age, to attain this steadiness of mind. Philosophy pursued it as its chief object; and professed that the great end of its discipline was, to enable its votaries to conquer the fear of death. Let us then, before we have recourse to the more powerful aid of Religion, harken for a little to what Reason has suggested on this subject. Her assistance may, perhaps, be not entirely despicable; and though the armour which she offers be not completely of proof, it may serve, however, to turn aside, or to blunt, some of the shafts which are aimed against us by the last foe.

AFTER this manner she may be supposed to address mankind, in order to reconcile them to their fate.—Children of men! it is well known to you, that you are a mortal race. Death is the law of your nature, the tribute of your being, the debt which all are bound to pay.—On these terms you received life, that you should be ready to give it up when Providence calls you to make room for others, who, in like manner, when their time is come, shall follow you. He who is unwilling to submit to death when Heaven decrees it, deserves not to have lived. You might as reasonably complain that you did not live before the time appointed for your coming

into the world, as lament that you are not to live longer, when the period of your quitting it is arrived. What divine Providence hath made necessary, human prudence ought to comply with cheerfully. Submit at any rate you must; and is it not much better to follow of your own accord, than to be dragged reluctantly, and by force? What privilege have you to plead, or what reason to urge, why you should possess an exemption from the common doom? All things around you are mortal and perishing. Cities, states, and empires have their period set. The proudest monuments of human art moulder into dust.— Even the works of nature wax old and decay. In the midst of this universal tendency to change, could you expect that to your frame alone a permanent duration should be given? All who have gone before you, have submitted to the stroke of death.— All who are to come after you, shall undergo the same fate.— The great and the good, the prince, and the peasant the renowned and the obscure, travel alike the road which leads to the grave. At the moment when you expire, thousands throughout the world, shall, together with you, be yielding up their breath. Can that be held a great calamity, which is common to you with every thing that lives on earth; which is an event as much according to the course of nature as it is that leaves should fall in autumn, or that fruit should drop from the tree when it is fully ripe?

The pain of death cannot be very long, and is probably less severe than what you have at other times experienced. The pomp of death is more terrifying than death itself. It is to the weakness of the imagination that it owes its chief power of dejecting your spirits; for when the force of the mind is roused, there is almost no passion in our nature but what has showed itself able to overcome the fear of death. Honour has defied death; love has despised it; shame has rushed upon it; revenge has disregarded it; grief a thousand times has wished for its approach. Is it not strange that reason and virtue cannot give you strength to surmount that fear, which, even in feeble minds so many passions have conquered? What inconstancy is there in complaining so much of the evils of life, and being at the same time so afraid of what is to terminate them all! Who can tell whether his future life might not teem with disasters and miseries, as yet unknown, were it to be prolonged according to his wish? At any rate, is it desirable to draw life out to the last dregs, and to wait till old age pour upon you its whole store of diseases and sorrows? You lament that you are to die; but did you view your situation properly, you would have much greater cause to lament if you were chained to this life for two or three hundred years, without possibility of release. Expect therefore calmly that which is natural in itself, and which must be fit, because it is the appointment of Heaven. Perform your

duty as a good subject of the Deity, during the time allotted you ; and rejoice that a period is fixed for your dismissal from the present warfare. Remember that the slavish dread of death destroys all the comfort of that life which you seek to preserve. Better to undergo the stroke of death at once, than to live in perpetual misery from the fear of dying.

SUCH discourses as these are specious at least, and plausible. The arguments are not without strength, and ought to produce some effect on a considerate reflecting mind. But it is to be suspected that their effect will be chiefly felt when the mind is calm and at ease ; rather when speculating upon death at a distance, than when beholding it at hand. When the critical moment arrives, which places the anxious trembling soul on the borders of an unknown world, reasonings drawn from necessity and propriety will be of small avail to quiet its alarms. In order to afford relief, you must give it hope ; you must promise it protection ; you must offer somewhat on which it can lay hold for support amidst the struggles of labouring nature. Hence, the great importance of those discoveries which revelation has made, and of those principles with which it fortifies the heart. To the consideration of these let us next proceed, and observe their superior efficacy for surmounting the fear of death. In order to judge of their importance, it will be proper to take a view of death in each of those lights in which it appears most formidable to mankind.

It may be considered, first, as the termination of our present existence ; the final period of all its joys and hopes. The concluding scene of any course of action in which we have been engaged with pleasure, even the last sight of objects which we have been long accustomed to behold, seldom fails of striking the mind with painful regret. How many circumstances will concur to heighten that regret, when the time comes of our bidding an eternal adieu to the light of day ; to every pursuit which had occupied our attention as citizens of the world ; and to every friend and relation who had attached our hearts ! How dejecting is the thought to the greatest part of men, that the sun shall rise, and the seasons shall turn to others, but no more to them ; and that, while their neighbours are engaged in the usual affairs of life, they shall be shut up in a dark lonesome mansion, forgotten and cut off from among men, as though they never had been ! *I said, in the cutting off my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave. I am deprived of the residue of my years. I shall not see the Lord again in the land of the living. I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.**

* Isaiah, xxxviii. 10, 11.

Let us now observe, that the dejection in which we are apt to sink at such a juncture, will bear proportion to the degree of our attachment to the objects which we leave, and to the importance of those resources which remain with us when they are gone. He who is taking farewell of a country through which he had travelled with satisfaction, and he who is driven from his native land, with which he had connected every idea of settlement and comfort, will have very different feelings at the time of departure. Such is the difference which, at the hour of death, takes place between the righteous and the ungodly. The latter knows nothing higher or better than the present state of existence. His interests, his pleasures, his expectations, all centered here. He lived solely for the enjoyments of this world. Dreadful, therefore, and insupportable must be that event which separates him from these for ever. Whereas, the culture of religion had previously formed the mind of a Christian for a calm and easy transitory from this life. It had instructed him in the proper estimate of sublunary happiness. It had set higher prospects before him. It had formed him to a more refined taste of enjoyment, than what the common round of worldly amusements could gratify. It gave him connections and alliances with spiritual objects, which are unknown to the men of the world. Hence, though he be attached to life by the natural feelings of humanity, he is raised above the weak and unmanly regret of parting with it. He knew that it was intended as preparatory only to a succeeding state. As soon as the season of preparation should be finished, he expected a removal; and when Providence gives the signal, he bids adieu to the world with composed resolution and undisturbed heart. What though death interrupt him in the middle of his designs, and break off the plans which he had formed, of being useful to his family and the world? All these he leaves with tranquillity in the hands of that Providence to which he has ever been accustomed to look up with resignation; which governed the world wisely and graciously before he existed; and which he knows will continue to govern it with equal wisdom and benignity when he shall be in it no more. The time of his departure was not left to his own choice; but he believes it to be the most proper, because it is the time chosen by him who cannot err. *Honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the gray hair to man; and an unspotted life is old age.** When he beholds his friends and relations mourning around him, his heart may melt, but will not be overpowered; for it is relieved by the thought that he i-

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv, 8, 9.

bidding them only a temporary not an eternal farewell. He commends them, in the mean time, to the blessing of that God whom he has served; and while he is parting from them, he hears a voice which soothes his spirit with those comforting words, *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widow trust in me.**

BUT death is more than the conclusion of human life. It is the gate, which, at the same time that it closes on this world, opens into eternity. Under this view, it has often been the subject of terror to the serious and reflecting. The transition they were about to make was awful. Before them lay a vast undiscovered region, from whose bourn no traveller ever returned to bring information of the reception which he found, or of the objects which he met with there. The first conception which suggests itself is, that the disembodied spirit is to appear before its Creator, who is then to act as its judge. The strict inquisition which it must undergo, the impartial doom which it must hear pronounced, and the unalterable state to which it shall be assigned, are awful forms rising before the imagination. They are ideas which Conscience forces upon all. Mankind can neither avoid considering themselves as accountable creatures, nor avoid viewing death as the season when their account is to be given. Such a sentiment is with most men the source of dread; with all men, of anxiety. To a certain degree, a good conscience will convey comfort. The reflection on a well-spent life makes a wide difference between the last moments of the righteous and the sinner. But whose conscience is so clear as to strike him with no remorse? Whose righteousness is so unblemished as to abide the scrutiny of the great Searcher of hearts? Who dares rest his everlasting fate upon his perfect conformity to the rule of duty throughout the whole of his life?

We must not judge of the sentiments of men at the approach of death, by their ordinary train of thought in the days of health and ease. Their views of moral conduct are then, too generally, superficial; slight excuses satisfy their minds, and the avocations of life prevent their attention from dwelling long on disagreeable subjects. But when altogether withdrawn from the affairs of the world, they are left to their own reflections on past conduct; with their spirits enfeebled by disease, and their minds impressed with the terrors of an invisible region; the most resolute are apt to despond, and even the virtuous are in danger of sinking under the remembrance of their errors and frailties. The trembling mind casts every where around an anxious exploring eye after any power that can uphold, any mercy that will shield and save it. And accordingly we see how eagerly

* Jerem. xlix, 11.

every device has been embraced, which superstition could invent in various countries, for quieting the alarms of the departing spirit.

Here appears the great importance of those discoveries which Christianity has made concerning the government of the universe. It displays the ensigns of grace and clemency. It reveals the Almighty, not as a Creator only and a Judge, but as a compassionate Parent, *who knows our frame, who remembers we are dust, who pities us as a father pitieth his children; and with whom there is forgiveness*, that he may be loved as well as feared.—These general views, however, of the divine administration, would not have been sufficient to give full relief, if they had not been confirmed by certain decisive facts to which the mind can appeal amidst all its doubts and fears. Two such facts the Gospel holds forth to us, particularly adapted to the situation of human nature in its greatest extremity; the atonement, and the intercession of Christ. There is no sentiment more natural to men than this, that guilt must be expiated by suffering. All government is founded on the principle, that public justice requires compensation for crimes; and all religions proceed upon the belief, that, in order to the pardon of the sinner, atonement must be made to the justice of Heaven. Hence the endless variety of sacrifices, victims, and expiations, which have filled the earth. The great sacrifice which our Redeemer offered for guilt, coincides with these natural sentiments of mankind in giving ease to the heart. It shows us the forfeit of guilt paid by a divine personage in our behalf; and allows us to look up to the Governor of the world, as merciful to the guilty in consistency with justice and order. But still some anxiety might remain concerning the extension of that mercy to our own case in particular. An invisible sovereign is an awful idea; almighty, unknown power, is always formidable, and would be ready to overwhelm the spirit of the feeble, were not an intercessor with that sovereign revealed. This intercessor is one who lived and acted in our own nature; who not only knows, but who experienced our frailty; who has all the feelings of a brother for human infirmity and distress; who himself passed through that *valley of the shadow of death* which is now opening on us; to whose powerful mediation with his Father, we have every encouragement to commit the charge of our departing spirit. Such is the provision which Christianity has made for comforting the last hours of man. The atonement, and the intercession of Christ, are the refuge of the penitent sinner, and the consolation of the saint. By their means, the throne of the universe is encircled with mercy. The cloud which hung over the invisible world begins to be dispersed; and hope brightens through the gloom.

BUT what completes the triumph of good men over death, is the prospect of eternal felicity. This was the great object after which all nations have sighed, as the only complete remedy both of the miseries of life and the fears of death. On this, the learned and the ignorant, the civilized and the savage tribes of mankind, bent their longing eyes; eagerly grasping at every argument, and fondly indulging every hope, that could promise them a propitious Deity, and a prolongation of existence in a happier state. But beyond wishes and feeble expectations, the light of nature could hardly reach. Even the most cultivated, philosophical mind was, at the hour of dissolution, left in painful suspense. Christianity has put an end to all hesitation and doubt on this important subject. It has drawn aside the veil through which reason essayed to penetrate; and has displayed to full view the future dwellings of the spirits of the just, the mansions of everlasting rest, *the city of the living God*. Not only has it informed us that a state of perfect felicity is prepared for the righteous, but it has added to this information a variety of circumstances which render that state sensible to our imagination, and encouraging to our hopes. It represents it as fully secured by the gracious undertaking of the Saviour of the world. It describes it as *an inheritance*, to which he has given his followers a right and title. He is said to have taken possession of it in their name. He rose from the grave as *the first fruits of them that sleep*; and under the character of their *fore-runner*, entered into the heavenly regions. *I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I give unto my sheep eternal life. I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.**

Hence, to those who have lived a virtuous life, and who die in the faith of Christ, the whole aspect of death is changed. Death is to them no longer the tyrant who approaches with his iron rod, but the messenger who brings the tidings of life and liberty. The prospects which open to them cheer their minds. Even in the valley of death's shade, *green pastures* appear to rise. They view themselves as going forth, not to lie silent and solitary in the darkness of the grave, not to wander forsaken in the wide deserts of the universe, not even to pass into a region where they are altogether strangers and unknown; but to enter on a land, new indeed to sight, but by faith and hope frequented long before; where they shall continue to be under the charge of him who hath hitherto been their guardian, be re-united to many of their ancient and beloved friends, and admitted to join the *innumerable multitude, gathered out of all nations, and tongues and people, who stand before the throne of God*. They leave be

* John, xi. 25.—xx. 17

hind the dregs of their nature; and exchange this confined and gloomy apartment of the universe, for the glorious mansions of their Father's house. Blessed, surely, are the dying in this hope, and *blessed the dead* in this fruition, *resting from their labours, and followed by their works*. Good men are detained at present in the outer court of the temple: Death admits them into the holy place. As yet, they sojourn in the territories of pilgrimage and exile. Death brings them home to the native land of Spirits. In this world, they are divided from one another, and mingled with the worthless and vile: Death unites in one assembly all the pure and the just. *In the sight of the universe they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for utter destruction. But they are in peace. Their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them with the Most High.*—O Death! where is now thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory!* Where are the terrors with which thou hast so long affrighted the nations? Where are thy dreary and desolate domains, the haunts of spectres and shades, the abhorred dwellings of darkness and corruption? At the touch of the divine rod, the visionary horrors have fled. The spell is broken. The dawn of the celestial morning has dispelled thy dismal gloom; and, instead of the *habitations of dragons*, appears the paradise of God.

BUT supposing both the regret of quitting life, and the dread of entering into a future state, to be overcome, there is still one circumstance which renders death formidable to many; that is, the shock which nature is apprehending to sustain at the separation of the soul from the body. Formidable, I admit, this may justly render it to them whose languishing spirits have no inward fund whence they can then draw relief. Firmness and strength of mind are peculiarly requisite for the support of nature in its last extremity; and that strength is supplied by religion. The testimony of a good conscience, and the remembrance of a virtuous life, a well-grounded trust in the divine acceptance, and a firm hope of future felicity, are principles sufficient to give composure and fortitude to the heart, even in the midst of agony. In what a high degree they can suspend or alleviate the feelings of pain, has been fully demonstrated, by the magnanimous behaviour of such as have suffered death in the cause of conscience and religion. How often has the world beheld them advancing to meet that supposed king of terrors, not with calmness only, but with joy; raised by divine prospects and hopes, into an entire neglect and contempt of bodily suffering?

It is not without reason that a peculiar assistance from heaven is looked for by good men at the hour of death. As they are taught to believe, that in all their emergencies of their life

* Wisdom of Solomon, iii. 2, 3.—v. 15

divine goodness has watched over them, they have ground to conclude, that at the last it will not forsake them ; but that, at the season when its aid is most needed, it shall be most liberally communicated. Accordingly, a persuasion so congruous to the benignity and compassion of the Father of mercies, has been the comfort of pious men in every age. *My flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart. In the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. When the rod and staff of this Shepherd of Israel are held forth to his expiring servants, declining nature needs no other support. The secret influence of his reviving Spirit is sufficient for their consolation and strength, while the painful struggle with mortality lasts ; till at length when the moment arrives that the silver cord must be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken, their Almighty Protector carries off the immortal spirit unhurt by the fall of its earthly tabernacle, and places it in a better mansion. How respectable and happy is such a conclusion of human life, when one in this manner quits the stage of time, honoured and supported with the presence of his Creator, and enjoying till the last moment of reflection, the pleasing thought, that he has not lived in vain ! I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course ; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day.**

AFTER the view which we have taken of the advantages possessed by good men for overcoming the fears of death, the first sentiment which should arise in our minds, is gratitude to Heaven for the hopes which we enjoy by means of the Christian religion. How depressed and calamitous was the human condition, as long as the terror of death hung, like a dark cloud, over the inhabitants of the earth ; when, after all the toils of life, the melancholly silence of the grave appeared finally to close the scene of existence ; or, if a future state opened behind it, that state teemed with all those forms of horror which conscious guilt could suggest to a terrified imagination ! The happiest change which ever took place in the circumstances of the human race, is that produced by the discoveries with which we are blessed, concerning the government of the universe, the redemption of the world, and the future destination of man. How much dignity is thereby added to the human character, and state ! What light and cheerfulness is introduced into our abode ! What eternal praise is due to Him, who, *according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven !*

* 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

THE next effect which the subject we have considered should produce, is an earnest desire to acquire those advantages which good men enjoy at their death. The road which leads to them is plain and obvious. A peaceful and happy death is, by the appointment of Heaven connected with a holy and virtuous life. Let us renounce criminal pursuits and pleasures; let us fear God, and keep his commandments; let us *hold faith and a good conscience*, if we hope for comfort at our last hour. To prepare for this last hour every wise man should consider as his most important concern. Death may justly be held the test of life. Let a man have supported his character with esteem and applause, as long as he acted on the busy stage of the world, if at the end he sinks into dejection and terror, all his former honour is effaced; he departs under the imputation of either a guilty conscience or a pusillanimous mind. In the other parts of human conduct, disguise and subtlety may impose on the world; but seldom can artifice be supported in the hour of death. The mask most commonly falls off, and the genuine character appears. When we behold the scene of life closed with proper composure and dignity, we naturally infer integrity and fortitude. We are led to believe that divine assistance supports the soul, and we presage its transition into a happier mansion. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.**

THE last instruction, which our subject points out, respects the manner in which a wise and good man ought to stand affected towards life and death. He ought not to be servilely attached to the one. He has no reason abjectly to dread the other. Life is the gift of God, which he may justly cherish and hold dear. Nay, he is bound by all fair means to guard and preserve it, that he may continue to be useful in that post of duty where Providence has placed him. But there are higher principles to which the love of life should remain subordinate.—Wherever religion, virtue, or true honour, call him forth to danger, life ought to be hazarded without fear. There is a generous contempt of death, which should distinguish those who live and walk by the faith of immortality. This is the source of courage in a Christian. His behaviour ought to show the elevation of his soul above the present world; ought to discover the liberty which he possesses, of following the native sentiments of his mind, without any of those restraints and fetters which the fear of death imposes on vicious men.

At the same time, this rational contempt of death must carefully be distinguished from that inconsiderate and thoughtless indifference, with which some have affected to treat it. This is

* Psalm xxxvii. 37.

what cannot be justified on any principle of reason. Human life is no trifle, which men may play away at their pleasure. Death, in every view, is an important event. It is the most solemn crisis of the human existence. A good man has reason to meet it with a calm and firm mind. But no man is entitled to treat it with ostentatious levity. It calls for manly seriousness of thought. It requires all the recollection of which we are capable; that with the proper disposition of dependent beings, when the dust is about to *return to its dust*, we may deliver up *the spirit to Him who gave it*.

SERMON XXIV.

ON THE HAPPINESS OF A FUTURE STATE.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

After this I beheld, and, lo ! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.—REVELATIONS, vii. 9.

IN this mysterious book of Scripture many revolutions are foretold, which were to take place in the church of God. They are not indeed so foretold as to afford clear and precise information concerning the time of their coming to pass. It would have been, on many accounts, improper to have lifted up too far that awful veil which covers futurity. The intention of the Spirit of God was not to gratify the curiosity of the learned, by disclosing to them the fate of monarchies and nations, but to satisfy the serious concerning the general plan, and final issue of the divine government. Amidst those distresses which befel Christians during the first ages, the discoveries made in this book were peculiarly seasonable; as they showed that there was an Almighty Guardian, who watched with particular attention over the interests of the church which he had formed, who foresaw all the commotions which were to happen among the kingdoms of the earth, and would so overrule them as to promote in the end the cause of truth. This is the chief scope of those mystic visions with which the Apostle John was favoured; of seals opened in Heaven; of trumpets sounding; and vials poured forth. The kingdom of darkness was to maintain for a while a violent struggle against the kingdom of light. But at the conclusion, a voice was to be heard *as the voice of many waters and of mighty*

*thunderings, saying, Allelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever.** Such is the prospect with which the Divine Spirit at intervals enlightens, and with which he finally terminates, the many dark and direful scenes that are exhibited in this book. In closing the canon of scripture, he, with great propriety, leaves upon our mind deep impressions of the triumphs of righteousness, and of the blessedness of the redeemed. *After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.*

These words present a beautiful description of the happiness of saints in heaven; a subject on which it is, at all times, both comfortable and improving to meditate. On this day in particular, when we are to commemorate the dying love of our Saviour, we cannot be better employed than in contemplating what his love hath purchased; in order both to awaken our gratitude, and to confirm our attachment to him. The sacrament of the Supper is the oath of our fidelity. Let us dispose ourselves for celebrating it, by taking a view of the rewards which await the faithful. I shall, for this end, in several observations from the words of the text, taken in connexion with the context, endeavour to illustrate, in some imperfect degree, the prospect which is here afforded us of a state of future felicity; and then shall make practical improvement of the subject.

I. WHAT the words of the text most obviously suggest is, that heaven is to be considered as a state of blessed society. *A multitude*, a numerous assembly, are here represented as sharing together the same felicity and honour. Without society, it is impossible for man to be happy. Place him in a region where he was surrounded with every pleasure; yet there, if he found himself a solitary individual, he would pine and languish.—They are not merely our wants, and our mutual dependence, but our native instincts also, which impel us to associate together. The intercourse which we here maintain with our fellows, is a source of our chief enjoyments. But, alas! how much are these allayed by a variety of disagreeable circumstances that enter into all our connections! Sometimes we suffer from the distresses of those whom we love; and sometimes from their vices or frailties. Where friendship is cordial, it is exposed to the wounds of painful sympathy, and to the anguish of violent separation. Where it is so cool as not to occasion sympathetic pains, it is never productive of much pleasure. The ordinary commerce of the world consists in a circulation of frivolous in-

* Rev. xix. 6.—xi. 15.

tercourse, in which the heart has no concern. It is generally insipid, and often soured by the slightest difference in humour, or opposition of interest. We fly to company, in order to be relieved from wearisome correspondence with ourselves; and the vexations which we meet with in society, drive us back again into solitude. Even among the virtuous, dissensions arise; and disagreement in opinion too often produces alienation of heart. We form few connections where somewhat does not occur to disappoint our hopes. The beginnings are often pleasing.—we flatter ourselves with having found those who will never give us any disgust. But weaknesses are too soon discovered. Suspicious arise; and love waxes cold. We are jealous of one another, and accustomed to live in disguise. A studied civility assumes the name, without the pleasure, of friendship; and secret animosity and envy are often concealed under the caresses of dissembled affection.

Hence the pleasure of earthly society, like all our other pleasures, is extremely imperfect; and can give us a very faint conception of the joy that must arise from the society of perfect spirits in a happier world. Here, it is with difficulty that we can select from the corrupted crowd a few with whom we wish to associate in strict union. There, are assembled all the wise, the holy, and the just, who ever existed in the universe of God! without any distress to trouble their mutual bliss, or any source of disagreement to interrupt their perpetual harmony. Artifice and concealment are unknown there. There, no competitors struggle, no factions contend; no rivals supplant each other. The voice of discord never rises, the whisper of suspicion never circulates, among those innocent and benevolent spirits. Each happy in himself, participates in the happiness of all the rest; and, by reciprocal communications of love and friendship at once receives from and adds to the sum of general felicity. Renew the memory of the most affectionate friends with whom you were blest in any period of your life. Divest them of all those infirmities which adhere to the human character. Recal the most pleasing and tender moments which you ever enjoyed in their society; and the remembrance of those sensations may assist you in conceiving that felicity which is possessed by the saints above. The happiness of *brethren dwelling together in unity* is, with great justice and beauty, compared by the Psalmist to such things as are most refreshing to the heart of man; to the fragraney of the richest odours, and to the reviving influence of soft ethereal dews. *It is like the precious ointment poured on the head of Aaron; and like the dew of Hermon, even the dew that descendeth on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore.**

* Psalm cxxxiii. 2.

Besides the felicity which springs from perfect love, there are two circumstances which particularly enhance the blessedness of that *multitude who stands before the throne*; these are, access to the most exalted society, and renewal of the most tender connections. The former is pointed out in the Scripture by *joining the innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and church of the first-born; by sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven*;* a promise which opens the sublimest prospects to the human mind. It allows good men to entertain the hope, that, separated from all the dregs of the human mass, from that mixed and polluted crowd in the midst of which they now dwell, they shall be permitted to mingle with prophets, patriarchs, and apostles, with legislators and heroes, with all those great and illustrious spirits, who have shown in former ages as the servants of God, or the benefactors of men; whose deeds we are accustomed to celebrate; whose steps we now follow at a distance; and whose names we pronounce with veneration.

United to this high assembly, the blessed at the same time renew those ancient connections with virtuous friends which had been dissolved by death. The prospect of this awakens in the heart the most pleasing and tender sentiment which perhaps can fill it in this mortal state. For, of all the sorrows which we are here doomed to endure, none is so bitter as that occasioned by the fatal stroke which separates us, in appearance, for ever, from those to whom either nature or friendship had intimately joined our hearts. Memory, from time to time, renews the anguish; opens the wound which seemed once to have been closed; and, by recalling joys that are past and gone, touches every spring of painful sensibility. In these agonizing moments how relieving the thought, that the separation is only temporary, not eternal; that there is a time to come, of re-union with those with whom our happiest days were spent; whose joys and sorrows once were ours; and from whom, after we shall have landed on the peaceful shore where they dwell, no revolutions of nature shall ever be able to part us more!—Such is the society of the blessed above. Of such are the multitude composed who *stand before the throne*. Let us now observe,

II. THAT this is not only a blessed but a numerous society. It is called *a multitude, a great multitude, a great multitude which no man could number*. These expressions convey the most enlarged views of the kingdom of glory. Dismay not yourselves with the apprehension of heaven being a confined and almost inaccessible region, into which it is barely possible for a small handful to gain admission, after making their escape from the general wreck of the human race. *In my Father's house*, said our Saviour, *there are many mansions*. *That city of the*

* Heb. xii. 22, 23. Matth. viii. 11.

living God, towards which you profess to bend your course, is prepared for the reception of citizens innumerable. It already abounds with inhabitants; and more and more shall be added to it, until the end of time. Whatever difficulties there are in the way which leads to it, they have been often surmounted. The path, though narrow, is neither impassible, nor untrodden.— Though the gate stands not so wide as that which opens into hell, yet through the narrow gate multitudes have entered, and been crowned.

It is much to be lamented, that, among all denominations of Christians, the uncharitable spirit has prevailed, of unwarrantably circumscribing the terms of divine grace within a narrow circle of their own drawing. The one half of the Christian world has often doomed the other, without mercy, to eternal perdition. Without the pale of that church to which each sect belongs, they seem to hold it impossible for salvation to be attained. But is this the genuine spirit of the gospel? Can a Christian believe the effects of the sufferings of Christ to be no greater than these! For this did the Son of God descend from the highest heavens, and pour out his soul unto the death, that only a few, who adopt the same modes of expression, and join in the same forms of worship with us, might be brought to the kingdom of heaven? Is this all *the deliverance he has wrought upon the earth*? *He was with child*; *he was in pain*; and shall he not *see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied*? Surely, the Scripture has given us full ground to conclude, that the trophies of our Redeemer's grace shall correspond to the greatness of his power. *The Captain of our salvation shall bring many sons with himself to glory. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see his seed; He shall justify many. Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.* For our farther encouragement let us observe,

III. THAT the heavenly society is represented in the text, as gathered out of all the varieties of the human race. This is intimated by the remarkable expressions, of *a multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*; as if designed on purpose to correct our narrow notions of the extent and power of divine grace. They whom distant seas and regions now divide, whose languages and manners are at present strange to one another, shall then mingle in the same assembly. No situation is so remote, and no station so unfavourable, as to preclude access to the heavenly felicity. A road is opened by the Divine Spirit to those blissful habitations from all corners of the earth, and from all conditions of human life; from the peopled city, and from the solitary desert; from the cottages of the poor, and from the palaces of kings; from the dwellings of ignorance and simplicity, and from the regions of science

and improvement. *They shall come*, says our blessed Lord *himself from the east, and from the west. from the north, and from the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.**

Such discoveries serve both to enlarge our conceptions of the extent of divine goodness, and to remove those fears which are ready to arise from particular situations in life. Were you permitted to draw aside the veil, and to view that diversified assembly of the blessed who surround the throne, you would behold among them numbers who have overcome the same difficulties which encounter you, and which you dread as insuperable. You would behold there the uninstructed, with whom an upright intention supplied the place of knowledge; the feeble, whom divine grace had strengthened; and the misled, whom it had brought back into the right path. You would behold the young who had surmounted the allurements of youthful pleasure, and the old who had borne the distress of age with undecayed constancy; many whom want could not tempt to dishonesty; many whom riches did not seduce into pride or impiety; many who in the most difficult and ensnaring circumstances, in the midst of camps and armies, and corrupted courts, had preserved unsullied integrity. In a word. *from all kindreds and people*; that is, from all ranks of life, and all tribes of men, even from among *publicans and sinners*, you would behold those whom divine assistance had conducted to future glory.—And is not the same assistance, in its full extent, offered also to us? Encompassed, while we run the Christian race, with this *cloud of witnesses* who have finished their course with success; animated, while we *fight the good fight*, with the shouts of those who have overcome and are crowned, shall despair enervate or deject our minds? From the happy multitude above, there issues a voice which ought to sound perpetually in the ear of faith. *Be ye faithful unto the death; and ye shall receive the crown of life: Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might: Be followers of us who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises.* Consider,

IV. THE description given in the text of the happiness, and glory of the heavenly society. They were beheld by the Apostle *standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.* All that these *palms and white robes* import, it is not given us now to understand. We know that among all nations they have been used as ensigns of joy and victory! and are undoubtedly employed here to represent that distinguished felicity and honour to which human nature shall be then advanced. But we must be endowed with the faculties of the blessed, in order to comprehend their employ-

* Luke, xiii. 29.

ments and pleasures; and therefore on this part of the subject I shall not attempt to enlarge. The silence of humble and respectful hope better becomes us, than the indulgence of those excursions of fancy, which degrade the subject they endeavour to exalt,

One circumstance only cannot fail to attract particular attention; That the blessed are here described as *standing before the throne, and before the Lamb*; that is, enjoying the immediate presence of the great Creator, and of the merciful Redeemer of the world. The unhappy distance at which we are now removed from God, is the source of all our woes. Those territories which we inhabit, are not His abode. They are regions of exile. They are the dwellings of a fallen race; and are condemned to be invested with clouds and darkness. Here, God standeth afar off. In vain we often pursue his presence through his works, his ways, and his religious institutions. He is said to be a *God that hideth himself. He dwelleth, as to us, in the secret place of thunder. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it.* The manifestation of his presence shall be the signal for the renovation of all things. When that *Sun of righteousness* breaks forth from the cloud which now conceals him, sorrow and sin, and every evil thing, shall fly away before the brightness of his face. For neither guilt nor misery can remain where God dwells. As the rising of the sun transforms at once the face of nature, and converts the whole extent of space, over which his beams are spread, into a region of light; so shall the divine presence, as soon as it is revealed, diffuse universal bliss over all who behold it. It imports *fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore.* The inspired writer of this book thus describes its effects; *There shall be no more death; neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain: for the former things are passed away. He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. But the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* But, descending from this too sublime theme, let us,

V. TURN our attention to a circumstance in the state of future happiness, more commensurate to our present conceptions, which is suggested by the commentary upon the words of the text given in the sequel of the chapter. *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which come out of great tribulation.** This explanatory circumstance may relate particu-

larly to the case of those primitive sufferers who endured severe persecution in the cause of the Gospel. But, in general, it presents this natural and beautiful view of the future felicity of good men, that it is their rest from the troubles and toils of life. For, to all, even to the happiest, human life is tribulation and conflict. No man is thoroughly at ease, in his condition. Pursuits succeeding to pursuits keep us in constant agitation; while frequent returns of disappointment break our plans and oppress our spirits.—Fatigued by such a variety of toils, mankind have ever looked forward to rest as their favourite object. Throughout all their ranks, from the highest to the lowest, they are in perpetual chase of it; and it perpetually flies before them. It is an object which here they are doomed always to seek, and never to enjoy.

The nature and laws of our present state admit not the gratification of this favourite wish. For, besides the necessity of trouble, in order to fulfil the purposes of discipline and improvement, our very happiness, such as it is in this world, requires a circulation of labours. Our enjoyment consists in pursuit, not in attainment. Attainment is with us, for the most part, the grave of pleasure. Had we no object to excite fresh activity, and to impel us to new toils, human life would quickly stagnate in melancholy indolence. At the same time the current of all our wishes tends to repose. Imaginary forms float incessantly before our view, of the happiness which is to be enjoyed in rest: And from this conflict between our wishes on the one hand, and our actual situation on the other, arise much of the disquiet, and much of the infelicity, of human life. It is only in heaven that the tranquil repose, which on earth is no more than a pleasing phantom, shall be fully realized. There, *remaineth at last a rest for the people of God*; rest from the disturbance of passion, the vanity of pursuit, and the vexation of disappointment; rest from all the sins and the sorrows of this miserable world; rest, which shall not be merely an indolent cessation from labour, but a full and satisfying enjoyment. Good men *shall rest from their labours, and their works shall follow them*. They have *come out of great tribulation*. They have fulfilled, with honour, their appointed course of trial. They have sat down in the seat of the Conqueror; and of past labours nothing remains but the pleasing review, and the happy fruits. There is still to be considered,

VI. ONE very material circumstance, descriptive both of the character, and of the happiness of those who enjoy the heavenly bliss. Not only have *they come out of great tribulation*, but, as the Spirit of God adds in explaining the text, *they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the*

*Lamb.** Two things are here suggested; the sanctity of the blessed, and the means by which it is attained.

First, their sanctity or purity is emblamatically described, by their being clothed in *robes which are washed and made white*.— In order to qualify human nature for the enjoyment of such happiness as I have endeavoured to describe, it must undergo a change so great, as to receive in Scripture the appellation of a *new birth*; a change to which all the institutions of religion, and all the operations of grace, contribute in this life, but which is not completed till the next. In this sanctity, or regeneration, consist not only the necessary preparations for future felicity, but which is not so commonly attended to, consists an essential part of that felicity itself. For whence arises the misery of this present world? It is not owing to our cloudy atmosphere, our changing seasons, and inclement skies. It is not owing to the debility of our bodies, or to the unequal distribution of the goods of fortune. Amidst all disadvantage of this kind, a pure, a steadfast, and enlightened mind, possessed of exalted virtue, could enjoy itself in peace, and smile at the impotent assaults of fortune and the elements. It is within ourselves that misery has fixed its seat. Our disordered hearts, our guilty passions, our violent prejudices, and misplaced desires, are the instruments of the torment which we endure. These sharpen the darts which adversity would otherwise point in vain against us. These are the *vials of wrath* which pour forth plagues on the inhabitants of the earth; and make the dwellings of nations become the abodes of wo. Thence discontent and remorse gnaw the hearts of individuals. Thence society is torn by open violence, or undermined by secret treachery; and man is transformed into a savage to man.

But suppose sin to be banished from the world; suppose perfect purity and charity to descend from Heaven, and to animate every human breast; and you would behold the present habitation of men changed into the paradise of God. The undisturbed enjoyment of a holy mind, and of a blissful union with one another, would scarcely allow us to feel those external evils of which we now so loudly complain. All nature would assume a different appearance around us. That golden age, which was so long the subject of the philosopher's dream, and of the poet's song, would in fact take place. According to the beautiful language of ancient prophecy, *springs would then rise in the desert, and rivers be opened in the thirsty land. The wilderness and the solitary place would be glad. The wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid. Judgment would dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness re-*

* Rev. vii. 14.

main in the fruitful field. The desert would rejoice, and blossom as the rose.—If such, even in this world, would be the effects of innocence and virtue completely restored, how much greater must they be in that *new earth*, and those *new heavens*, where rectitude of nature shall be combined with every circumstance of external felicity? It is the present imperfect state of human virtue, that hinders us from conceiving fully the influence of righteousness upon happiness. The *robes* in which the best men are now clothed, to use the language of the text, are sullied with so many stains, as to convey no adequate idea of the original beauty which belongs to the garb of righteousness. But when these stains shall be washed away, when these robes shall be made perfectly white and pure, a lustre will flow from them, of which we can, as yet, form no conception.

But how are the robes of the blessed thus washed? Whence is derived that spotless purity in which they are arrayed? The Spirit of God hath answered us, *from the blood of the Lamb*; leading our thoughts to that high dispensation of mercy, to which the saints above owe their establishment, first in grace, and then in glory. From that blood which was *shed for the remission of sins*, flow both the atonement of human guilt, and the regeneration of human nature. Human nature had fallen too low to be capable of retrieving itself. It could not regain its primitive innocence, and still less was capable of raising itself so high in the scale of existence as to mingle with angels.—We had neither sufficient knowledge to discover, nor virtue to merit, nor ability to qualify ourselves for enjoying, celestial glory. Heaven must have been either covered from our view by perpetual darkness, or only beheld from afar as an inaccessible region, if Christ had not interposed to *open for us a new and living way within the veil*. The obligations which his generous undertaking has conferred upon the human race, will tend highly to increase the felicity of the blessed. The sense of being distinguished by so illustrious a benefactor, and the corresponding returns of gratitude and love to him, form some of the most pleasing of those emotions which shall continue to delight them through all eternity.

FROM those views of a state of future happiness which the text has suggested, various instructions relating to life and practice naturally arise. We are taught to rectify our notions of felicity; to look for it, not in what is external, but in what relates to the mind and heart; in good dispositions and a purified soul; in unity and friendship with one another; and in the divine presence and favour. If such things form the principal articles of future bliss, they cannot but be essential to our happiness in the more early periods of existence; and he who seeks

his chief enjoyment from an opposite quarter, errs widely from the path which conducts to felicity.

We are farther taught whence to derive constancy and perseverance, amidst the present discouragements of a virtuous life. In this world, we often behold good men depressed, and the wicked prospering around us. Our best deeds meet with unjust returns from an ungrateful world. Sincerity is over-reached by craft, and innocence falls a victim to power. But let us not on such occasions say within ourselves, *that in vain we have cleansed our hearts, and washed our hands in innocency.* Let us rest on the assurance, that these disorders extend not far in the kingdom of God. They affect only the first stage of existence. They relate to discipline and trial, which will soon be finished. In that permanent state which is about to open, a new and better order of things shall arise. When dejected with the evils of life, let us look up to that happy *multitude who have come out of great tribulation, and now stand before the throne.* Until the day arrive which shall join us to that blessed assembly, let us show ourselves worthy of the hope that is before us, by supporting, with a constant mind, the trials of our fidelity. *Be patient; stablish your hearts. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

From the prospects which the text has afforded, we may likewise learn what the spirit is which should regulate our life. Sanctity of conduct, dignity of character, elevation of affections, become those who expect to mingle with angels, and *spirits of just men made perfect.* I mean not that such prospects should carry away our whole attention from the present world, where undoubtedly lies the chief scene of human action, of human duty. But while we act as inhabitants of the earth, we ought at the same time so to remember our connection with a better world, as not to debase ourselves with what is mean, not to defile ourselves with what is impure, not to entangle ourselves among what is ensnaring, in the present state. Let neither its advantages elate, nor its disappointments deject us; but with an equal spirit with a mind full of immortality, let us pass through all the changes of this mortal life.

Finally, Let the discoveries of future happiness inspire us with suitable gratitude to God and Christ; to the eternal Father, who originally decreed such rewards for the righteous; and to the Son, who acts in the high character of the Dispenser of the divine mercies, and the great Restorer of the fallen race of men. Particularly when approaching to God in solemn acts of devotion, such as we are at this day to perform, let gratitude be alive and ardent in our heart. The commemoration of our Saviour's death is in a high degree suited to awaken every emotion of tenderness and love. It brings before us, under one view, all

the obligations which we lie under to this great Benefactor of mankind. When just ready to suffer for our sake, he instituted this holy sacrament, and said, *Do this in remembrance of me.*—Whom, Oh blessed Jesus! shall we ever remember, if we are capable of forgetting Thee? Thee, to whom we owe the forgiveness of sin, and the restoration of divine favour; our victory over death, and our hope of life eternal! Thou hast enlarged our views beyond those territories of disorder and darkness. Thou hast discovered to us the *city of the living God*. Thou settest open the gates of that *new Jerusalem*; and leadest us into the *path of life*. Thou from age to age gatherest *out of every nation, and kindred, and people, that multitude which stand before the throne*. Thou bringest them *out of great tribulation*. Thine are the *white robes* with which they are invested; thine *the palms* which they bear; and by Thee they are placed under the light of the divine countenance for ever.

SERMON XXV.

ON CANDOUR.

Charity—thinketh no evil.—1 CORINTH. XIII. 5.

RELIGION and Government are the two great foundations of order and comfort among mankind. Government restrains the outrages and crimes which would be subversive of society, secures the property, and defends the lives, of its subjects. But the defect of government is, that human laws can extend no farther than to the actions of men. Though they protect us from external violence, they leave us open on different sides to be wounded. By the vices which prevail in society our tranquillity may be disturbed, and our lives in various ways embittered, while government can give us no redress. Religion supplies the insufficiency of law, by striking at the root of those disorders which occasion so much misery in the world. Its professed scope is to regulate, not actions alone, but the temper and inclinations. By this means it ascends to the sources of conduct; and very ineffectual would the wisest system of legislation prove for the happiness of mankind, if it did not derive aid from religion, in softening the dispositions of men, and checking many of those evil passions to which the influence of law cannot possibly reach.

We are led to this reflection by the description given in the context, of charity, that great principle in the Christian system. The Apostle places it in a variety of lights, and under each of them explain its operation by its internal effects; not by the actions to which it gives rise, but by the dispositions which it produces in the heart. He justly supposes, that if the temper be duly regulated, propriety of action will follow, and good order take place in external behaviour. Of those characters of charity, I have chosen one for the subject of this Discourse, which leads to the consideration of a virtue highly important to us.

both as Christians and as members of society. I shall endeavour, first, to explain the temper here pointed out, by showing what this description of charity imports, that *it thinketh no evil*; and then to recommend such a disposition, and to display the bad effects of an opposite turn of mind.

I. LET us consider what this description of charity imports. You will easily perceive that the expression in the text is not to be understood in a scene altogether unlimited; as if there were no occasion on which we are to think unfavourably of others.—To view all the actions of men with the same degree of complacency, would be contrary both to common understanding, and to many express precepts of religion. In a world where so much depravity abounds, were we to think and speak equally well of all, we must either be insensible of the distinction between right and wrong, or be indifferent to that distinction when we perceived it. Religion renders it our duty to *abhor that which is evil*; and, on many occasions, to express our indignation openly against it. But the Apostle, with great propriety, describes the temper which he is recommending, in such strong and general terms, as might guard us against that extreme, to which we are naturally most prone, of rash and unjust suspicion.—The virtue which he means to inculcate, is that which is known by the name of Candour: a virtue, which, as soon as it is mentioned, every one will acknowledge to be essential to the character of a worthy man; a virtue which we seldom fail of ascribing to any person whom we seek to recommend to the esteem of others; but which, I am afraid, when we examine our own conduct in a religious view, is seldom the subject of enquiry.

It is necessary to observe, that true Candour is altogether different from that guarded, inoffensive language, and that studied openness of behaviour, which we so frequently meet with among men of the world. Smiling, very often, is the aspect, and smooth are the words, of those who inwardly are the most ready to think evil of others. That Candour which is a Christian virtue, consists not in fairness of speech, but in fairness of heart. It may want the blandishment of external courtesy, but supplies its place with humane and generous liberality of sentiment. Its manners are unaffected, and its professions cordial. Exempt, on one hand, from the dark jealousy of a suspicious mind; it is no less removed, on the other, from that easy credulity which is imposed on by every specious pretence. It is perfectly consistent with extensive knowledge of the world, and with due attention to our own safety. In that various intercourse which we are obliged to carry on with persons of every different character, suspicion, to a certain degree, is a necessary guard. It is only when it exceeds the bounds of prudent caution, that it degenerates into vice. There is a proper mean

between undistinguishing credulity and universal jealousy, which a sound understanding discerns, and which the man of candour studies to preserve.

He makes allowance for the mixture of evil with good, which is to be found in every human character. He expects none to be faultless; and he is unwilling to believe that there is any without some commendable quality. In the midst of many defects, he can discover a virtue. Under the influence of personal resentment, he can be just to the merit of an enemy. He never lends an open ear to those defamatory reports and dark suggestions, which, among the tribes of the censorious, circulate with so much rapidity, and meet with such ready acceptance. He is not hasty to judge, and he requires full evidence before he will condemn. As long as an action can be ascribed to different motives, he holds it as no mark of sagacity to impute it always to the worst. Where there is just ground for doubt, he keeps his judgment undecided; and, during the period of suspense, leans to the most charitable construction which an action can bear. When he must condemn, he condemns with regret; and without those aggravations which the severity of others adds to the crime. He listens calmly to the apology of the offender, and readily admits every extenuating circumstance which equity can suggest. How much soever he may blame the principles of any sect or party, he never confounds, under one general censure, all who belong to that party or sect. He charges them not with such consequences of their tenets, as they refuse and disavow. From one wrong opinion, he does not infer the subversion of all sound principles; nor, from one bad action, conclude that all regard to conscience is overthrown. When he *beholds the mote in his brother's eye* he remembers *the beam in his own*. He commiserates human frailty; and judges of others, according to the principles by which he would think it reasonable that they should judge of him. In a word, he views men and actions in the clear sunshine of charity and good-nature; and not in that dark and sullen shade which jealousy and party-spirit throw over all characters.—Such being, in general, the spirit of that charity which *thinketh no evil*, I proceed,

II. To recommend, by various arguments, this important branch of Christian virtue.

Let us begin with observing what a necessary requisite it is to the proper discharge of all the social duties. I need not spend time in showing that these hold a very high rank in the Christian system. The encomium which the Apostle in this chapter bestows upon charity, is alone sufficient to prove it. He places this grace at the head of all the gifts and endowments which can be possessed by man; and assures us, that *though we had all faith, so that we could remove mountains*, yet if we be destitute of

charity, *it will profit us nothing.* Accordingly, *love, gentleness, meekness and long-suffering,* are enumerated as distinguishing *fruits of the spirit* of Christ.* But it is impossible for such virtues as these to find place in a breast, where the propensity to think evil of others is predominant. Charitable and candid thoughts of men are the necessary introduction to all good-will and kindness. They form, if we may speak so, the only climate in which love can grow up and flourish. A suspicious temper checks in the bud every kind affection. It hardens the heart, and estranges man from man. What friendship or gratitude can you expect from him, who views all your conduct with distrustful eyes, and ascribes every benefit you confer to artifice and stratagem? The utmost which you can hope from one of this character, is justice in his dealings: nor even that can you be assured of; as to the suspicions to which he is a prey will afford him frequent pretexts for departing from truth, and for defending himself with the same arms which he conceives to be employed against him. Unhappy will they be who are joined with him by any close connection; exposed to every malignant suspicion which arises in his own mind, and to every unjust suggestion which the malice of others may insinuate against them. That store of poison which is collected within him, frequently throws out its venom on all who are within its reach. As a companion, he will be severe and satirical; as a friend, captious and dangerous; in his domestic sphere, harsh, jealous, and irascible; in his civil capacity, seditious and turbulent, prone to impute the conduct of his superiors to improper motives, and upon loose information to condemn their conducts.

The contrary of all this may be expected from a candid temper. Whatever is amiable in manners, or useful in society, naturally and easily ingrafts itself upon it. Gentleness, humanity, and compassion, flow from it as their native spring. Open and cheerful in itself, it diffuses cheerfulness and good-humour over all who are under its influence. It is the chief ground of mutual confidence and union among men. It prevents those animosities from arising, which are the offspring of groundless prejudice; or, by its benign interposition, allays them when arisen. In the magistrate, it tempers justice with lenity. Among subjects it promotes good order and submission. It connects humanity with piety. For he who is not given to think evil of his fellow-creatures, will not be ready to censure the dispensations of his Creator. Whereas the same turn of mind which renders one jealous and unjust towards men, will incline him to be querulous and impious towards God.

IN the second place. As a suspicious uncharitable spirit is in-

* Gal. v. 22, 23.

consistent with all social virtue and happiness, so, in itself, it is unreasonable and unjust. In order to form sound opinions concerning characters and actions, two things are especially requisite, information and impartiality. But such as are most forward to decide unfavourably, are commonly destitute of both. Instead of possessing, or even requiring, full information, the grounds on which they proceed are frequently the most slight and frivolous. A tale, perhaps, which the idle have invented, the inquisitive have listened to, and the credulous have propagated, or a real incident which rumour, in carrying it along, has exaggerated and disguised, supplies them with materials of confident assertion, and decisive judgment. From an action, they presently look into the heart, and infer the motive. This supposed motive they conclude to be the ruling principle; and pronounce at once concerning the whole character.

Nothing can be more contrary both to equity and to sound reason, than such precipitate judgments. Any man who attends to what passes within himself, may easily discern what a complicated system the human character is, and what a variety of circumstances must be taken into the account, in order to estimate it truly. No single instance of conduct whatever, is sufficient to determine it. As from one worthy action, it were credulity, not charity, to conclude a person to be free from all vice; so from one which is censurable, it is perfectly unjust to infer that the author of it is without conscience and without merit.—Did you know all the attending circumstances, it might appear in an excusable light; nay, perhaps, under a commendable form. The motives of the actor may have been entirely different from those which you ascribe to him; and, where you suppose him impelled by bad design, he may have been prompted by conscience and mistaken principle. Admitting the action to have been in every view criminal, he may have been hurried into it through inadvertency and surprise. He may have sincerely repented; and the virtuous principle may have now regained its full vigour. Perhaps this was the corner of frailty the quarter on which he lay open to the incursions of temptation; while the other avenues of his heart were firmly guarded by conscience.

No error is more palpable than to look for uniformity from human nature; though it is commonly on the supposition of it that our general conclusions concerning character are formed. Mankind are consistent neither in good nor in evil. In the present state of frailty, all is mixed and blended. The strongest contrarieties of piety and hypocrisy, of generosity and avarice, of truth and duplicity, often meet in one character. The purest human virtue is consistent with some vice; and, in the midst of much vice and disorder, amiable, nay respectable, qualities may be found. There are few cases in which we have ground to con-

clude that all goodness is lost. At the bottom of the character there may lie some sparks of piety and virtue, suppressed, but not extinguished; which, kept alive by the breath of Heaven, and gathering strength in secret from reflection, may, on the first favourable opening which is afforded them, be ready to break forth with splendour and force.—Placed, then, in a situation of so much uncertainty and darkness, where our knowledge of the hearts and characters of men is so limited, and our judgments concerning them are so apt to err, what a continual call do we receive, either to suspend our judgment, or to give it on the favourable side? especially when we consider, that as, through imperfect information we are unqualified for deciding soundly, so through want of impartiality, we are often tempted to decide wrong. How much this enforces the argument for candour will appear by considering,

In the third place, What the sources are of those severe and uncharitable opinions which we are so ready to form. Were the mind altogether free from prepossession and bias, it might avail itself to more advantage of the scanty knowledge which it possesses. But this is so far from being the case, that on every side we are enumbered with prejudices, and warped by passions, which exert their influence in nothing more than in leading us to think evil of others. At all times we are justly said to *see through a glass darkly*; but passion and prejudice, looking through a glass which distorts the form of the objects, make us also see falsely.

It is one of the misfortunes of our present situation, that some of the good dispositions of human nature are apt to betray us into frailties and vices. Thus, it often happens, that the laudable attachment which we contract to the country, or the church, to which we belong, or to some political denomination under which we class ourselves, both confines our affections within too narrow a sphere, and gives rise to violent prejudices against such as come under an opposite description. Not contented with being in the right ourselves, we must find all others in the wrong. We claim an exclusive possession of goodness and wisdom; and, from approving warmly of those who join us, we proceed to condemn, with much acrimony, not only the principles, but the characters, of those from whom we differ. Hence, persons of well-disposed minds are too often, through the strength of partial good affection, involved in the crime of uncharitable judgment. They rashly extend to every individual the severe opinion which they have unwarrantably conceived of a whole body.—This man is of a party whose principles we reckon slavish; and therefore his whole sentiments are corrupted. That man belongs to a religious sect which we are accustomed to deem bigoted; and therefore he is incapable of any generous or liberal

thought. Another is connected with a sect which we have been taught to account relaxed; and therefore he can have no sanctity.—Are these the judgments of candour and charity? Is true piety or virtue so very limited in its nature, as to be confined to such alone as see every thing with our eyes, and follow exactly the train of our ideas? Was there ever any great community so corrupt as not to include within it individuals of real worth?

Besides prepossessions of this nature, which sometimes mislead the honest mind, there are other, and much more culpable, causes of uncharitable judgment. Pride is hurt and wounded by every excellence in which it can claim no share; and, from eagerness to discover a blemish, rests upon the slightest appearance of one, as a satisfying proof. When rivalry and competition concur with pride, our desire to espy defects increases, and by consequence the grounds of censure multiply. Where no opposition of interests takes place, envy has too much influence in warping the judgment of many. Even when none of these causes operate, the inward consciousness of depravity is sufficient to fill the mind with evil thoughts of others. Whence should a man so readily draw his opinion of men as from that character with which he is best acquainted, because it is his own? A person of low and base mind naturally imputes to others the sentiments which he finds congenial to himself; and is incredulous of every excellency, which to him is totally unknown. He enjoys, besides, consolation in the thought that others are no better than himself; that his weaknesses and crimes are those of all men; and that such as appear most distinguished for virtue possess no real superiority, except greater dexterity in concealing their vices. Soothing themselves with this doctrine in secret, too many foster and strengthen the bad opinion which they entertain of all mankind. Rarely, if ever, have you ground to think well of that man's heart, who is, on every occasion, given to think the worst of others. Let us observe,

In the fourth place, that suitable to the sources whence a jealous and suspicious temper proceeds, are the effects which it produces in the world, the crimes and mischiefs with which it fills society. It possesses this unhappy distinction beyond the other failings of the human heart, that while it impels men to violent deeds, it justifies to their own apprehension the excesses which they commit. Amidst the uproar of other bad passions, conscience acts as a restraining power. As soon as the tumult subsides, remorse exerts its influence, and renders the sinner sensible of the evil which he has done. But the uncharitable man is unfortunately set loose from any such check or controul. Through the infatuation of prejudice, his judgment is perverted; conscience is misled; *the light within him is turned into dark-*

ness. Viewing the objects of his displeasure as evil men, he thinks himself entitled to give that displeasure full vent; and in committing the most inhuman actions, may sometimes imagine that he is doing good service to God.

The first fruits of an evil-thinking spirit are calumny and detraction, by which society is so often embroiled, and men are set at variance with one another. But did it proceed no farther than censorious speech, the mischief would be less. Much greater and more serious evils frequently ensue. What direful effects, for instance, have often flowed from rash and ill-founded jealousy in private life? No sooner has one allowed that dæmon to take possession of his mind, than it perverts his understanding, and taints all his faculties. Haunting him by night and by day, bringing perpetually before him the odious and disquieting forms which it has raised up, it blackens every appearance to his view; gives to trifles, which are in themselves light as air, the weight of full confirmation; till what was at first a dubious surmise, or a slight displeasure, rises at length into full belief and implacable fury. Hence, families torn with the most violent convulsions; the husband armed against the wife, the father against the son, the friend against the friend; the plan of treachery and assassination contrived, and the dagger plunged into the bosom of the innocent.—In public life, how often have kingdoms been shaken with all the violence of war and rebellion, from the unjust suspicions which subjects had conceived of their rulers; or the rash jealousy which princes had entertained of their people!—But it is in religious dissensions chiefly, that the mischievous power of uncharitable prejudice has displayed its full atrocity. Religion is always found to heighten every passion on which it acts, and to render every contest into which it enters, uncommonly ardent; because the objects which it presents are of such a nature, as strongly to seize and engage the human mind. When zeal for their own principles has prompted men to view those of a different persuasion in the odious lights which bigotry suggests, every sentiment of humanity has too often been extinguished. The mild influence of that religion which breathes nothing but gentleness, has proved too feeble to restrain the violent and bloody hand of persecution; and the uncharitable spirit, raging among contending parties, has filled the world with such calamities and crimes, as have brought disgrace on the Christian name.

Let us attend particularly to one awful instance of the guilt which men may contract, and of the ruin which they may bring upon themselves, through the want of fairness and candour. The nation of the Jews were almost noted for a narrow and uncharitable spirit. When John the Baptist, and our blessed Lord, appeared among them, because the former was austere in his tem-

per, and retired in his life, they pronounced of him that he had an evil spirit; and, because the latter was open and sociable in his manners, they held him to be destitute of that sanctity which became a prophet. Their prejudice against our Lord took its first rise from a most frivolous and contemptible cause—*Is not this the son of the carpenter? Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* When his miracles repelled this reproach, and sufficiently proved the eminence of his character, still they fostered their prejudices by this most futile reasoning. *Have any of the rulers believed on him?* Obstinate in their attachment to a temporal Messiah, and continuing to view all our Saviour's conduct with an evil eye, when he conversed with bad men in order to reclaim them, they treated him as a *companion of publicans and sinners*. Because he disallowed their groundless traditions, they held him to be a breaker of the Sabbath, and a contemner of religion. Because he prophesied the destruction of their temple, they accused him of being an enemy to his own nation.—Till at last, through their perpetual misconstruction of his actions, their passions become so inflamed as to make them cry out with one voice, *Away with this man to the death, and give us Barabbas the robber.*—Viewing in this dreadful event the consequences of want of candour, let every man tremble to think evil rashly of his brother. No one can tell how far uncharitable prejudices may carry him in guilt, if he allows them to harbour and gather strength within his breast. The cloud which *rose from the sea, no bigger than a man's head*, may soon swell and spread, till it cover the whole horizon, and discharge with most destructive violence the gathered storm.

IN the fifth place, As a suspicious spirit is the source of so many crimes and calamities in the world, so it is the spring of certain misery to the person who indulges it. His friends will be few; and small will be his comfort in those whom he possesses. Believing others to be his enemies, he will of course make them such. Let his caution be ever so great, the asperity of his thoughts will often break out in his behaviour; and, in return for suspecting and hating, he will incur suspicion and hatred. Besides the external evils which he draws upon himself, arising from alienated friendship, broken confidence, and open enmity; the suspicious temper itself is one of the worst evils which any man can suffer. If *in all fear there be torment*, how miserable must be his state who, by living in perpetual jealousy, lives in perpetual dread! Looking upon himself to be surrounded with spies, enemies, and designing men, he is a stranger to reliance and trust. He knows not to whom to open himself. He dresses his countenance in forced smiles, while his heart throbs within from apprehensions of secret treachery. Hence fretfulness and ill-humour, disgust at the world, and all the painful sensations of an irritated and embittered mind.

So numerous and great are the evils arising from a suspicious disposition, that of the two extremes it is more eligible to expose ourselves to occasional disadvantage from thinking too well of others, than to suffer continual misery by thinking always ill of them. It is better to be sometimes imposed upon, than never to trust. Safety is purchased at too dear a rate, when, in order to secure it, we are obliged to be always clad in armour, and to live in perpetual hostility with our fellows. This is, for the sake of living, to deprive ourselves of the comfort of life. The man of candour enjoys his situation, whatever it is, with cheerfulness and peace. Prudence directs his intercourse with the world; but no black suspicions haunt his hours of rest. Accustomed to view the characters of his neighbours in the most favourable light, he is like one who dwells amidst those beautiful scenes of nature, on which the eye rests with pleasure. Whereas, the suspicious man, having his imagination filled with all the shocking forms of human falsehood, deceit, and treachery, resembles the traveller in the wilderness, who discerns no objects around him but what are either dreary or terrible; caverns that open, serpents that hiss, and beasts of prey that howl. Hence, in him are verified those descriptions which the Spirit of God has given us of the misery of the wicked. *They shall have no peace. They shall be like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. The Lord shall give them a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And they shall fear day and night, and have none assurance of heart.*—I add,

In the sixth and last place, That there is nothing which exposes men in a more marked and direct manner to the displeasure of the Almighty, than a malignant and censorious spirit. I insist not now on the general denunciations of divine wrath against malice and hatred. Let us only consider under what particular description the Spirit of God brings this crime of uncharitable judgment. It is declared to be an impious invasion of the prerogative of God, to whom alone it belongs to search all hearts, and to determine concerning all characters. This privilege He often appropriates expressly to Himself, on purpose to restrain the rashness of censure among men; requiring us to leave the judging of others to Him, and to attend to our own business and duty. *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who shall make manifest the counsels of the heart.**

It deserves our most serious attention, that in several passages of Scripture, the great Judge of the world is represented, at the day of final retribution, as proceeding upon this principle, of ren-

* Rom. xiv. 4. 1 Corinth. iv 5.

dering to men according to the manner in which they have acted towards their brethren. *With the merciful, thou wilt show thyself merciful; and with the froward, thou wilt show thyself froward. With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.** It is impossible to form an argument of more force than this, to restrain all severity of judgment among such as look forward to the tribunal of God. The argument extends not indeed so far, as to represent our acceptance with the Deity, as entirely suspended upon the candour which we show in forming our sentiments of others. We know that other graces besides this are requisite, in order to fit us for heaven; and that, without piety towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, all our charity to men will be found defective and vain. But, this we know also, that in the heart which is destitute of fairness and candour, the Spirit of God certainly dwells not; and that whatever appearances of religion the uncharitably man may assume, on him the Sovereign of the universe looks with no favour—Thou, who art a man full of frailties, who standest in need, not merely of impartiality in thy divine Judge, but of indulgence and mercy: Thou who implorest daily this mercy from Him, and prayest that He would *remember thou art dust*, and not to be strict to *mark iniquity against thee*; darest thou, with those very prayers in thy mouth, proceed to judge without candour of thy brethren, and upon the slightest grounds to reprobate and condemn them? Oh thou hypocrite! (for by what other name can we call thee?) vain are all thy pretensions to piety. Ineffectual is every plea which thou canst form for mercy from Heaven. The precedent which thou hast established against thyself is decisive. Thou hast dictated the sentence of thine own condemnation.

On the whole, it clearly appears that no part of the government of temper deserves attention more, than to keep our minds pure from uncharitable prejudices, and open to candour and humanity in judging of others. The worst consequences, both to ourselves and to society, follow from the opposite spirit. Let us beware of encouraging a habit of suspicions, by forming too severe and harsh opinions concerning human nature in general. A great proportion of infirmity and corruption, doubtless, adheres to it; yet tempered also it is with various mixtures of virtue and good affection. Darkened as the Divine Image now is among mankind, it is not wholly effaced. Much piety and goodness may lie hidden in hearts that are unknown to us. Vice is glaring and loud. The crimes of the wicked make a noise in the world, and alarm society. True worth is retired an mo-

* Psalm. xviii 25, 26. Matth. vii 2.

dest, and requires particular situations to bring it forth to public notice. The prophet Elijah, in a time of prevailing corruption, imagined that all true religion had forsaken the land. *I, even I only*, said he to the Lord, *am left to serve thee*. But the Almighty, who discerned what was concealed from his imperfect view, replied, *Yet have I left me seven thousand men in Israel, who have not bowed the knee to Baal*.*

The aged, and the unfortunate, who have toiled through an unsuccessful life with long experience of the falsehood and fraud of evil men, are apt to be the most severe in the opinions which they entertain of others. For such, their circumstances may be allowed to form some degree of apology. But if, in youth and prosperity, the same hard suspicious spirit prevail; if they who are beginning the career of life set out with all the scruples of distrust; if, before they have had reason to complain of the world, they betray the diffidence of a jealous, and the malignity of a censorious mind; sad is the presage which may thence be drawn of their future dishonour. From such, you have nothing to look for that shall be either engaging in private life, or respectable in public character. To youth it particularly belongs to be generous in sentiment, candid in opinion, undesigning in behaviour, open to the most favourable construction of actions and conduct. Throughout all the stages of life, candour is one of the most honourable distinctions of the human character; it is connected with magnanimity; it is justified by wisdom; it is suitable to the relation in which we stand to one another. But if reason and humanity be insufficient to restrain us from rash and uncharitable judgments, let that awful denunciation frequently resound in our ears, *He shall have judgment without mercy who hath showed no mercy*.

* 1 Kings, xix. 18.

SERMON XXVI.

ON THE CHARACTER OF JOSEPH.

Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither ; for God did send me before you to preserve life. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.—
GENESIS, xlv. 5. 8.

IN this generous manner, Joseph frames an apology for the unnatural behaviour of his brethren. He extenuates the atrocity of their crime, by representing the happy effects which it had produced. He looks beyond all second causes ; and recognizes, in the wonderful events of his life, the hand of the Almighty.—No human character exhibited in the records of Scripture, is more remarkable and instructive than that of this Patriarch. He is one whom we behold tried in all the vicissitudes of fortune ; from the condition of a slave, rising to be ruler of the land of Egypt ; and in every station acquiring, by his virtue and wisdom, favour with God and man. When overseer of Potiphar's house, his fidelity was proved by strong temptations, which he honourably resisted. When thrown into prison by the artifice of a false woman, his integrity and prudence soon rendered him conspicuous, even in that dark mansion. When called into the presence of Pharaoh, the wise and extensive plan which he formed for saving the kingdom from the miseries of impending famine, justly raised him to a high station, wherein his abilities were eminently displayed in the public service. But in his whole history there is no circumstance so striking and interesting, as his behaviour to his brethren, who had sold him into slavery. The moment in which he made himself known to them, that moment at which we are now to contemplate him, was the most critical one of his life, and the most decisive of his character. It is such as rarely occurs in the course of human events ; and is calculated to draw

the highest attention of all who are endowed with any degree of sensibility of heart. Let us consider the sentiment which Joseph utters in the text, under two views, each of which is very instructive to all Christians. I. As a discovery of his cordial forgiveness of his brethren; and, II. As an instance of his dutiful attention to the Providence of God.

I. THE most cordial forgiveness is here displayed. I shall not recapitulate all the preceding history respecting Joseph and his brethren; as it is well known by every one who has the least acquaintance with the sacred writings. From the whole tenour of the narration it appears, that though Joseph, upon the arrival of his brethren in Egypt, made himself strange to them, yet from the beginning he intended to discover himself; and studied so to conduct the discovery as might render the surprise of joy complete. For this end, by affected severity, he took measures for bringing down into Egypt all his father's children. They were now arrived there; and Benjamin among the rest, who was his younger brother by the same mother, and was particularly beloved by Joseph. Him he threatened to detain; and seemed willing to allow the rest to depart. This incident renewed their distress. They all knew their father's extreme anxiety about the safety of Benjamin, and with what difficulty he had yielded to his undertaking this journey. Should he be prevented from returning, they dreaded that grief would overpower the old man's spirits, and prove fatal to his life. Judah, therefore, who had particularly urged the necessity of Benjamin's accompanying his brothers, and had solemnly pledged himself to their father for his safe return, craved, upon this occasion, an audience of the governor; and gave him a full account of the circumstances of Jacob's family.

Nothing can be more interesting and pathetic than this discourse of Judah, as it is recorded in the preceding chapter.—Little knowing to whom he spoke, he paints, in all the colours of simple and natural eloquence, the distressed situation of the aged Patriarch, hastening to the close of life; long afflicted for the loss of a favourite son, whom he supposed to have been torn in pieces by a beast of prey; labouring now under anxious concern about his youngest son, the child of his old age, who alone was left alive of his mother, and whom nothing but the calamities of severe famine could have moved a tender father to send from home, and expose to the dangers of a foreign land. *If we bring him not back with us, we shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant, our father, with sorrow, to the grave. I pray thee, therefore, let thy servant abide instead of the young man, a bondman to our Lord. For how shall I go up to my father, and Benjamin not with me? lest I see the evil that shall come on my father.*

Upon this relation, Joseph could no longer restrain himself. The tender ideas of his father and his father's house, of his ancient home, his country and his kindred, of the distress of his family and his own exaltation, all rushed too strongly upon his mind to bear any farther concealment. *He cried, Cause every man to go out from me; and he wept aloud.* The tears which he shed, were not the tears of grief. They were the bursts of affection. They were the effusions of a heart overflowing with all the tender sensibilities of nature. Formerly he had been moved in the same manner, when he first saw his brethren before him. *His bowels yearned upon them; he sought for a place where to weep. He went into his chamber; and then washed his face and returned to them.* At that period, his generous plans were not completed. But now, when there was no farther occasion for constraining himself, he gave free vent to the strong emotions of his heart. The first minister to the king of Egypt was not ashamed to show, that he felt as a man, and a brother. *He wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard him.*

The first words which his swelling heart allowed him to pronounce, are the most suitable to such an affecting situation which were ever uttered; *I am Joseph; doth my Father yet live?* What could he, what ought he, in that impassioned moment, to have said more? This is the voice of nature herself, speaking her own language; and it penetrates the heart: No pomp of expression; no parade of kindness; but strong affection hastening to utter what it strongly felt. *His brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.* Their silence is as expressive of those emotions of repentance and shame, which, on this amazing discovery, filled their breasts, and stopped their utterance, as the few words which Joseph speaks are expressive of the generous agitations which struggle for vent within him. No painter could seize a more striking moment for displaying the characteristic features of the human heart, than what is here presented. Never was there a situation of more tender and virtuous joy, on the one hand; nor, on the other, of more overwhelming confusion and conscious guilt. In the simple narration of the sacred historian it is set before us with greater energy and higher effect, than if it had been wrought up with all the colouring of the most admired modern eloquence.

When Joseph had a little recovered himself from the first transports of emotion, he proceeds to explain his situation to his brethren, and to show them the beneficent purposes for which he conceived himself to be raised by Providence into power. The apology which he makes in the text for their former cruelty is uncommon and remarkable. *Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me*

before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God; and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. This apology was, in truth, no satisfactory excuse for their crime. For though the over-ruling Providence of Heaven had so directed the course of events, as to render their bad intentions subservient to a happy issue; yet the badness of the intention originated entirely from themselves. The envy and jealousy which they entertained against their brother, led them to the commission of an atrocious deed. The deed was voluntary; the crime was all their own; and the interposition of Providence, in making unforeseen consequences follow from that crime, did not, could not exculpate them from guilt. It were an impious conclusion, that because God extracts good from our evil, we are not answerable for the evil which we perpetrate. *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.** But the sentiment in the text is to be considered as a colour which the generous humanity of Joseph prompted him to throw on the conduct of his brethren. He saw the confusion with which they were overwhelmed in his presence. He diverts their attention from the remembrance of a crime which was now wringing their hearts with anguish, by representing to them the happy effects which that crime had produced. He sets them free from all uneasiness on his account. He calls upon them to rejoice in his prosperity, and, instead of dwelling on a painful recollection of their own conduct, to join with him in acknowledging and adoring the hand of the Almighty.

How different is this amiable spirit which Joseph discovers, from that harsh and ostentatious superiority which too often accompanies the pretended forgiveness of injuries among those who call themselves Christians! They are ready to say, that, for their part, they pardon the wrongs which have been done them; they wish that the persons who have committed them may be able to forgive themselves; they leave them to God and to their own conscience. By the severe suggestions which they throw out, they discover the inward bitterness of their spirit; and artfully gratify resentment, at the time when they profess to exercise forgiveness. Whereas the great and good man, whose character we now consider, effaces all memory of the crimes which he pardons. He seeks to alleviate the remorse of his brethren by an extenuation of their guilt; and, while he is preparing to make their circumstances comfortable, studies at the same time to render their minds easy and tranquil.

This was not merely a transient emotion with Joseph, owing

* James, i. 13.

to the first burst of affection on discovering himself to his brethren. We have a clear proof, from a remarkable transaction which passed many years after this period, of his disposition continuing the same to the end of life. It is recorded in the last chapter of this book, that when Jacob died, his sons began to be seized with fear concerning the treatment which they might receive from their brother.—The guilty are always suspicious. Conscious of their own baseness, they are incapable of conceiving the magnanimity of others. They saw the bond, which held the family together, now broken by their fathers death. They dreaded that the resentment of Joseph against them had hitherto been only suppressed or concealed. *They said among themselves, peradventure he will now hate us, and requite all the evil which we did unto him.* Under this apprehension, they first sent a humble message to deprecate his displeasure by the memory of their common father; and then appearing in his presence, they fell down before his face, professing themselves to be his servants, and praying him to forgive the trespasses which they had committed against him. But no such hidden resentment as they dreaded had ever lurked in the soul of Joseph. On the contrary, when he beheld his brethren in this affecting situation, bereaved of their ancient protector, and reduced, as they imagined, to the necessity of holding up their hands to him for mercy, he was overpowered by a tide of tender emotions. *Joseph wept while his brethren spake unto him.* These affectionate tears alone were sufficient to have assured them of his forgiveness. But hastening also by words to dispel their alarms, he presently added, *Fear not; for, though ye thought evil against me, God meant it unto good. Now therefore fear ye not; I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.**

Such was the last incident that is recorded in the life of this eminent personage, than whom you will find few more distinguished by an assemblage of illustrious virtues; in the lowest adversity, patient and faithful; in the highest prosperity, beneficent and generous; dutiful and affectionate as a son; kind and forgiving as a brother; accomplished as a statesman; wise and provident as a ruler of the land. In such a character you behold human nature possessing its highest honours. The sentiments which it inspires tend to ennoble our minds; and to prevent their imbibing the spirit of those hard, interested, and self-seeking men with whom the world abounds.

THE striking example of forgiveness which the text displays ought frequently to occur to our thoughts, amidst the various occasions of provocation and offence which arise in our inter-

* Genesis,, l. 21

course with the world. If one so worthy and amiable, in the days too of his youth and innocence, suffered such cruel treatment from his brothers, ought we to be surprised if, even from our nearest relations, we meet with injustice or ingratitude? Wrongs and injuries are, more or less, the portion of all. Like Death, they are an evil unavoidable. No station is so high, no power so great, no character so unblemished, as to exempt us from them. In the world, ungrateful men, false friends, and violent enemies, abound. Every wise man ought to prepare himself for what he is to encounter in passing through this thorny region. He is not to expect that he can *gather grapes from thistles*; nor to lose the government of his mind, because, in the midst of evil men, he is not allowed to remain, like a secret and inviolable person, untouched and uninjured.

As this view of our situation ought to blunt the edge of passion and impatience, so the alleviating circumstances which reason will suggest, ought to mollify resentment. Think of the various constructions which the actions of men will bear. Consider how different the motives of him who hath given us offence, may have been from those, which, in the heat of passion, we ascribe to him; how apt all men are to be seduced by mistaken views of interest, and how little ground we have to complain, if, upon a supposed interfering of interests, we suffer by others preferring their own to ours. Remember that no opinions which you form under the power of resentment can be depended upon as just; and that every one loads the intentions of his enemy with imaginary degrees of malice.

But, admitting the injury you have received to be ever so atrocious in its nature, and aggravated in its circumstances; supposing it to be even parallel to that which Joseph suffered; look up, like him, to that divine government under which we are all placed. If forgiveness be a duty which we know God to have required under the most awful sanctions, dare we draw upon ourselves the merited vengeance of that Superior to whose clemency we are obliged daily to fly? When, with hard and unrelenting dispositions towards our brethren, we send up to Heaven prayers for mercy to ourselves, those prayers return like imprecations upon our heads; and our very devotions seal our condemnation.

The most plain and natural sentiments of equity concur with divine authority to enforce the duty which I now recommend.—Let him who has never in his life done wrong, be allowed the privilege of remaining inexorable. But let such as are conscious of frailties and crimes, consider forgiveness as a debt which they owe to others. Common failings are the strongest lesson of mutual forbearance. Were this virtue unknown among men, order and comfort, peace and repose, would be strangers

to human life. Injuries retaliated according to the exorbitant measure which passion prescribes, would justify resentment in return. The injured person would become the injurer; and thus wrongs, retaliations, and fresh injuries, would circulate in endless succession, till the world was rendered a field of blood. Of all the passions which invade the human breast, revenge is the most direful. When allowed to reign with full dominion, it is more than sufficient to poison the few pleasures which remain to man in his present state. How much soever a person may suffer from injustice, he is always in hazard of suffering more from the prosecution of revenge. The violence of an enemy cannot inflict what is equal to the torment he creates to himself, by means of the fierce and desperate passions which he allows to rage in his soul.

Those evil spirits who inhabit the regions of misery, are represented as delighting in revenge and cruelty. But all that is great and good in the universe, is on the side of clemency and mercy. The Almighty Ruler of the world, though for ages offended by the unrighteousness, and insulted by the impiety of men, is *long-suffering, and slow to anger*. His Son, when he appeared in our nature, exhibited, both in his life and his death, the most illustrious example of forgiveness which the world ever beheld. If you look into the history of mankind, you will find that, in every age, those who have been respected as worthy, or admired as great, have been distinguished for this virtue. Revenge dwells in little minds. A noble and magnanimous spirit is always superior to it. It suffers not from the injuries of men those severe shocks which others feel. Collected within itself, it stands unmoved by their impotent assaults; and, with generous pity, rather than with anger, looks down on their unworthy conduct. It has been truly said, that the greatest man on earth can no sooner commit an injury, than a good man can make himself greater, by forgiving it. Joseph, at the moment when we now contemplate him, had entirely under his power all those unnatural brethren who had been guilty towards him of the most cruel outrage which men could perpetrate. He could have retained them for ever in that Egyptian bondage to which they had once consigned him; and have gratified revenge by every accumulation of disgrace which despotic power enabled him to inflict. Had he acted this part, he might for a while have been soothed by the pleasures of his high station; but, remorse, in the end, would have stung his soul. Cruelty would have rendered him unhappy within himself, as well as odious to others; and his name would have perished among the crowd of those contemptible statesmen whose actions stain the annals of history. Whereas now, his character stands among the foremost in the ranks of spotless fame. His memory is blessed to all ge-

nerations. His example continues to edify the world, and he himself shines in the celestial regions, *as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars, for ever and ever.* Let us now,

II. CONSIDER the sentiment contained in the text, not only as a discovery of cordial forgiveness, but as an expression of devout attention to the conduct of Providence, *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.* Remark how beautifully piety and humanity are, in this instance, connected together. As we are told of Cornelius, the good Centurion, that *his prayers and his alms*, his devotion and his good works, came up together *in memorial before God*; so here we perceive fraternal affection and religious reverence, mingling in one emotion within the patriarch's heart. In a person of low and vulgar mind, the sensations on such an occasion would have been extremely different. Looking back on the past events of his life, he would have ascribed all the adversity which he had suffered, to the perverse treatment of his brothers; and all the prosperity which he afterwards attained, to his own good conduct and wisdom; and by consequence would have remained embittered against the instruments of the one, and filled with pride and self-sufficiency on account of the other. But the elevated and noble mind of Joseph rejected such unworthy sentiments. Contemplating the hand of God in all that had befallen him, he effaced the remembrance of those evil deeds which had produced his adversity; and for his prosperity he affected no praise to himself, but ascribed it entirely to the will of Heaven. Let us take notice, that this is not the reflection of a private, retired man, whose situation might be supposed to favour such devout meditations. It is the reflection of one, who was leading a busy and a seducing life, in the midst of a court; the favourite of the greatest monarch who was then known in the world. Yet him you behold, amidst the submission and adulation which was paid to him, preserving the moderation and simplicity of a virtuous mind; and, amidst the idolitry and false philosophy of the Egyptians, maintaining the principles of true religion, and giving glory to the God of Israel.

From this unity of piety with humanity, which is so conspicuous in the sentiments of Joseph, there arises one very important instruction; that a devout regard to the hand of God in the various events of life, tends to promote good dispositions and affections towards men. It will be found by those who attend to the workings of human nature, that a great proportion of those malignant passions which break out in the intercourse of men, arises from confining their attention wholly to second causes, and overlooking the first cause of all. Hence they are insolent in prosperity, because they discern nothing higher than their own abilities; and in adversity they are peevish and un-forgiving, because they have no object on which to fix their

view, but the conduct of men who have acted as their enemies. They behold no plan of wisdom or goodness carried on throughout nature, which can allay the discomposure of their mind. As soon as their temper is ruffled, the world appears to them to be a continued scene of disasters and injuries, of confused events, and of unreasonable men. Whereas, to the pious man, the contemplation of the universe exhibits a very different spectacle. In the midst of seeming confusion he traces a principle of order; and by attention to that order, his mind is harmonized and calmed. He beholds a wise and righteous Governor presiding over all the commotions which are raised by the tumult of conflicting passions and interests; guiding, with imperceptible influence, the hand of the violent to beneficent purposes; accomplishing unexpected ends by the most improbable means; obliging *the wrath of man to praise him*; sometimes humbling the mighty, sometimes exalting the low; often *snaring the wicked in the devices which their hands have wrought*. Respectful acknowledgement of this divine government, controuls the disorders of inferior passions. Reverence for the decrees of Heaven inspires patience and moderation. Trust in that perfect wisdom and goodness which directs all for the best, diminishes the shock which worldly disasters occasion. The irritation of passion and resentment will always bear proportion to the agitation which we suffer from the changes of fortune. One who connects himself with nothing but second causes, partakes of the violence and irregularity of all the inferior movements belonging to this great machine. He who refers all to God, dwells, if we may speak so, in that higher sphere where motion begins; he is subject to fewer shocks and concussions, and is only carried along by the motion of the universe.

How can mildness or forgiveness gain place in the temper of that man, who, on occasion of every calamity which he suffers from the ill usage of others, has no sanctuary within his own breast to which he can make retreat from their vexations; who is possessed of no principle which is of sufficient power to bear down the rising tide of peevish and angry passions? The violence of an enemy, or the ingratitude of a friend, the injustice of one man, and the treachery of another, perpetually dwell and rankle in his thoughts. The part which they have acted in bringing on his distress, is frequently more grating to him than the distress itself. Whereas, he who in every event looks up to God, has always in his view a great and elevating object which inspires him with magnanimity. His mind lies open to every relieving thought, and is inclined to every suggestion of generosity. He is disposed to say with Joseph, *it was not you that sent me hither, but God*; with David, *it is the Lord*; *let him do what seemeth good in his eyes*; and, with a greater personage

than either of these, *the cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?* Hence arises superiority to many of the ordinary provocations of the world. For he looks upon the whole of his present life as part of a great plan which is carried on under the direction of Heaven. In this plan he views men as acting their several parts, and contributing to his good or evil. But their parts he considers as subordinate ones; which, though they may justly merit his affection, and may occasionally call forth his resentment, yet afford no proper foundation to violent or malignant passion. He looks upon bad men as only the rod with which the Almighty chastens; like the pestilence, the earthquake, or the storm. In the midst of their injustice and violence he can pity their blindness; and imitate our blessed Lord in praying, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

SERMON XXVII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF HAZAEL.

And Hazael said, Why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Is ael. Their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.—2 KINGS, viii. 12, 13.

IN the days of Joram, king of Israel, flourished the prophet Elisha. His character was so eminent, and his fame so widely spread, that Benhadad, the king of Syra, though an idolater, sent to consult him concerning the issue of a distemper which threatened his life. The messenger employed on this occasion was Hazael, who appears to have been one of the princes, or chief men, of the Syrian court. Charged with rich gifts from the King, he presents himself before the Prophet, and accosts him in terms of the highest respect. During the conference which they held together, Elisha fixed his eye steadfastly on the countenance of Hazael; and discerning, by a prophetic spirit, his future tyranny and cruelty, he could not contain himself from bursting into a flood of tears. When Hazael, in surprise, inquired into the cause of this sudden emotion, the Prophet plainly informs him of the crimes and barbarities which he foresaw that hereafter he should commit. The soul of Hazael abhorred, at this time, the thoughts of cruelty. Uncorrupted, as yet, by ambition or greatness, his indignation arose at being thought capable of such savage actions as the Prophet had mentioned; and, with much warmth, he replies, *But, what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* Elisha makes no return but to point out a remarkable change which was to take place in

his condition ; *The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* In course of time, all that had been predicted came to pass. Hazael ascended the throne ; and ambition took possession of his heart. *He smote the children of Israel in all their coasts. He oppressed them during all the days of king Jehouhaz ;** and from what is left on record of his actions, plainly appears to have proved what the Prophet foresaw him to be, a man of violence, cruelty, and blood.

In this passage of history, an object is presented which deserves our serious attention. We behold a man who, in one state of life, could not look upon certain crimes without surprise and horror ; who knew so little of himself, as to believe it impossible for him ever to be concerned in committing them ; that same man, by a change of condition, transformed in all his sentiments, and, as he rose in greatness, rising also in guilt ; till, at last, he completed that whole character of iniquity which he once detested. Hence the following observations naturally arise. I. That to a mind not entirely corrupted, sentiments of abhorrence at guilt are natural. II. That, notwithstanding those sentiments, the mind may be brought under the dominion of the vices which it had most abhorred. III. That this unhappy revolution is frequently owing to a change of men's external circumstances and condition in the world. These observations are to make the subject of the present Discourse ; and will lead us to such a view of human nature, as, it is hoped, may be of general use.

I. SENTIMENTS of abhorrence at guilt are natural to the human mind. Hazael's reply to the Prophet, shows how strongly he felt them. *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* Is he, or can he ever be so base and wretched, as to perpetrate crimes which would render him unworthy of bearing the name of a man? This is the voice of human nature, while it is not as yet hardened in iniquity. Some vices are indeed more odious to the mind than others. Providence has wisely pointed the sharpest edge of this natural aversion against the crimes which are of most pernicious and destructive nature ; such as treachery, oppression, and cruelty. But, in general, the distinction between moral good and evil is so strongly marked, as to stamp almost every vice with the character of turpitude.—Present to any man, even the most ignorant and untutored, an obvious instance of injustice, falsehood, or impiety ; let him view it in a cool moment, when no passion blinds, and no interest warps him ; and you will find that his mind immediately revolts against it, as shameful and base, nay, as deserving punishment. Hence, in reasoning on the characters of others, how-

* 2 Kings, xiii. 32.

ever men may mistake as to facts, yet they generally praise and blame according to the principles of sound morality.

With respect to their own character, a notorious partiality too generally misleads their judgment. But it is remarkable, that no sinner ever avows directly to himself, that he has been guilty of gross and downright iniquity. Even when engaged by his passions in the commission of the greatest crimes, he always palliates them to his own mind by some extenuation or apology, some pretended necessity, or some borrowed colour of innocence. Such power, the undeniable dignity of virtue, and the acknowledged turpitude of vice, possesses over every human heart. These sentiments are the remaining impressions of that law, which was originally written on the mind of man. They are gleams of that light which once shone clear and strong within us; and which, though it be now greatly obscured, yet continues to shoot a feeble ray athwart the darkness of human nature.—But whatever sentiments of abhorrence at vice we may at any time entertain, we have no reason to build upon these a presumptuous confidence of our continuance in virtue. For the next instruction which the text suggests, is,

II. THAT such is man's ignorance of his own character, such the frailty of his nature, that he may one day become infamous for those very crimes which at present he holds in detestation. This observation is too well verified by the history of Hazael; and a thousand other instances might be brought to confirm it. Though there is nothing which every person ought to know so thoroughly as his own heart, yet from the conduct of men it appears, that there is nothing with which they are less acquainted. Always more prone to flatter themselves than desirous to discover the truth, they trust to their being possessed of every virtue which has not been put to the trial; and reckon themselves secure against every vice to which they have not hitherto been tempted. As long as their duty hangs in speculation, it appears so plain, and so eligible, that they cannot doubt of performing it. The suspicion never enters their mind, that in the hour of speculation, and in the hour of practice, their sentiments may differ widely. Their present disposition they easily persuade themselves will ever continue the same; and yet that disposition is changing with circumstances every moment.

The man who glows with the warm feelings of devotion, imagines it impossible for him to lose that sense of the divine goodness which at present melts his heart. He whom his friend had lately saved from ruin, is confident that, if some trying emergency shall put his gratitude to proof, he will rather die than abandon his benefactor. He who lives happy and

contented in frugal industry, wonders how any man can give himself up to dissolute pleasure. Where any of those persons informed by a superior spirit, that the time was shortly to come when the one should prove an example of scandalous impiety, the other of treachery to his friend, and the third of all that extravagant luxury which disgraces a growing fortune; each of them would testify as much surprise and abhorrence as Hazael did, upon hearing the predictions of the Prophet. Sincere they might very possibly be in their expressions of indignation; for hypocrisy is not always to be charged on men whose conduct is inconsistent. Hazael was in earnest, when he resented with such ardour the imputation of cruelty. The Apostle Peter was sincere, when he made the zealous profession, that though he should go to prison and to death with his Master, he would never deny him. They were sincere; that is, they spoke from the fulness of their hearts, and from the warmth of the present moment; but they did not know themselves, as the events which followed plainly showed. So false to its principles, too frequently is the heart of man; so weak is the foundation of human virtue; so much reason there is for what the Gospel perpetually inculcates concerning the necessity of distrusting ourselves, and depending on divine aid. Mortifying, I confess, is this view of human nature; yet proper to be attended to by all, in order to escape the most fatal dangers.—For, merely through unguarded conduct, and from the want of this prudent suspicion of their own weakness, how many, after the most promising beginnings, have gradually apostatized from every principle of virtue; until, at last, it has become as difficult for one to believe, that they ever had any love of goodness, as it would have been once to have persuaded themselves that they were to advance to such a height in wickedness!

IN such cases as I have described, what has become, it may be enquired, of those sentiments of abhorrence at guilt which were once felt so strongly? Are they totally erased? or, if in any degree they remain, how do such persons contrive to satisfy themselves in acting a part which their minds condemn?—Here, there is a mystery of iniquity which requires to be unfolded. Latent and secret is the progress of corruption within the soul; and the more latent, the more dangerous is its growth. No man becomes of a sudden completely wicked. Guilt never shows its whole deformity at once; but by gradual acquaintance reconciles us to its appearance, and imperceptibly diffuses its poisons through all the powers of the mind. Every man has some darling passion, which generally affords the first introduction to vice. The irregular gratifications into which it occasionally seduces him, appear under the form of venial weak-

nesses ; and are indulged, in the beginning, with scrupulousness and reserve. But, by longer practice, these restraints weaken, and the power of habit grows. One vice brings in another to its aid. By a sort of natural affinity they connect and entwine themselves together ; till their roots come to be spread wide and deep over all the soul. When guilt rises to be glaring, conscience endeavours to remonstrate. But conscience is a calm principle. Passion is loud and impetuous ; and creates a tumult which drowns the voice of reason. It joins, besides, artifice to violence ; and seduces at the same time that it impels.—For it employs the understanding to impose upon the conscience. It devises reasons and arguments to justify the corruptions of the heart. The common practice of the world is appealed to. Nice distinctions are made. Men are found to be circumstanced in so peculiar a manner, as to render certain actions excusable, if not blameless, which, in another situation, it is confessed, would have been criminal. By such a process as this, there is reason to believe, that a great part of mankind advance from step to step in sin, partly hurried by passion, and partly blinded by self-deceit, without any just sense of the degree of guilt which they contract. By inveterate habits, their judgment is at length perverted, and their moral feelings are deadened. They see now with other eyes ; and can look without pain on evil actions which they formerly abhorred.

It is proper, however, to observe, that though our native sentiments of abhorrence at guilt may be so borne down, or so eluded, as to lose their influence on conduct, yet those sentiments belonging originally to our frame, and being never totally eradicated from the soul, will still retain so much authority, as if not to reform, at least, on some occasions, to chasten the sinner.—It is only during a course of prosperity, that vice is able to carry on its delusions without disturbance. But, amidst the dark and thoughtful situations of life, conscience regains its rights ; and pours the whole bitterness of remorse on his heart, who has apostatized from his original principles. We may well believe that, before the end of his days, Hazael's first impressions would be made to return. In the hour of adversity, the remembrance of his conference with the venerable Prophet would sting his heart. Comparing the sentiments which, in those his better days, he felt, with the atrocious cruelties which he had afterwards committed, all the honours of royalty would be unable to save him from the inward sense of baseness and infamy.

FROM this view which has been exhibited of the progress of corruption, and of the danger to which we are exposed, of falling from principles which once appeared firmly established, let

us receive useful admonition for our own conduct. *Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast like him that putteth it off.*—Let no man place a rash and dangerous confidence in his virtue. But *let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* Never adventure on too near an approach to what is evil. Familiarize not yourselves with it, in the slightest instances, without fear. Listen with reverence to every reprehension of conscience; and preserve the most quick and accurate sensibility to right and wrong. If ever your moral impressions begin to decay, and your natural abhorrence of guilt to lessen, you have ground to dread that the ruin of virtue is fast approaching. While you employ all the circumspection and vigilance which reason can suggest, let your prayers, at the same time, continually ascend to God for support and aid. Remember that from him *descendeth every good and perfect gift*; and that to him only it *belongs to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.* I proceed now to the

III^d OBSERVATION from the text, That the power which corruption acquires to pervert the original principles of man, is frequently owing to a change of their circumstances and condition in the world. How different was Hazeel the messenger of Benhadad, from Hazeel the king; he who started at the mention of cruelty, from him who waded in blood! Of this sad and surprising revolution, the Prophet emphatically assigns the cause in these few words: *The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* That crown, that fatal crown which is to be set upon thy head, shall shed a malignant influence over thy nature; and shall produce that change in thy character, which now thou canst not believe.—Whose experience of the world is so narrow, as not to furnish him with instances similar to this, in much humbler conditions of life? So great is the influence of a new situation of external fortune; such a different turn it gives to our temper and affections, to our views and desires, that no man can foretel what his character would prove, should Providence either raise or depress his circumstances in a remarkable degree, or throw him into some sphere of action, widely different from that to which he has been accustomed in former life.

The seeds of various qualities, good and bad, lie in all our hearts. But until proper occasions ripen and bring them forward, they lie there inactive and dead. They are covered up and concealed within the recesses of our nature; or, if they spring up at all, it is under such an appearance as is frequently mistaken, even by ourselves. Pride, for instance, in certain situations, has no opportunity of displaying itself, but as magnanimity, or sense of honour. Avarice appears as necessary and law-

dable œconomy. What in one station of life would discover itself to be cowardice and baseness of mind, passes in another for prudent circumspection. What in the fulness of power would prove to be cruelty and oppression, it is reputed, in a subordinate rank, no more than the exercise of proper discipline.—For a while, the man is known neither by the world nor by himself, to be what he truly is. But bring him into a new situation of life, which accords with his predominant disposition; which strikes on certain latent qualities of his soul, and awakens them into action; and as the leaves of a flower gradually unfold to the sun, so shall all his true character open full to view.

This may in one light, be accounted not so much an alteration of character produced by a change of circumstances as a discovery brought forth of the real character, which formerly lay concealed. Yet at the same time, it is true, that the man himself undergoes a change. For opportunity being given for certain dispositions, which had been dormant, to exert themselves without restraint, they of course gather strength.—By means of the ascendancy which they gain, other parts of the temper are borne down; and thus an alteration is made in the whole structure and system of the soul. He is a truly wise and good man, who, through divine assistance, remains superior to this influence of fortune on his character, who having once imbibed worthy sentiments, and established proper principles of action, continues constant to these, whatever his circumstances be; maintains, throughout all the changes of his life, one uniform and supported tenor of conduct; and what he abhorred as evil and wicked in the beginning of his days, continues to abhor to the end. But how rare is it to meet with this honourable consistency among men, while they are passing through the different stations and periods of life! When they are setting out in the world, before their minds have been greatly misled or debased, they glow with generous emotions, and look with contempt on what is sordid and guilty. But advancing farther in life, and inured by degrees to the crooked ways of men; pressing through the crowd, and the bustle of the world; obliged to contend with this man's craft, and that man's scorn; accustomed, sometimes, to conceal their sentiments, and often to stifle their feelings, they become at last hardened in heart, and familiar with corruption. Who would not drop a tear over this sad, but frequent fall of human probity and honour? Who is not humbled, when he beholds the refined sentiments and high principles on which we are so ready to value ourselves brought to such a shameful issue; and man, with all his boasted attainments of reason, discovered so often to be the creature of his external fortune, moulded and formed by the incidents of his life?

THE instance of Hazael's degeneracy leads us to reflect, in particular, on the dangers which arise from stations of power and greatness; especially when the elevation of men to these has been rapid and sudden. Few have the strength of mind which is requisite for bearing such a change with temperance and self-command. The respect which is paid to the great, and the scope which their condition affords for the indulgence of pleasure, are perilous circumstances to virtue. When men live among their equals, and are accustomed to encounter the hardships of life, they are of course reminded of their mutual dependence on each other, and of the dependence of all upon God.— But when they are highly exalted above their fellows, they meet with few objects to awaken serious reflection, but with many to feed and inflame their passions. They are apt to separate their interest from that of all around them; to wrap themselves up in their vain grandeur; and, in the lap of indolence and selfish pleasure, to acquire a cold indifference to the concerns even of those whom they call their friends. The fancied independence into which they are lifted up, is adverse to sentiments of piety, as well as of humanity, in their heart. *Taking the timbrel and the harp, and rejoicing at the sound of the organ, they say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? or what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?*

But we are not to imagine that elevated stations in the world furnish the only formidable trials to which our virtue is exposed. It will be found, that we are liable to no fewer nor less dangerous temptations, from the opposite extreme of poverty and depression. When men who have known better days are thrown down into abject situations of fortune, their spirits are broken, and their temper soured. Envy rankles in their breast at such as are more successful. The providence of Heaven is accused in secret murmurs; and the sense of misery is ready to push them into atrocious crimes, in order to better their state.— Among the inferior classes of mankind, craft and dishonesty are too often found to prevail. Low and penurious circumstances depress the human powers. They deprive men of the proper means of knowledge and improvement; and where ignorance is gross, it is always in hazard of engendering profligacy.

Hence it has been, generally, the opinion of wise men in all ages, that there is a certain middle condition of life, equally remote from either of those extremes of fortune, which, though it want not also its own dangers, yet is, on the whole, the state most favourable both to virtue and to happiness. For there, luxury and pride on the one hand, have not opportunity to enervate or intoxicate the mind, nor want and dependence on the

other, to sink and debase it; there, all the native affections of the soul have the freest and fairest exercise, the equality of men is felt, friendships are formed, and improvements of every sort are pursued with most success; there, men are prompted to industry without being overcome by toil, and their powers called forth into exertion, without being either superseded by too much abundance, or baffled by insuperable difficulties; there, a mixture of comforts and of wants, at once awakens their gratitude to God, and reminds them of their dependence on his aid; and, therefore, in this state, men seem to enjoy life to most advantage, and to be least exposed to the snares of vice. Such a condition is recorded in the book of Proverbs, to have been the wish and choice of one who was eminent for wisdom. *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.**

FROM the whole view which we have now taken of the subject, we may, in the first place, learn the reasons for which a variety of conditions and ranks was established by Providence among mankind. This life is obviously intended to be a state of probation and trial. No trial of characters is requisite with respect to God, who sees what is in every heart, and perfectly knows what part each man would act, in all the possible situations of fortune. But on account of men themselves, and of the world around them, it was necessary that trials should take place, and a discrimination of characters be made; in order that true virtue might be separated from false appearances of it, and the justice of Heaven be displayed in its final retributions; in order that the failings of men might be so discovered to themselves, as to afford them proper instruction, and promote their amendment; and in order that their characters might be shewn to the world in every point of view, which could furnish either examples for imitation, or admonitions of danger. The accomplishment of these important purposes required, that human life should not always proceed in one tenor; but that it should both be chequered with many revolutions, and diversified by a variety of employments and ranks; in passing through which, the touchstone might be applied to the characters of men, and their hidden virtues or vices explored. Hazael might have appeared in history with a degree of reputation to which he was not entitled, had he continued to act in a subordinate station. At bottom, he was false and unsound. When raised higher in life, the corruption of his heart discovered itself; and he is now held forth with deserved infamy, as a warning to succeeding ages.

* Prov xxx. 8, 9.

IN the second place, We learn from what has been said, the importance of attending, with the utmost care, to the choice which we make of our employment and condition in life. It has been shown, that our external situation frequently operates powerfully on our moral character; and by consequence that it is strictly connected, not only with our temporal welfare, but with our everlasting happiness or misery. He who might have passed unblamed, and upright, through certain walks of life, by unhappily choosing a road where he meets with temptations too strong for his virtue, precipitates himself into shame here, and into endless ruin hereafter. Yet how often is the determination of this most important article left to the chance of accidental connections, or submitted to the option of youthful fancy and humour? When it is made the subject of serious deliberation, how seldom have they, on whom the decision of it depends, any further view than so to dispose of one who is coming out into life, as that he may the soonest become rich, or, as it is expressed, make his way to most advantage in the world? Are there no other objects than this to be attended to, in fixing the plan of life? Are there no more sacred and important interests which deserve to be consulted? You would not willingly place one whose welfare you studied in a situation for which you were convinced that his abilities were unequal. These, therefore, you examine with care; and on them you rest the ground of your decision. Be persuaded that not abilities merely, but the turn of the temper, and the heart, require to be examined with equal attention, in forming the plan of future establishment. Every one has some peculiar weakness, some predominant passion, which exposes him to temptations of one kind more than of another. Early this may be discerned to shoot; and from its first rising its future growth, may be inferred. Anticipate its progress. Consider how it is likely to be affected by succeeding occurrences in life. If you bring one whom you are rearing up into a situation where all the surrounding circumstances shall cherish and mature this fatal principle in his nature, you become in a great measure, answerable for the consequences that follow. In vain you trust to his abilities and powers. Vice and corruption, when they have tainted the heart, are sufficient to upset the greatest abilities. Nay, too frequently they turn them against the possessor; and render them the instruments of his more speedy ruin.

IN the third place, We learn from the history which has been illustrated never to judge of true happiness, merely from the degree of men's advancement in the world. Always betrayed by appearances, the multitude are caught by nothing so much as by the show and pomp of life. They think every one blest, who is raised far above others in rank. From their earliest

years they are taught to fix their views upon worldly elevation, as the ultimate object of their aims; and of all the sources of error in conduct, this is the most general.—Hazael, on the throne of Syria, would, doubtless, be more envied, and esteemed by the multitude a far happier man, than when, yet a subject, he was employed by Benhadad to carry his message to Elisha. Yet, Oh Hazael! how much better had it been for thee never to have known the name or honour of a king, than to have purchased it at the expense of so much guilt; forfeiting thy first and best character; rushing into crimes which were once thine abhorrence; and becoming a traitor to the native sentiments and dictates of thy heart! How fatal to thy repose proved that coveted purple, which was drenched by thee in so much innocent blood! How much more cheerful were thy days, and how much calmer thy nights, in the former periods of thy life, than when, placed on a throne, thy ears were invaded by day with the cries of the miserable whom thou hadst ruined; and thy slumbers broken by night with the shocking remembrance of thy cruelties and crimes!—Never let us judge by the outside of things; nor conclude a man to be happy, solely because he is encompassed with wealth or grandeur. Much misery often lurks where it is little suspected by the world. The material enquiries respecting felicity are, not what a man's external condition is, but with what disposition of mind he bears it; whether he be corrupted or improved by it; whether he conducts himself so as to be acceptable to God, and approved of by good men. For these are the circumstances which make the real and important distinctions among the conditions of men. The effects of these are to last for ever, when all worldly distinctions shall be forgotten.

IN the fourth place, from all that has been said, we should learn never to be immoderately anxious about our external situation, but to submit our lot with cheerfulness to the disposal of Heaven. To make the best and most prudent arrangements which we can, respecting our condition in life, is matter of high duty. But let us remember that all the plans which we form are precarious and uncertain. After the utmost precautions taken by human wisdom, no man can foresee the hidden dangers which may await him in that path of life on which he has pitched. Providence chooses for us much more wisely than we can choose for ourselves; and, from circumstances that appeared at first most unpromising and adverse, often brings forth in the issue both temporal and spiritual felicity. *Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?* When we consider the darkness of our present state, the imbecility of human nature, and the doubtful and ambiguous value of all that we call prosperity, the

exhortation of the Psalmist comes home with great force on every reflecting mind, *Commit thy way unto the Lord.** Form thy measures with prudence; but divest thyself of anxiety about the issue. Instead of seeking to order thine own lot, acquiesce in the appointment of Heaven, and follow without hesitation the call of Providence, and of duty. In whatever situation of life God shall place thee, look up devoutly to Him for grace and assistance; and study to act the part assigned thee with a faithful and upright heart. Thus shalt thou have peace within thyself, while thy course is going on; and when it draws towards a close, with satisfaction thou shalt review thy conduct. For, after all the toils and labours of life, and all the vain struggles which we maintain for pre-eminence and distinction, we shall find at the conclusion of the whole scene, that *to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man.*

* Psalm xxxvii, 5.

SERMON XXVIII.

ON THE BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.—ECCLESIASTES, vii. 2, 3, 4.

MANY of the maxims contained in this book of Ecclesiastes will appear strange sayings to the men of the world. But when they reflect on the character of him who delivers them, they cannot but admit that his tenets deserve a serious and attentive examination. For, they are not the doctrines of a pedant, who, from an obscure retirement, declaims against pleasures which he never knew. They are not the invectives of a disappointed man, who takes revenge upon the world, by satirizing those enjoyments which he sought in vain to obtain. They are the conclusions of a great and prosperous prince, who had once given full scope to his desires; who was thoroughly acquainted with life in its most flattering scenes; and who now, reviewing all that he had enjoyed, delivers to us the result of long experience, and tried wisdom. None of his principles seem, at first view, more dubious and exceptionable than those which the text presents. To assert that sorrow is preferable to mirth, and the *house of mourning to the house of feasting*; to advise men to choose mortification and sadness when it is in their power to indulge in joy, may appear harsh and unreasonable doctrines. They may, perhaps, be accounted enemies to the innocent enjoyment of life who give countenance to so severe a system, and thereby increase the gloom which already sits suf-

ficiently heavy on the condition of man. But let this censure be suspended, until we examine with care into the spirit and meaning of the sentiments here delivered.

It is evident that the wise man does not prefer sorrow, upon its own account, to mirth; or represent sadness as a state more eligible than joy. He considers it in the light of discipline, only. He views it with reference to an end. He compares it with certain improvements which he supposes it to produce; *when the heart is made better by the sadness of the countenance, and the living to lay to heart what is the end of all men.* Now, if great and lasting benefits are found to result from occasional sadness, these, sure, may be capable of giving it the preference to some fleeting sensations of joy. The means which he recommends in order to our obtaining those benefits, are to be explained according to the principles of sound reason; and to be understood with those limitations which the eastern style, in delivering moral precepts, frequently requires. He bids us *go to the house of mourning*; but he does not command us to dwell there. When he prefers sorrow to laughter, he is not to be understood as prohibiting all mirth; as requiring us to wear a perpetual cloud on our brow, and to sequestrate ourselves from every cheerful entertainment of social life. Such an interpretation would be inconsistent with many other exhortations in his own writings, which recommend temperate and innocent joy. It would not suit with the proper discharge of the duties which belong to us as members of society; and would be most opposite to the goodness and benignity of our Creator. The true scope of his doctrine in this passage is, that there is a certain temper and state of heart, which is of far greater consequence to real happiness, than the habitual indulgence of giddy and thoughtless mirth; that for the attainment and cultivation of this temper, frequent returns of grave reflection are necessary; that, upon this account, it is profitable to give admission to those views of human distress which tend to awaken such reflection in the mind; and that thus, from the vicissitudes of sorrow, which we either experience in our own lot, or sympathize with in the lot of others, much wisdom and improvement may be derived. These are the sentiments which I purpose at present to justify and recommend, as most suitable to the character of men and of Christians; and not in the least inconsistent with pleasure, rightly understood.

Among the variety of dispositions which are to be found in the world, some indeed require less of this discipline than others. There are persons whose tender and delicate sensibility, either derived from nature, or brought on by repeated afflictions, renders them too deeply susceptible of every mournful impression; whose spirits stand more in need of being supported and cheered, than of being saddened by the dark views of human life. In

such cases we are commanded to *lift up the hands which hang down, and to confirm the feeble knees.** But this is far from being the common disposition of men. Their minds are in general inclined to levity, much more than to thoughtful melancholy; and their hearts more apt to be contracted and hardened, than to relent with too much facility. I shall therefore endeavour to show them, what bad inclinations their compliance with Solomon's advice would correct; what good dispositions, with respect to God, their neighbours, and themselves, it would improve; and how, upon the whole, his doctrine is verified, that *by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.*

I BEGIN by observing, that the temper recommended in the text suits the present constitution of things in this world. Had man been destined for a course of undisturbed enjoyment, perpetual gaiety would then have corresponded to his state; and pensive thought have been an unnatural intrusion. But in a state where all is chequered and mixed, where there is no prosperity without a reverse, and no joy without its attending griefs, where from the house of feasting all must, at one time or other, pass into the house of mourning, it would be equally unnatural if no admission were given to grave reflection. The mind of man must be attempered to his condition. Providence, whose wisdom is conspicuous in all its works, has adjusted with exact proportion the inward powers to the outward state of every rational being. It has for this purpose implanted the serious and sympathetic feelings in our nature, that they might correspond with the vicissitudes of sorrow in our lot. He who endeavours to repel their influence, or to stifle them in unseasonable mirth, acts a violent and unnatural part. He strives with vain effort against the current of things, contradicts the intentions of his Maker, and counteracts the original impulses of his own heart.

It is proper also to observe, that as *the sadness of the countenance* has, in our present situation, a proper and natural place; so it is requisite to the true enjoyment of pleasure. Worldly and sensual men often remark, not till it be too late, that, by the studied efforts of constant repetition, all their pleasures fail. They draw them off so close to the dregs, that they become insipid and nauseous. Hence even *in laughter their heart is sorrowful, and the end of their mirth is heaviness.*† It is only the interposal of serious and thoughtful hours, that can give any lively sensations to the returns of joy. I speak not of those thoughtful hours, too well known to sinners, which proceed from guilty remorse; and which, instead of preparing for future pleasure, damp and sicken the moment of enjoyment: but

* Isaiah, xxxv. 3. Heb. xii. 12.

† Prov. xiv. 13.

of those which take rise from the mind retreating into itself, and opening to the sentiments of religion and humanity. Such hours of virtuous sadness brighten the gleams of succeeding joy. They give, to the temperate enjoyments of the pious and humane, a refined and delicate relish, to which the hardened and insensible are entire strangers. For it will be found, that in proportion as the tender affections of the soul are kept awake, how much soever they may sometimes distress the heart, they preserve it open likewise to the most agreeable sensations.—He who never knew the sorrows of friendship, never also knew its joys. He whose heart cannot relent in the house of mourning, will, in the most social hour of the house of feasting, partake of no more than the lowest part of animal pleasure.—Having premised these observations, I proceed to point out the direct effects of a proper attention to the distresses of life upon our moral and religious character.

In the first place, The house of mourning is calculated to give a proper check to our natural thoughtlessness and levity. The indolence of mankind, and their love of pleasure, spread through all characters and ranks some degree of aversion to what is grave and serious. They grasp at any object, either of business or amusement, which makes the present moment pass smoothly away ; which carries their thoughts abroad, and saves them from the trouble of reflecting on themselves. With too many this passes into a habit of constant dissipation. If their fortune and rank allow them to indulge their inclinations, they devote themselves to the pursuit of amusement through all its different forms. The skilful arrangement of its successive scenes, and the preparatory study for shining in each, are the only exertions on which their understanding is employed. Such a mode of life may keep alive, for a while, a frivolous vivacity. It may improve men in some of those exterior accomplishments, which sparkle in the eyes of the giddy and the vain ; but it must sink them in the esteem of all the wise. It renders them strangers to themselves ; and useless, if not pernicious, to the world. They lose every manly principle. Their minds become relaxed and effeminate. All that is great or respectable in the human character is buried under a mass of trifles and follies.

If some measures ought to be taken for rescuing the mind from this disgraceful levity ; if some principles must be acquired, which may give more dignity and steadiness to conduct ; where, I pray you, are these to be looked for ? Not surely in the house of feasting, where every object flatters the senses, and strengthens the seductions to which we are already prone ; where the spirit of dissipation circulates from heart to heart ; and the children of folly mutually admire and are admired. It is in the sober and serious house of mourning that the tide of

vanity is made to turn, and a new direction given to the current of thought. When some affecting incident presents a strong discovery of the deceitfulness of all worldly joy, and rouses our sensibility to human woe: when we behold those with whom we had lately mingled in the house of feasting, sunk by some of the sudden vicissitudes of life into the vale of misery: or when, in sad silence, we stand by the friend whom we had loved as our own soul, stretched on the bed of death; then is the season when the world begins to appear in a new light; when the heart opens to virtuous sentiments, and is led into that train of reflection which ought to direct life. He who before knew not what it was to commune with his heart on any serious subject, now puts the question to himself—For what purpose he was sent forth into this mortal, transitory state: what his fate is likely to be when it concludes: and what judgment he ought to form of those pleasures which amuse for a little, but which, he now sees, cannot save the heart from anguish in the evil day? Touched by the hand of thoughtful melancholy, that airy edifice of bliss, which fancy had raised up for him, vanishes away. He beholds in the place of it, the lonely and barren desert, in which, surrounded with many a disagreeable object, he is left musing upon himself. The time which he has mis-spent, and the faculties which he has misemployed, his foolish levity, and his criminal pursuits, all rise in painful prospect before him. That unknown state of existence into which, race after race, the children of men pass, strikes his mind with solemn awe.—Is there no course by which he can retrieve his past errors?—Is there no superior power to which he can look up for aid?—Is there no plan of conduct, which, if it exempt him not from sorrow, can at least procure him consolation amidst the distressful exigencies of life?—Such meditations as these, suggested by the house of mourning, frequently produce a change on the whole character. They revive those sparks of goodness which were nigh being quite extinguished in the dissipated mind: and give rise to principles and conduct more rational in themselves, and more suitable to the human state.

In the second place, Impressions of this nature not only produce moral seriousness but awaken sentiments of piety, and bring men into the sanctuary of Religion. One might, indeed, imagine that the blessings of a prosperous condition would prove the most natural incitements to devotion; and that when men were happy in themselves, and saw nothing but happiness around them, they could not fail gratefully to acknowledge that God, who *giveth them all things richly to enjoy*. Yet such is their corruption, that they are never more ready to forget their benefactor, than when loaded with his benefits. The giver is concealed from their careless and inattentive view, by the cloud

of his own gifts. When their life continues to flow in one smooth current unruffled by any griefs; when they neither receive in their own circumstances, nor allow themselves to receive from the circumstances of others, any admonitions of human instability; they not only become regardless of Providence, but are in hazard of contemning it. Glorifying in their strength, and lifted up by the pride of life into supposed independence, that impious sentiment, if not uttered by the mouth, yet too often lurks in the hearts of many, during their flourishing period. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him; and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*

If such be the tendency of the house of feasting, how necessary is it, that, by some change in their situation, men should be obliged to enter in the house of mourning, in order to recover a proper sense of their dependent state? It is there, when forsaken by the gaieties of the world, and left alone with God, that we are made to perceive how awful his government is; how easily human greatness bends before him; and how quickly all our designs and measures, at his interposal, vanish into nothing. There when the countenance is sad, and the affections are softened by grief; when we sit apart, involved in serious thought, looking down as from some eminence on those dark clouds that hang over the life of man, the arrogance of prosperity is humbled, and the heart melts under the impressions of religion. Formerly we were taught, but now we see, we feel, how much we stand in need of an Almighty Protector, amidst the changes of this vain world. Our soul cleaves to Him who *despises not, nor abhors the affliction of the afflicted*. Prayer flows forth of its own accord from the relenting heart, that he may be our God, and the God of our friends in distress; that he may never forsake us while we are sojourning in this land of pilgrimage; may strengthen us under its calamities; and bring us hereafter to those habitations of rest, where we, and they whom we love, may be delivered from the trials which all are now doomed to endure. The discoveries of his mercy, which he has made in the Gospel of Christ, are viewed with joy, as so many rays of light sent down from above to dispel, in some degree, the surrounding gloom. A Mediator and Intercessor with the Sovereign of the universe, appear comfortable names; and the resurrection of the just becomes the powerful cordial of grief. In such moments as these, which we may justly call happy moments, the soul participates of all the pleasures of devotion.—It feels the power of religion to support and relieve. It is softened, without being broken. It is full, and it pours itself forth; pours itself forth, if we may be allowed to use the expression, into the bosom of its merciful Creator.

IN the third place, Such serious sentiments produce the happiest effect upon our disposition towards our fellow-creatures, as well as towards God. It is a common and just observation, that they who have lived always in affluence and ease, strangers to the miseries of life, are liable to contract hardness of heart with respect to all the concerns of others. Wrapped up in themselves, and their own pleasures, they behold with indifference the most affecting scenes of distress. Habituated to indulge all their desires without controul, they become impatient of the least provocation or offence; and are ready to trample on their inferiors, as if they were creatures of a different species from themselves. Is this an amiable temper, or such as becomes a man? When appearing in others, do we not view it with much displeasure? When imputed to ourselves, can we avoid accounting it a severe reproach?

By the experience of distress, this arrogant insensibility of temper is most effectually corrected; as the remembrance of our own sufferings naturally prompts us to feel for others when they suffer. But if Providence has been so kind as not to subject us to much of this discipline in our own lot, let us draw improvement from the harder lot of others. Let us sometimes step aside from the smooth and flowery paths in which we are permitted to walk, in order to view the toilsome march of our fellows through the thorny desert. By voluntarily going into the house of mourning; by yielding to the sentiments which it excites, and mingling our tears with those of the afflicted, we shall acquire that humane sensibility which is one of the highest ornaments of the nature of man. Perceiving how much the common distresses of life place us all on a level, and render the high and the low, the rich and the poor, companions in misfortune and mortality, we shall learn to set no man at nought, and least of any, our afflicted brother. Prejudices will be extinguished, and benevolence opened and enlarged, when looking around on the multitude of men, we consider them as a band of fellow-travellers in the valley of woe, where it ought to be the office of every one to alleviate, as much as possible, the common burden.—While the vain and the licentious are revelling in the midst of extravagance and riot, how little do they think of those scenes of sore distress which are going on at that moment throughout the world; multitudes struggling for a poor subsistence to support the wife and the children whom they love, and who look up to them with eager eyes for that bread which they can hardly procure; multitudes groaning under sickness in desolate cottages, unattended and unmourned; many, apparently in a better situation of life, pining away in secret with concealed griefs; families weeping over the beloved friends

whom they have lost, or, in all the bitterness of anguish, bidding those who are just expiring the last adieu.

May we not appeal to the heart of every good man, nay almost to the heart of every man who has not divested himself of his natural feelings, whether the admission of such views of human life might not, sometimes at least, furnish a more worthy employment to the mind, than that *mirth of fools* which Solomon compares to *the crackling of thorns under a pot* ;* the transient burst of unmeaning joy ; the empty explosion of giddiness and levity ? Those sallies of jollity in the house of feasting are often forced from a troubled mind ; like flashes from the black cloud, which after a momentary effulgence, are succeeded by thicker darkness. Whereas, compassionate affections even at the time when they draw tears from our eyes for human misery, convey satisfaction to the heart. The gracious appointment of Heaven has ordained that sympathetic pains should always be accompanied with a certain degree of pleasure ; on purpose that we might be more interested in the case of the distressed, and that by this mysterious bond, man might be linked closer to man. The inward satisfaction which belongs to the compassionate affections is, at the same time, heightened by the approbation which they receive from our reason ; and by the consciousness which they afford us of feeling what men and Christians ought to feel.

IN the fourth place, The disposition recommended in the text, not only improves us in piety and humanity, but likewise assists us in self-government, and the due moderation of our desires. The house of mourning is the school of temperance and sobriety. Every wise man will find it for his interest to enter into it sometimes of his own accord, lest otherwise he be compelled to take up his dwelling there. Seasonable interruptions of our pleasures are necessary to their prolongation. For, continued scenes of luxury and indulgence hasten to a melancholy issue. The house of feasting too often becomes an avenue to the house of mourning. Short, to the licentious, is the interval between them ; and speedy the transition from the one to the other.

But supposing that, by prudent management, the men of pleasure could avoid the pernicious effects which intemperance and dissoluteness are likely to produce on their health or their fortune, can they also prevent those disorders which such habits will introduce into their minds ? Can they escape that wrath of the Almighty, which will infallibly pursue them for their sins both here and hereafter ? For whence, so much as from the unchecked pursuit of pleasure, do all those crimes arise which

* Eccles. vii. 6.

stain the characters of men with the deepest guilt, and expose them to the severest judgments of Heaven? Whence, then, is the corrective of those mischiefs to be sought, but from such discipline as shall moderate that intemperate admiration of the world which gave rise to the evil? By repairing sometimes to the house of mourning, you would chasten the looseness of fancy, abate the eagerness of passion, and afford scope to reason for exerting her restraining powers. You would behold this world stripped of its false colours, and reduced to its proper level. Many an important instruction you would receive from the humiliation of the proud, the mortification of the vain, and the sufferings of the voluptuous, which you would see exemplified before you in the chambers of sorrow, of sickness, and of death. You would then be taught *to rejoice as though you rejoiced not, and to weep as though you weeped not*; that is, neither in joy and in grief, to run to excess; *but to use this world so as not to abuse it; contemplating the fashion thereof as passing away.*

Moreover, you would there learn the important lesson, of suiting your mind, before hand, to what you had reason to expect from the world; a lesson too seldom studied by mankind, and to the neglect of which, much of their misery, and much of their guilt, is to be charged. By turning away their eyes from the dark side of life, by looking at the world only in one light, and that a flattering one, they form their measures on a false plan, and are necessarily deceived and betrayed. Hence, the vexation of succeeding disappointment and blasted hope. Hence, their criminal impatience of life, and their better accusations of God and man; when, in truth, they have reason to accuse only their own folly.—Thou, who wouldst act like a wise man, and build thy house on the rock, and not on the sand, contemplate human life not only in the sunshine, but in the shade.—Frequent the house of mourning, as well as the house of mirth. Study the nature of that state in which thou art placed; and balance its joys with its sorrows. Thou seest that the cup which is held forth to the whole human race, is mixed. Of its bitter ingredients, expect that thou art to drink thy portion. Thou seest the storm hovering every where in the clouds around thee. Be not surprised if on thy head it shall break. Lower, therefore, thy sails. Dismiss thy florid hopes; and come forth prepared either to act or to suffer, according as Heaven shall decree. Thus shalt thou be excited to take the properest measures for defence, by endeavouring to secure an interest in his favour, who, *in the time of trouble, can hide thee in his pavilion.* Thy mind shall adjust itself to follow the order of his Providence. Thou shalt be enabled, with equanimity and steadiness, to hold thy course through life.

IN the fifth place, By accustoming ourselves to such serious views of life, our excessive fondness for life itself will be moderated, and our minds gradually formed to wish and to long for a better world. If we know that our continuance here is to be short, and that we are intended by our Maker for a more lasting state, and for employments of a nature altogether different from those which now occupy the busy, or amuse the vain, we must surely be convinced that it is of the highest consequence to prepare ourselves for so important a change. This view of our duty is frequently held up to us in the sacred writings; and hence religion becomes, though not a morose, yet a grave and solemn principle, calling off the attention of men from light pursuits to those which are of eternal moment. *What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* if he shall lead a life of thoughtless mirth on earth, and exclude himself from eternal felicity in heaven? Worldly affection and sensual pleasure depress all our higher powers. They form an unnatural union between the human soul and this earth, which was only designed for its temporary abode, They attach it too strongly to objects from which it must shortly part. They alienate its desires from God and Heaven, and deject it with slavish and unmanly fears of death. Whereas, by the discipline of religious seriousness, it is gradually loosened from the fetters of sense. Assisted to discover the vanity of this world, it rises above it; and, in the hours of sober thought, cultivates connexion with those divine and immortal objects, among which it is designed to dwell.

ENOUGH has now been said to convince any thinking person of the justice and reasonableness of the maxims in the text; and to show, that on various occasions, *sorrow may be better than laughter.* Wouldst thou acquire the habit of recollection, and fix the principles of thy conduct; wouldst thou be led up to thy Creator and Redeemer, and be formed to sentiments of piety and devotion; wouldst thou be acquainted with those mild and tender affections which delight the compassionate and humane; wouldst thou have the power of sensual appetites tamed and corrected, and thy soul raised above the ignoble love of life, and fear of death? Go, my brother, go—not to scenes of pleasure and riot, not to the house of feasting and mirth—but to the silent house of mourning; and adventure to dwell for a while among objects that will soften thy heart. Contemplate the lifeless remains of what once was fair and flourishing. Bring home to thyself the vicissitudes of life. Recall the remembrance of the friend, the parent, or the child whom thou tenderly lovedst. Look back on the days of former years; and think on the companions of thy youth, who now sleep in the dust. Let the vanity, the mutabi-

lity, and the sorrows of the human estate, rise in full prospect before thee; and though *thy countenance* may be *made sad, thy heart shall be made better*. This sadness, though for the present it dejects, yet shall in the end fortify thy spirit; inspiring thee with such sentiments and prompting such resolutions, as shall enable thee to enjoy, with more real advantage, the rest of life. Dispositions of this nature form one part of the character of those *mourners* whom our Saviour hath pronounced *blessed*; and of those to whom it is promised, that *sowing in tears, they shall reap in joy*.^{*} A great difference there is between being serious and melancholy; and a melancholy too there is of that kind which deserves to be sometimes indulged.

Religion hath, on the whole, provided for every good man abundant materials of consolation and relief. How dark soever the present face of nature may appear, it dispels the darkness, when it brings into view the entire system of things, and extends our survey to the whole kingdom of God. It represents what we now behold as only a part, and a small part, of the general order. It assures us, that though here, for wise ends, misery and sorrow are permitted to have place, these temporary evils shall, in the end, advance the happiness of all who love God, and are faithful to their duty. It shews them this mixed and confused scene vanishing by degrees away, and preparing the introduction of that state, where the house of mourning shall be shut up for ever; where no tears are seen, and no groans heard; where no hopes are frustrated, and no virtuous connexions dissolved; but where, under the light of the Divine countenance, goodness shall flourish in perpetual felicity. Thus, though religion may occasionally chasten our mirth with sadness of countenance, yet under that sadness it allows not the heart of good men to sink; it calls upon them to rejoice, *because the Lord reigneth who is their Rock, and the most high God, who is their Redeemer*. Reason likewise joins her voice with that of religion; forbidding us to make peevish and unreasonable complaints of human life, or injuriously to ascribe to it more evil than it contains. Mixed as the present state is, she pronounces, that generally, if not always, there is more happiness than misery, more pleasure than pain, in the condition of man.

^{*} Matth. v. 4. Psalm cxxvi. 5.

SERMON XXIX.

ON THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT OF THE PASSIONS OF MEN

*Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee ; the remainder of
wrath shalt thou restrain.*—PSALM lxxvi. 10.

THIS Psalm appears to have been composed on occasion of some remarkable deliverance obtained by the Jewish nation, It is generally understood to have been written in the reign of Hezekiah. and to refer to the formidable invasion of Judea by Sennacherib; when the angel of the Lord, in one night, discomfitted the whole Assyrian host, and smote them with sudden destruction. To this interposition of the Divine arm, those expressions in the context may naturally be applied; *There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle. The stout-hearted are spoiled; they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, Oh God of Jacob! both the chariot and the horse are cast into a dead sleep.*—In the text we have the wise and religious reflection of the Psalmist upon the violent designs which had been carried on by the enemies of his country, and upon the issue to which Providence had brought them. *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee.* By *the wrath of man*, we are to understand all that the impetuosity of human passions can devise or execute; the projects of ambition and resentment, the rage of persecution, the fury of war; the disorders which violence produces in private life, and the public commotions which it excites in the world. All these shall *praise God*, not with their intention and design, nor by their native tendency; but by those wise and good purposes, which his providence makes them accomplish; from their poison extracting health, and converting things, which in themselves are pernicious, into instruments of his glory, and of public benefit: So that, though *the wrath of man worketh not the*

righteousness of God, it is nevertheless forced and compelled to minister to his praise. The Psalmist adds, *the remainder of wrath shall thou restrain*; that is, God will allow scope to the wrath of man as far as it answers his good purposes, and is subservient to his praise; the rest of it shall be curbed and bound up. When it would attempt to go beyond its prescribed limit, he says to it, as to the waters of the ocean, *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be staid*.

All this shall be fully verified and declared by the last issue of things; when we shall be able more clearly to trace the Divine administration through its several steps, by seeing the consummation of the whole. In some cases, it may be reserved for this period to unfold the mysterious wisdom of Heaven. But in general, as much of the Divine conduct is at present manifest, as gives just ground for the assertion in the text. In the sequel of this discourse I shall endeavour to illustrate and confirm it. I shall show in what manner the wrath of man is made to praise the power, the wisdom, the justice and the goodness of God.

I BEGIN with this observation, That in order to accomplish the great purposes carried on by the Government of the Universe, it is necessary that the Divine perfections be displayed before mankind in a sensible and striking manner. We are not to conceive the Supreme Being as hereby seeking praise to himself, from a principle of ostentation or vain glory. Independent and self-sufficient, he rests in the enjoyment of his own beatitude. His praise consists in the general order and welfare of his creation. This end cannot be attained, unless mankind be made to feel the subjection under which they are placed. They must be taught to admire and adore their Sovereign. They must be overawed by the view of a high hand, which can at pleasure controul their actions, and render them subservient to purposes, which they neither foresaw nor intended. Hence the propriety of God's making *the wrath of man to praise him*. We easily conceive in what manner the heavens and the earth are said to praise God, as they are standing monuments of that supreme perfection which is displayed in their creation. The virtues of good men obviously praise him, by exhibiting his image, and reflecting back his glory. But when even the vices and inordinate passions of bad men are made to praise him, in consequence of the useful purposes which they are compelled to accomplish, this, in a particular manner, distinguishes and signals a Divine hand; this opens a more wonderful prospect of the administration of Heaven, than if all its subjects had been loyal and willingly obedient, and the course of human affairs had proceeded in a quiet and regular tenor.

I. THE *wrath of man* redounds to the praise of Divine power. It brings it forth with full and awful lustre, to the view of mankind. To reign with sovereign command amidst the most turbulent and disordered state of things, both in the natural and moral world, is the peculiar glory of Omnipotence. Hence God is described in Scripture as *sitting on the flood, riding on the wings of the wind, dwelling in the darkness and the tempest*; that is, making the most violent powers in the universe minister to his will; giving them scope or restraining them, according as suits the purposes of his dominion. As *he stills*, at his pleasure, the *raging of the seas, and the noise of their waves*, in like manner *he stills the tumults of the people*. when the passions of men are most inflamed, and their designs just ripe for bursting into execution; often, by some unexpected interposition, he calls upon the world to observe that there is One higher than the highest on earth, who can frustrate their devices in a moment, and command *the earth to be still before him*. Proud fleets, destined to carry destruction to neighboring kingdoms, may cover the ocean. He blows with his wind, and they are scattered.

Mighty armies may go forth to the field in all the glory of human strength; but the issues of battle are with Him. He suspends on high the invisible balance which weighs the fate of nations. According as the scale inclines, he gives to some slight event the power of deciding the contest. He clouds the sky with darkness, or opens the windows of Heaven to let forth their flood. He dejects the hearts of the brave with sudden terror, and renders the hands of the strong, weak and unperforming at the critical moment. A thousand unseen ministers stand ready to be the instruments of his power, in humbling the pride, and checking the efforts of the wrath of man. Thus, in the instance of haughty Sennacherib, and that boasted tempest of wrath which he threatened to pour upon all the Jewish nation; *I will put my hook, says the Almighty, in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.** In that night the destroying angel smote the host, and he *departed with shame of face to his own land*. *When the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing; when the kings of the earth set themselves, and its rulers take council together, He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.†*

II. THE *wrath of man* is made to praise the wisdom as well as the power of God. Nothing displays more remarkably the admirable counsel of Heaven, than its arranging the train of events in such a manner, that the unruly passions of the wicked

* 2 Kings, xix. 28

† Psalm ii. 1, 2, 4.

shall contribute to overthrow their own designs. History abounds with examples of their being rendered the unconscious ministers of Providence to accomplish purposes directly opposite to those which they had in view. Thus, the cruelty of the sons of Jacob, in pursuing the destruction of their brother Joseph became the means of effecting his high advancement. Thus, the wrath of Pharaoh against the Israelites, and his unjust attempts to detain them in bondage, proved the occasion of bringing them forth from the land of slavery, with signal marks of the favour of Heaven. Thus, the inhuman plan which Haman had formed for ruining Mordcai, and extirpating the whole Jewish nation, paved the way for Mordecai's high promotion, and for the triumph of the Jews over all their enemies.

After this manner the Almighty *snareth the wicked in the works of their hands*; and erects his own counsel upon the ruin of theirs. Those events which, viewed apart, appear as spots in the Divine administration, when considered in connection with all their consequences, are often found to give it additional lustre. The beauty and magnificence of the universe are much heightened by its being an extensive and complicated system; in which a variety of springs are made to play, and a multitude of different movements are, with most admirable art, regulated and kept in order. Interfering interests, and jarring passions, are in such manner balanced against one another; such proper checks are placed on the violence of human pursuits; and the *wrath of man* is made so to hold his course, that how opposite soever the several motions seem to be, yet they concur and meet at last in one direction. While, among the multitudes that dwell on the face of the earth, some are submissive to the Divine authority; some rise up in rebellion against it; others, absorbed in their pleasures and pursuits, are totally inattentive to it; they are all so moved by an imperceptible influence from above, that the zeal of the dutiful, the wrath of the rebellious, and the indifference of the careless, contribute finally to the glory of God. All are governed in such a way as suits their powers, and is consistent with rational freedom; yet all are subjected to the necessity of fulfilling the eternal purposes of Heaven.—This depth of Divine wisdom in the administration of the universe, exceeds all human comprehension, and affords everlasting subject of adoration and praise.

III. *THE WRATH OF MAN* praises the justice of God, by being employed as the instrument of inflicting punishment on sinners. Did bad men trace the course of events in their life with attentive eye, they might easily discover the greatest part of the disasters which they suffer, to be brought upon them by their own ungoverned passions. The succession of causes and

effects is so contrived by Providence, that the wrath which they meant to pour forth on others, frequently recoils, by its effects, upon themselves. But supposing them to escape those external mischiefs which violent passions naturally occasion, they cannot evade the internal misery which they produce. The constitution of things is framed with such profound wisdom, that the Divine laws, in every event, execute themselves against the sinner, and carry their sanction in their own bosom. The Supreme Being has no occasion to unlock the prisons of the deep, or to call down the thunder from Heaven, in order to punish the *wrath of man*. He carries on the administration of justice with more simplicity and dignity. It is sufficient that he allow those fierce passions which render bad man the disturbers of others, to operate on their own hearts. He delivers them up to themselves, and they become their own tormentors. Before the world, they may disguise their sufferings; but it is well known, that to be inwardly torn with despite, revenge, and wrathful passions, is the most intense of all misery. In thus connecting the punishment with the crime, making their *own wickedness to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them*, the avenging hand of a righteous Governor is conspicuous; and thus the observation of the Psalmist is fully verified; *the wicked have drawn out the sword, and bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy; but their sword shall enter into their own heart.**

The *wrath of man* also praises the justice of God in the punishment of other criminals, as well as of the wrathful themselves. Ambitious and lawless men are let loose upon each other, that, without any supernatural interposition, they may fulfil the just vengeance of Heaven in their mutual destruction. They may occasionally be cemented together by conspiracy against the just; but, as no firm nor lasting bond can unite them, they become at last the prey of mutual jealousy, strife, and fraud. For a time, they may go on, and seem to prosper. The justice of Heaven may appear to slumber; but it is awake, and only waits till the measure of their iniquity be full. God represents himself in Scripture as sometimes permitting wickedness to rise to an overgrown height, on purpose that its ruin may be the greater, and more exemplary. He says to the tyrant of Egypt, that *for this cause he had raised him up*, that is, had allowed him to prosper and be exalted, *that he might shew in him his power; and that his name might be declared throughout all the earth.*†—The Divine administration is glorified in the punishment contrived for the workers of iniquity, as well as in the reward prepared for the righteous. *This is the purpose which the Lord hath*

* Psalm xxxviii. 14. 15

† Exod. ix. 16.

*purposed upon all the earth ; and this is the hand that is stretched forth over all the nations.**

IV. THE *wrath of man* is made to praise the goodness of God. This is the most unexpected of its effects ; and therefore requires to be the most fully illustrated. All the operations of the government of the Deity may be ultimately resolved into goodness. His power, and wisdom, and justice, all conduce to general happiness and order. Among the means which he uses for accomplishing this end, it will be found, that the wrath of man, through his over-ruling direction, possesses a considerable place.

FIRST, It is employed by God as an useful instrument of discipline and correction to the virtuous. The storms which ambition and pride raise among mankind, he permits with the same intention that he sends forth tempests among the elements ; to clear the atmosphere of noxious vapours, and to purify it from that corruption which all things contract by too much rest.—When wicked men prevail in their designs, and exercise the power which they have gained with a heavy and oppressive hand, the virtuous are apt to exclaim, in bitterness of soul, Where is the Lord ? and where the sceptre of righteousness and truth ? *Hath God forgotten to be gracious ?* or doth he indeed see, and *is there knowledge in the Most High ?*—Their oppressors are, in truth, no more than the ministers of God to them for good. He sees that they stand in need of correction, and therefore raises up enemies against them, in order to cure the intemperance of prosperity ; and to produce, in the serious hours of affliction, proper reflections upon their duty, and their past errors.

In this light the disturbers of the earth are often represented in Scripture, as scourges in the hand of God, employed to inflict chastisement upon a degenerating people. They are commissioned for the execution of righteous and wise purposes, concealed from themselves ; and when their commission is fulfilled, they are recalled and destroyed. Of this we have a remarkable example in the use which God made of the king of Assyria with respect to the people of Israel ; *I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey. Howbeit, he meaneth not so ; neither doth his heart think so ; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few. Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of*

* Isaiah xiv. 26.

*his high looks.** In vain, then, doth the *wrath of man* lift itself up against God. *He saith, by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?* All things, whether they will it or not, *must work together for good to them that love God.* The *wrath of man*, among the rest, fills up the place assigned to it by the ordination of Heaven. The violent enemy, the proud conqueror, and the oppressive tyrant, possess only the same station with the famine, the pestilence, and the flood. Their triumphs are no more than the accomplishment of God's correction; *and the remainder of their wrath shall he restrain.*

SECONDLY, God makes the *wrath of man* contribute to the benefit of the virtuous, by rendering it the means of improving and signaling their graces; and of raising them, thereby, to higher honour and glory. Had human affairs proceeded in an orderly train, and no opposition been made to religion and virtue by the violence of the wicked, what room would have been left for some of the highest and most generous exertions of the soul of man? How many shining examples of fortitude, constancy, and patience, would have been lost to the world? What a field of virtues peculiar to a state of discipline had lain uncultivated? Spirits of a higher order possess a state of established virtue, that stands in need of no such trials and improvements. But to us, who are only under education for such a state, it belongs to pass through the furnace, that our souls may be tried, refined, and brightened. We must stand the conflict, that we may be graced and crowned as conquerors. The *wrath of man* opens the field to glory; calls us forth to the most distinguished exercise of active virtue, and forms us to all those suffering graces which are among the highest ornaments of the human soul. It is thus, that the illustrious band of true patriots and heroes, of confessors and martyrs, have been set forth to the admiration of all ages, as *lights of the world*; while the rage and fury of enemies, instead of bearing them down, have only served to exalt and dignify them more.

THIRDLY, The *wrath of man* is often made to advance the temporal prosperity of the righteous. The occasional distresses which it brings upon them, frequently lay the foundation of their future success. The violence with which wicked men pursue their resentment, defeats its own purpose; and engages the world on the side of the virtuous, whom they persecute. The attempts of malice to blacken and defame them, bring forth their characters with more advantage to the view of impartial beholders. The extremities to which they are reduced by injustice

* Isaiah, x. 6, 7. 12.

and oppression, rouse their courage and activity; and often give occasion to such vigorous efforts in their just defence, as overcome all opposition, and terminate in prosperity and success.—Even in cases where the *wrath of man* appears to prevail over the peaceable and the just, it is frequently, in its issue, converted into a blessing. How many have had reason to be thankful, for being disappointed by their enemies in designs which they earnestly pursued, but which, if successfully accomplished, they have afterwards seen would have occasioned their ruin?—*Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.**

While the *wrath of man* thus praises God by the advantages which it is made to bring to good men as individuals, the divine hand is equally apparent in the similar effects which it is appointed to produce to nations and societies. When wars and commotions shake the earth, when factions rage, and intestine divisions embroil kingdoms, that before were flourishing. Providence seems, at first view, to have abandoned public affairs to the misrule of human passions. Yet from the midst of this confusion, order is often made to spring; and from these mischiefs lasting advantages to arise. By such convulsions, nations are roused from that dangerous lethargy into which flowing wealth, long peace, and growing effeminacy of manners had sunk them. They are awakened to discern their true interests; and taught to take proper measures for security and defence against all their foes. Inveterate prejudices are corrected; and latent sources of danger are discovered. Public spirit is called forth; and larger views of national happiness are formed. The corruptions to which every government is liable, are often rectified by a ferment in the political body, as noxious humours in the animal frame are carried off by the shock of a disease. Attempts made against a wise and well-established civil constitution tend in the issue to strengthen it; and the disorders of licentiousness and faction, teach men more highly to prize the blessings of tranquillity and legal protection.

FOURTHLY, The *wrath of man*, when it breaks forth in the persecution of religion, praises the divine goodness, by being rendered conducive to the advancement of truth, and propagation of religion in the world. The church of God, since the days of its infancy, hath never been entirely exempted from the wrath of the world; and in those ages during which it was most exposed to that wrath, it hath always flourished the most. In vain the policy and the rage of men united their efforts to extinguish this divine light. Though all the four winds blew against it, it only shone brighter, and flamed higher.—*Many waters*

* Psalm cvii. 43

could not quench it, nor all the floods drown it. The constancy and fortitude of those who suffered for the truth, had a much greater effect in increasing the number of converts, than all the terror and cruelty of persecutors in diminishing it. By this means the *wrath of man* was made to turn against itself, to the destruction of its own purpose; like waves, which, assulting a rock with impotent fury, discover its immoveable stability, while they dash themselves in pieces at its feet.

I SHALL only add one other instance of the *wrath of man* praising God, by accomplishing ends of most extensive benefit to mankind. Never did the rage and malice of the wicked imagine that they had obtained a more complete triumph, than in the death of Jesus Christ. When they had executed their purpose of making him suffer as a malefactor, they were confident that they had extinguished his name, and discomfited his followers for ever. Behold, how feeble are the efforts of the *wrath of man* against the decree of Heaven! All that they intended to overthrow, they most effectually established. The death of Christ was, in the councils of Heaven, the spring of everlasting life to the faithful. The cross on which he suffered with apparent ignominy, became the standard of eternal honour to him; the ensign under which his followers assembled, and triumphed. He who, at his pleasure, *restrains the remainder of wrath*, suffered the rage of our Saviour's enemies to suggest no other things to them than what, long before, he had determined, and his prophets had foretold. They all conspired to render the whole scene of Christ's sufferings exactly conformable to the original predicted plan of Divine mercy and goodness; and each of them contributed his share to accomplish that great undertaking, which none of them in the least understood, or meant to promote. So remarkable an instance as this, fully ascertained in Scripture, of the *wrath of man* ministering to the designs of Heaven, ought to be frequently in our eye; as an exemplification of the conduct of Providence in many other cases, where we have not so much light afforded us for tracing its ways.

By this induction of particulars, the doctrine contained in the text is plainly and fully verified. We have seen that the disorders which the pride and passions of men occasion in the world, though they take rise from the corruption of human nature in this fallen state, yet are so over-ruled by Providence, as to redound to his honour and glory who governs all. They illustrate before the world the divine perfections in the administration of the universe. They serve the purposes of moral and religious improvement to the souls of men. By a secret tendency, they advance the welfare of those whom they appear to threaten with evil. *Surely, O God! the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*—In thy hand it is; and

Thou never lettest it forth but in weight and in measure. It is wild and intractable in its nature; but Thou tamest it. It is blind and headlong in its impulse; but Thou directest it. It struggles continually to break its chain; but Thou confinest it; Thou retrenchest all the superfluity of its fury.—Let us now consider, what improvement is to be made of this meditation on the ways of Providence.

In the first place, Let it lead us to a religious contemplation of the hand of God in all the transactions of the world. In the ordinary course of human affairs, we behold a very mixed and busy scene; the passions of men variously agitated, and new changes daily taking place upon this stage of time. We behold peace and war alternately returning; the fortunes of private men rising and falling; and states and nations partaking of the same vicissitudes. In all this, if we attend only to the operation of external causes, and to the mere rotation of events, we view no more than the inanimate part of nature; we stop at the surface of things; we contemplate the great spectacle which is presented to us, not with the eyes of rational and intelligent beings. The life and beauty of the universe arises from the view of that wisdom and goodness which animates and conducts the whole, and unites all the parts in one great design. There is an eternal Mind who puts all those wheels in motion; Himself remaining for ever at rest. Nothing is void of God. Even in the passions and ragings of men, He is to be found; and where they imagine they guide themselves, they are guided and controlled by his hand. What solemn thoughts and devout affections ought this meditation to inspire; when, in viewing the affairs of the world, we attend not merely to the actings of men, but to the ways of God; and consider ourselves, and all our concerns, as included in his high administration.

In the second place, The doctrine which has been illustrated should prevent us from censuring Providence, on account of any seeming disorders and evils which at present take place in the world. The various instances which have been pointed out in this discourse, of human passion and wickedness rendered subservient to wise and useful ends, give us the highest reason to conclude, that in all other cases of seeming evil, the like ends are carried on. This ought to satisfy our mind, even when the prospect is most dark and discouraging. The plans of Divine wisdom are too large and comprehensive to be discerned by us in all their extent; and where we see only by parts, we must frequently be at a loss in judging of the whole. *The way of God is in the sea, and his paths in the great waters; his footsteps are not known.** But although thou sayest thou canst not see

* Psalm lxxvii. 19.

*him, yet judgment is before him, therefore trust thou in him.** As in the natural world no real deformity is found, nothing but what has either some ornament or some use ; so in the moral world, the most irregular and deformed appearances contribute, in one way or other, to the order of the whole. The Supreme Being, from the most opposite and disagreeing principles, forms universal concord ; and adapts even the most harsh and dissonant notes to the harmony of his praise. As he hath reared the goodly frame of nature from various and jarring elements, and hath settled it in peace ; so he hath formed such an union by his Providence of the more various interests, and more jarring passions of men, that they all conspire to his glory, and co-operate for general good.—How amazing is that wisdom, which comprehends such infinite diversities and contrarieties within its scheme ! How powerful that hand, which bends to its own purpose the good and the bad, the busy and the idle, the friends and the foes of truth ; which obliges them all to hold on their course to his glory, though divided from one another by a multiplicity of pursuits, and differing often from themselves ; and while they all move at their own freedom, yet, by a secret influence, winds and turns them at his will ! *Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !†*

IN the third place, We see, from what has been said, how much reason there is for submission to the decrees of Heaven. Whatever distresses we suffer from the *wrath of man*, we have ground to believe that they befall not in vain. In the midst of human violence or oppression, we are not left to be the sport of fortune. Higher counsels are concerned. Wise and good designs are going on. God is always carrying forward his own purposes ; and if these terminate in his glory, which is ever the same with the felicity of the righteous, is not this a sufficient reason for our calm and cheerful acquiescence ?

Hence also, to conclude, arises the most powerful argument for studying with zealous assiduity, to gain the favour and protection of the Almighty. If his displeasure hang over our heads, all things around us may be just objects of terror. For, against him, there is no defence. The most violent powers in nature are ministers to him. Formidable, indeed, may prove the *wrath of man*, if he be pleased to let it forth against us. To him, but not to us, it belongs to restrain it at pleasure. Whereas, when we are placed under his protection, all human wrath is divested of its terrors. *If he be for us, who, or what, can be against us ?* Let us pursue the measures which he hath appoint-

* Job, xxxv. 14.

† Rom. xi. 33.

ed for obtaining his grace, by faith, repentance, and a holy life, and we shall have no reason to be *afraid of evil tidings; our hearts will be fixed, trusting in the Lord.* When the religious fear of God possesses the heart, it expels the ignoble fear of man, and becomes the principle of courage and magnanimity.—The Lord is *a buckler and a shield* to them that serve him. *When he ariseth, his enemies shall be scattered as smoke is driven away, and as chaff before the wind. He giveth strength and victory to his people; he clotheth them with salvation. The wrath of man shall praise him and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain.*

SERMON XXX.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE TO MANKIND.

[Preached before the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian
Knowledge.]

*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain ; for
the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the
waters cover the sea.—ISAIAH, xi. 9.*

THIS passage of Scripture, is understood, by all Christian interpreters, to refer to the days of the Gospel. The Prophet describes in the context, the auspicious influence of the Messiah's reign, as extending over all nature, and producing universal felicity. The full accomplishment of this prediction is yet future, and respects some more advanced period of the kingdom of God, when true religion shall universally prevail, and the native tendency of the Gospel attain its entire effect. In the prospect of this event the prophet seems to rise above himself, and celebrates that happy age in the most sublime strain of Eastern poetry. He opens a beautiful view of the state of the world, as a state of returning innocence. He represents all nature flourishing in peace ; discord and guile abolished ; the most hostile natures reconciled, and the most savage reformed and tamed. *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid ; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The lion shall eat straw like the ox ; and the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain ; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

Upon reading these words, we must immediately perceive the great encouragement which they give to all good designs for promoting religion in the world. When we engage in these, we have the comfort of being engaged, not only in a good cause, but also in one that shall undoubtedly be successful. For we are here assured by the Divine promise, that truth and righteousness shall at length prevail, and that the increasing influence of religion shall introduce general happiness. It is a pleasing and animating reflection, that, in carrying on such designs, we act upon the Divine plan; and co-operate with God for advancing the kingdom of the Messiah. We have no reason to be discouraged by any unfavourable circumstances which at present oppose our pious endeavours. Though the ignorance, superstition, and corruption, which now fill so great a part of the world, have a dark and mysterious aspect, it is not beyond the power of that Supreme Being, who brings light out of darkness, to clear up those perplexing appearances, and gradually to extricate mankind from the labyrinth of ignorance and error. Let us consider how improbable it seemed, when the Gospel was first published, that it should extend so far, and overthrow so much established superstition, as it has already done. There is nothing in the present state of the world, to render it more unlikely that it shall one day be universally received, and prevail in its full influence. At the rise of Christianity, the disproportion was, at least, as great, between the apparent human causes, and the effect which has actually been produced, as there is in our age, between the circumstances of religion in the world, and the effect which we farther expect. *The Sun of righteousness* having already exerted its influence in breaking through the thickest darkness, we may justly hope, that it is powerful enough to dispel all remaining obscurity; and that it will ascend by degrees to that perfect day, when *healing shall be under its wings* to all the nations. *A little one shall become a thousand; and a small one a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it in its time.**

BESIDES the prediction which the text contains of the future success of religion, it points out also a precise connection between the increase of religious knowledge, and the happiness of mankind. *The knowledge of the Lord filling the earth*, is assigned as the cause why *they shall not hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God*. To this I am now to lead your thoughts, as a subject both suited to the occasion of the present meeting, and proper to be illustrated in times, wherein total indifference to religious principles appears to gain ground. Whether Christianity shall be propagated farther or not, is treated as a matter

* Isaiah lx. 22.

of no great concern to mankind. The opinion prevails among many, that moral virtue may subsist, with equal advantage, independent of religion. For moral principles great regard is professed; but articles of religious belief are held to be abstract tenets, remote from life; points of mere speculation and debate, the influence of which is very inconsiderable on the actions of men. The general conduct, it is contended, will always proceed upon views and principles which have more relation to the present state of things; and religious knowledge can therefore stand in no necessary connection with their happiness and prosperity. —How adverse such opinions are, both to the profession and practice of religion, is abundantly evident. How adverse they are to the general welfare and real interests of mankind, I hope to make appear to candid minds.

By the *knowledge of the Lord*, in the text, is not to be understood the natural knowledge of God only. It is plain that the Prophet speaks of the age of the Messiah, when more enlarged discoveries should be made to mankind of the Divine perfections and government, than unassisted reason could attain. *The knowledge of the Lord*, therefore, comprehends the principles of Christianity, as well as of natural religion. In order to discern the importance of such knowledge to general happiness, we shall consider man, I. as an individual; II. as a member of society.

I. CONSIDERING man as an individual, let us inquire how far the knowledge of true religion is important, first, to his improvement; next, to his consolation.

FIRST, With respect to the improvement of man; the advancement of his nature in what is valuable and useful, the acquisition of such dispositions and habits as fit him for acting his part with propriety on this stage, and prepare him for a higher state of action hereafter; what benefit does he receive, in these respects, from religious knowledge and belief? It is obvious, that all increase of knowledge is improvement to the understanding. The more that its sphere is enlarged, the greater number of objects that are submitted to its view, especially when these objects are of intrinsic excellence, the more must those rational powers, which are the glory of man, be in the course of attaining their proper strength and maturity. But where the knowledge of religion merely speculative, though the speculation must be admitted to be noble, yet less could be said of its importance. We recommend it to mankind, as forming the heart, and directing the life. Those pure and exalted conceptions which the Christian religion has taught us to entertain of the Deity, as the universal Father and righteous Governor of the universe, the standard of unspotted perfection; and the *Author of every good and perfect gift*; conducting his whole admi-

nistration with an eternal regard to order, virtue, and truth ; ever favouring the cause, and supporting the interests of righteous men ; and applying, in this direction, the whole might of Omnipotence, and the whole council of unerring wisdom, from the beginning to the end of things ; such conceptions both kindle devotion, and strengthen virtue. They give fortitude to the mind in the practice of righteousness, and establish the persuasion of its being our highest interest.

All the doctrines peculiar to the Gospel are great improvements on what the light of nature had imperfectly suggested. A high dispensation of Providence is made known particularly suited to the exigencies of man ; calculated for recovering him from that corrupted state into which experience bears witness that he is fallen, and for restoring him to integrity and favour with his Creator. The method of carrying on this great plan is such as gives us the most striking views of the importance of righteousness or virtue, and of the high account in which it stands with God. The Son of God appeared on the earth, and suffered as a propitiation for the sins of the world, with this express intention, that he might *bring in everlasting righteousness* ; that he might *purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God* ; that he might *redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*. such a merciful interposition of the Creator of the world, while it illustriously displays his goodness, and signalizes his concern for the moral interests of mankind, affords us at the same time, the most satisfying ground of confidence and trust. It offers an object to the mind on which it can lay hold for the security of its future hopes ; when, with a certainty far beyond what any abstract argument could yield, it appeals to a distinguished fact ; and is enabled to say, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things*.*

While the Divine government is thus placed in a light the most amiable, and most encouraging to every virtuous mind, there is at the same time, something extremely awful and solemn in the whole doctrine of redemption. It is calculated to strike the mind with reverence for the Divine administration, It points at some deep malignity in sin, at some dreadful consequences flowing from guilt, unknown in their causes and in their whole effects to us, which moved the Sovereign of the world to depart from the ordinary course of Providence, and to bring about the restoration of his fallen creatures by a method so astonishing. Mankind are hereby awakened to the most serious reflections. Such views are opened of the sanctity of the Divine laws, of the

* Rom. viii. 32.

strictness of the Divine justice, of the importance of the part which is assigned them to act, as serve to prevent their trifling with human life, and add dignity and solemnity to virtue.— These great purposes are farther carried on, by the discovery which is made of the fixed connection in which this life stands with a future eternal state. We are represented as *sowing now, what we are to reap* hereafter ; undergoing a course of probation and trial, which according as it terminates in our improvement, or leaves us unreformed and corrupted, will dismiss us to lasting abodes, either of punishment or reward. Such a discovery rises far above the dubious conjectures, and uncertain reasonings, which mere natural light suggests concerning the future condition of mankind. Here we find, what alone can produce any considerable influence on practice, explicit promise and threatening ; an authoritative sanction given to a law, the Governor and Judge revealed ; and all the motives which can operate on hope and fear, brought home to the heart, with, *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts*. In a word, a great and magnificent plan of divine administration is opened to us in the Gospel of Christ ; and nothing is omitted that can impress mankind with the persuasion of their being all, in the strictest sense, subjects of the moral government of God.

Though the bounds of this Discourse allow us to take only an imperfect view of the principles of Christian doctrine, yet the hints which have been given, lay a sufficient foundation for appealing to every impartial mind, whether the knowledge and belief of such principles be not intimately connected with the improvement, and, by consequence, with the happiness of man? I reason now with such as admit, that virtue is the great source both of improvement and happiness. Let them lay what stress they please upon the authority of conscience, and upon the force and evidence of its dictates ; can they refuse to allow that the natural tendency of the principles which I have mentioned, is to support those dictates, and to confirm that authority ; to excite, on various occasions, the most useful sentiments ; to provide additional restraints from vice, and additional motives to every virtue? Who dares pronounce, that there is no case in which conscience stands in need of such assistance to direct, where there is so much uncertainty and darkness ; and to prompt, where there is so much feebleness and irresolution, and such a fatal proneness to vice and folly ?

But how good soever the tendency of religious principles may be, some will still call in question their actual significancy, and influence on life. This tendency is by various causes defeated. Between the belief of religious principles and a correspondent practice, it will be alleged that frequent experience shews there is no necessary connection ; and that therefore the propagation

of the one, cannot give us any assurance of proportionable improvements following in the other.—This, in part, is granted to be true; as we admit that religious knowledge and belief are susceptible of various degrees, before they arrive at that real Christian faith which the Scripture represents as *purifying the heart*. But though the connection between principle and practice be not necessary and invariable, it will not, I suppose, be denied, that there is some connection. Here then one avenue to the heart is opened. If the tendency of Religious knowledge be good, wisdom must direct, and duty oblige us to cultivate it.—For tendency will, at least in some cases, rise into effect; and, probably, in more cases than are known and observed by the world. Besides the distinguished examples of true religion and virtue, which have, more or less, adorned every age of the Christian era, what numbers may there be in the more silent and private scenes of life, overlooked by superficial observers of mankind, on whose hearts and lives religious principles have the most happy influence? Even on loose and giddy minds, where they are far from accomplishing their full effect, their influence is, frequently not altogether lost. Impressions of religion often check vice in its career. They prevent it from proceeding its utmost length; and though they do not entirely reform the offender, they serve to maintain order in society. Persons who are now bad, might probably have been worse without them, and the world have suffered more from unrestrained licentiousness.—They often sow latent seeds of goodness in the heart, which proper circumstances and occasions afterwards ripen; though the reformation of the offender may not be so conspicuous as his former enormities have been. From the native tendency of religious belief, there is reason to conclude, that those good effects of it are not so rare as some would represent them. By its nature and tendency, we can better judge of its effects, than by observations drawn from a supposed experience, which often is narrow in its compass and fallacious in its conclusions.

The actual influence of principle and belief of mankind admits of clear illustration from uncontested matter of fact. They who hold the good effects of Christian principles to be so inconsiderable, as to render the propagation of them of small importance, will be at no loss to give us instances of corrupt principles of belief having had the most powerful influence on the world.—Loud complaints we hear from this quarter of the direful effects which superstition and enthusiasm have produced; of their having poisoned the tempers, and transformed the manners of men; of their having overcome the strongest restraints of law, of reason and humanity. Is this then the case, that all principles, except good ones, are of such mighty energy? Strange! that false religion should be able to do so much, and true religion so

little; that belief, so powerful in the one case, should be so impotent in the other.—No impartial inquirer, surely, can entertain this opinion. The whole history of mankind shews that their religious tenets and principles, of whatever nature they be, are of great influence in forming their character, and directing their conduct. The mischief which false principles have done, affords a good argument to guard carefully against error; but as it is a proof of what belief can do, it gives ground to hope the more from it, when rightly directed. The same torrent which when it is put out of its natural course, overflows and lays waste a country, adorns and enriches it, when running in its proper channel. If it be alledged that superstition is likely to be more powerful in its effects than truth, because it agrees better with the follies and corruptions of the world, we may oppose to this, on the other hand, that truth has the Divine blessing and the countenance of Heaven on its side. Let us always hope well of a cause that is good in itself, and beneficial to mankind. Truth is mighty, and will prevail. Let us spread *the incorruptible seed* as widely as we can, and trust in God that he will give the increase.—Having thus, shewn the importance of Religious knowledge to mankind in the way of improvement, let us,

IN the second place, Consider it in the light of consolation; as bringing aid and relief to us amidst the distresses of life.—Here religion incontestably triumphs; and its happy effects in this respect, furnish a strong argument to every benevolent mind for wishing them to be farther diffused throughout the world.—For without the belief and hope afforded by divine Revelation, the circumstances of man are extremely forlorn. He finds himself placed here as a stranger in a vast universe, where the powers and operations of Nature are very imperfectly known; where both the beginnings and the issues of things are involved in mysterious darkness; where he is unable to discover, with any certainty, whence he sprung, or for what purpose he was brought into this state of existence; whether he be subjected to the government of a mild, or of a wrathful ruler; what construction he is to put on many of the dispensations of his providence; and what his fate is to be when he departs hence. What a disconsolate situation to a serious inquiring mind! The greater degree of virtue it possesses, its sensibility is likely to be the more oppressed by this burden of labouring thought. Even though it were in one's power to banish all uneasy thought, and to fill up the hours of life with perpetual amusement, life so filled up would upon reflection, appear poor and trivial. But these are far from being the terms upon which man is brought into this world.—He is conscious that his being is frail and feeble; he sees himself beset with various dangers; and is exposed to many a melancholy apprehension, from the evils which he may have to encoun-

ter, before he arrives at the close of life. In this distressed condition, to reveal to him such discoveries of the Supreme Being, as the Christian religion affords, is to reveal to him a Father and a friend; is to let in a ray of the most cheering light upon the darkness of the human estate. He who was before a destitute orphan, wandering in the inhospitable desert, has now gained a shelter from the bitter and inclement blast. He now knows to whom to pray, and in whom to trust; where to unbosom his sorrows, and from what hand to look for relief.

It is certain that when the heart bleeds from some wound of recent misfortune, nothing is of equal efficacy with religious comfort. It is of power to enlighten the darkest hour, and to assuage the severest wo, by the belief of divine favour, and the prospect of a blessed immortality. In such hopes the mind expatiates with joy; and when bereaved of its earthly friends, solaces itself with the thought of one Friend, who will never forsake it. Refined reasonings concerning the nature of the human condition, and the improvement which philosophy teaches us to make of every event, may entertain the mind when it is at ease; may perhaps contribute to sooth it when slightly touched with sorrow. But when it is torn with any sore distress they are cold and feeble, compared with a direct promise from the word of God. This is *an anchor to the soul both sure and stedfast*. This has given consolation and refuge to many a virtuous heart, at a time when the most cogent reasonings would have proved utterly unavailing.

Upon the approach of death, especially when, if a man thinks at all, his anxiety about his future interests must naturally increase; the power of religious consolation is sensibly felt.—Then appears, in the most striking light, the high value of the discoveries made by the Gospel; not only life and immortality revealed, but a Mediator with God discovered; mercy proclaimed, through him, to the frailties of the penitent and the humble; and his presence promised to be with them when they are passing through *the valley of the shadow of death*, in order to bring them safe into unseen habitations of rest and joy. Here is ground for their leaving the world with comfort and peace.—But in this severe and trying period, this laboring hour of nature, how shall the unhappy man support himself, who knows not, or believes not, the discoveries of religion; Secretly conscious to himself that he has not acted his part as he ought to have done, the sins of his past life arise before him in sad remembrance. He wishes to exist after death, and yet dreads that existence. The Governor of the world is unknown. He cannot tell whether every endeavour to obtain his mercy may not be vain. All is awful obscurity around him; and in the midst of endless doubts and perplexeties, the trembling, re-

luctant soul is forced away from the body. As the misfortunes of life must, to such a man, have been most oppressive, so its end is bitter. His sun sets in a dark cloud; and the night of death closes over his head, full of misery.—Having now shown how important *the Knowledge of the Lord* is, both to the improvement and the consolation of man, considered as an individual, I am next to show,

II. How important this Knowledge is to him as a member of society. This branch of the subject is in part anticipated by what has been said. For all the improvement which man receives as an individual, redounds to the benefit of the public.—Society reaps the fruit of the virtues of all the members who compose it; and in proportion as each, apart, is made better, the whole must flourish.

But, besides this effect, Religious Knowledge has a direct tendency to improve the social intercourse of men, and to assist them in co-operating for common good. It is the great instrument of civilizing the multitude, and forming them to union.—It tames the fierceness of their passions, and softens the rudeness of their manners. There is much reason to doubt whether any regular society ever subsisted, or could subsist, in the world, destitute of all religious ideas and principles. They who, in early times, attempted to bring the wandering and scattered tribes of men from the woods, and to unite them in cities and communities, always found it necessary to begin with some institution of religion. The wisest legislators of old, through the whole progress of their systems of government, considered religion as essential to civil polity. If even those imperfect forms of it, loaded with so much superstition and error, were important to the welfare of society, how much more that reasonable worship of the true God, which is taught by the Gospel? True religion introduces the idea of regular subjection, by accustoming mankind to the awe of superior power in the Deity, joined with the veneration of superior wisdom and goodness. It is by its nature an associating principle; and creates new and sacred bonds of union among men. Common assemblies for religious worship, and joint homage offered up to one God; the sense of being all dependent on the same protection, and bound to duty by the same ties, sharers in the same benefits of Heaven, and expectants of the same reward, tend to awaken the sentiments of friendly relation and to confirm and strengthen our mutual connection. The doctrine of Christianity is most adverse to all tyranny and oppression, but highly favourable to the interests of good government among men. It represses the spirit of licentiousness and sedition. It inculcates the duty of subordination to lawful superiors. It requires us *to fear*

God, to honour the king, and not to meddle with them that are given to change.

Religious Knowledge forwards all useful and ornamental improvements in society. Experience shows, that in proportion as it diffuses its light, learning flourishes, and liberal arts are cultivated and advanced. Just conceptions of religion promote a free and manly spirit. They lead men to think for themselves; to form their principles upon fair enquiry, and not to resign their conscience to the dictates of men. Hence they naturally inspire aversion to slavery of every kind; and promote a taste for liberty and laws. Despotic governments have generally taken the firmest root among nations that were blinded by Mahometan or Pagan darkness; where the throne of violence has been supported by ignorance and false religion. In the Christian world, during those centuries in which gross superstition held its reign undisturbed, oppression and slavery were in its train. The cloud of ignorance sat thick and deep over the nations; and the world was threatened with a relapse into ancient barbarity. As soon as the true *Knowledge of the Lord* revived, at the auspicious æra of the Reformation, learning, liberty, and arts, began to shine forth with it, and to resume their lustre.

But the happy influence which religion exerts on society, extends much farther than to effects of this kind. It is not only subsidiary to the improvement, but necessary to the preservation of society. It is the very basis on which it rests. Religious principle is what gives men the surest hold of one another. The last and greatest pledge of veracity, an oath, without which no society could subsist, derives its whole authority from an established reverence of God to whom it is a solemn appeal. Banish religious principle, and you loosen all the bonds which connect mankind together; you shake the fundamental pillar of mutual confidence and trust; you render the security arising from laws, in a great measure, void and ineffectual. For human laws and human sanctions cannot extend to numberless cases, in which the safety of mankind is deeply concerned. They would prove very feeble instruments of order and peace, if there were no checks upon the conduct of men from the sense of Divine legislation; if no belief of future rewards and punishments were to overawe conscience, and to supply the defects of human government.

Indeed, the belief of religion is of such importance to public welfare, that the most expressive description we could give of a society of men in the utmost disorder, would be to say that there was no fear of God left among them. Imagination would immediately conceive them as abandoned to rapine and violence, to perfidy and treachery; as deceiving and deceived, oppressing

and oppressed; consumed by intestine broils, and ripe for becoming a prey to the first invader. On the other hand, in order to form the idea of a society flourishing in its highest glory, we need only conceive the belief of Christian principle exerting its full influence on the hearts and lives of all the members. Instantly, the most amiable scene would open to our view. We should see the causes of public disunion removed when men were animated with that noble spirit of love and charity which our religion breathes, and formed to the pursuit of those higher interests, which give no occasion to competition and jealousy. We should see families, neighbourhoods, and communities, living in unbroken amity, and pursuing, with one heart and mind, the common interest; sobriety of manners, and simplicity of life, restored; virtuous industry carrying on its useful labours, and cheerful contentment every where reigning. Politicians may lay down what plans they please for advancing public prosperity; but in truth, it is the prevalency of such principles of religion and virtue which forms the strength and glory of a nation. Where these are totally wanting, no measures contrived by human wisdom can supply the defect. In proportion as they prevail, they raise the state of society from that sad degeneracy into which it is at present sunk, and carry it forward, under the blessing of Heaven, towards that happy period, when *nation shall not lift up their sword against nation, nor learn war any more.*

In order to prove the importance of Religious Knowledge to the interest of society, one consideration more, deserving particular attention, remains to be mentioned. It is, that if *good sense* be not sown in the field, *tares* will infallibly spring up.—The propension towards religion is strong in the human heart. There is a natural preparation in our minds for receiving some impressions of supernatural belief. Upon these, among ignorant and uncultivated men, superstition or enthusiasm never fail to graft themselves. Into what monstrous forms these have shot forth, and what various mischiefs they have produced to society, is too well known. Nor is this the whole of the danger. Designing men are always ready to take advantage of this popular weakness, and to direct the superstitious bias of the multitude to their own ambitious and interested ends. Superstition, in itself a formidable evil, threatens consequences still more formidable when it is rendered the tool of design and craft. Hence arises one of the most powerful arguments for propagating with zeal, as far as our influence can extend, the pure and undefiled doctrines of the Gospel of Christ; in order that just and rational principles of religion may fill up that room in the minds of men, which dangerous fanaticism will otherwise usurp.

This consideration alone is sufficient to show the high utility of the design undertaken by the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge. With great propriety, they have bestowed their chief attention on a remote quarter of our country, where, from a variety of causes, ignorance and superstition had gained more ground, than in any other corner of the land; where the inhabitants, by their local situation, were more imperfectly supplied with the means of proper education and instruction; and at the same time exposed to the seductions of such as sought to pervert them from the truth. The laudable endeavours of this Society, in diffusing religious and useful knowledge through this part of the country, have already been crowned with much success; and more is still to be expected from the continuance of their pious and well-directed attention.

With such good designs, it becomes all to co-operate, who are lovers of mankind. Thus shall they show their just sense of the value of that blessing which they enjoy in the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ; and their gratitude to Heaven for conferring it upon them. Thus shall they make the blessings of those who are now ready to *perish through lack of knowledge*, descend upon their heads. Thus shall they contribute their endeavours for bringing forward that happy period, foretold by ancient prophecy; when *there shall be one Lord over all the earth, and his name one*; when *that name shall be great from the rising to the setting sun*; when *there shall be nothing to hurt or destroy in all the holy mountain of God*; but *judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose: and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.**

* Zech. xiv. 9. Malachi, i 11. Isaiah, xxxii. 16. xxxv. 1.

SERMON XXXI.

ON THE TRUE HONOUR OF MAN.

Exalt her and she shall promote thee ; she shall bring thee to honour.—PROVERBS, iv. 8.

THE love of honour is one of the strongest passions in the human heart. It shows itself in our earliest years ; and is coeval with the first exertions of reason. It accompanies us through all the stages of subsequent life ; and in private stations discovers itself no less than in the higher ranks of society. In their ideas of what constitutes honour, men greatly vary, and often grossly err. But of somewhat which they conceive to form pre-eminence and distinction, all are desirous. All wish, by some means or other, to acquire respect from those among whom they live ; and to contempt and disgrace, none are insensible.

Among the advantages which attend religion and virtue, the honour which they confer on man is frequently mentioned in Scripture as one of the most considerable. *Wisdom is the principal thing*, says Solomon, in the passage where the text lies, *therefore get wisdom ; and, with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee ; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace ; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.* It is evident that throughout all the sacred writings, and particularly in the Book of Proverbs, by, *wisdom* is to be understood a principle of religion producing virtuous conduct. *The fear of the Lord* is said to be *the beginning of wisdom* : And by this fear of the Lord men are said to *depart from evil ; to walk in the way of good men, and to keep the path of the righteous.**—

* Prov. ii, 20.

Man is then regulated by the *wisdom which is from above*, when he is formed by piety to the duties of virtue and morality; and of the wisdom which produces this effect, it is asserted in the text, that it *bringeth us to honour*.

On this recommendation of religion it is the more necessary to fix our attention, because it is often refused to it by men of the world. Their notions of honour are apt to run in a very different channel. Wherever religion is mentioned, they connect it with ideas of melancholy and dejection, or of mean and feeble spirits. They perhaps admit that it may be useful to the multitude, as a principle of restraint from disorders and crimes; and that to persons of a peculiar turn of mind it may afford consolation under the distresses of life: but from the active scenes of the world, and from those vigorous exertions which display to advantage the human abilities, they incline totally to exclude it. It may soothe the timid or the sad: But they consider it as having no connection with what is proper to raise men to honour and distinction. I shall now endeavour to remove this reproach from religion; and to show that in every situation in human life, even in the highest stations, it forms the honour, as well as the happiness of man.

But first, let us be careful to ascertain what true religion is. I admit that there is a certain species of religion, (if we can give it that name,) which has no claim to such high distinction; when it is placed wholly in speculation and belief, in the regularity of external homage, or in fiery zeal about contested opinions. From a superstition inherent in the human mind, the religion of the multitude has always been tinged with too much of this spirit. They serve God as they would serve a proud master, who may be flattered by their prostrations, appeased by their gifts, and gained by loud protestations of attachment to his interest, and of enmity to all whom they suppose to be his foes. But this is not that *wisdom* to which Solomon ascribes in the text such high prerogatives. It is not the religion which we preach, nor the religion of Christ. That religion consists in the love of God and the love of man, grounded on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Redeemer of the world, the Intercessor for the penitent, and the Patron of the virtuous; through whom we enjoy comfortable access to the Sovereign of the universe in the acts of worship and devotion. It consists in justice, humanity, and mercy; in a fair and candid mind, a generous and affectionate heart; accompanied with temperance, self-government, and a perpetual regard in all our actions to conscience and to the law of God. A religious, and a thoroughly virtuous character, therefore, I consider as the same.

By the true honour of man is to be understood, not what merely commands external respect, but what commands the re-

spect of the heart : what raises one to acknowledge eminence above others of the same species ; what always creates esteem, and in its highest degree produces veneration. The question now before us is. From what cause this eminence arises ? By what means is it to be attained ?

I SAY, first, from riches it does not arise. These, we all know, may belong to the vilest of mankind. Providence has scattered them among the crowd with an undistinguishing hand, as of purpose to show of what small account they are in the sight of God. Experience every day proves that the possession of them is consistent with the most general contempt. On this point therefore I conceive it not necessary to insist any longer.

NEITHER does the honour of man arise from mere dignity of rank or office. Were such distinctions always, or even generally, obtained in consequence of uncommon merit, they would indeed confer honour on the character. But, in the present state of society, it is too well known that this is not the case. They are often the consequence of birth alone. They are sometimes the fruit of mere dependence and assiduity, They may be the recompense of flattery, versatility, and intrigue ; and so be conjoined with meanness and baseness of character. To persons graced with noble birth, or place in high stations, much external honour is due. This is what the subordination of society necessarily requires ; and what every good member of it will cheerfully yield. But how often has it happened that such persons, when externally respected, nevertheless, despised by men in their hearts ; nay, sometimes execrated by the public ? Their elevation, if they have been unworthy of it, is so far from procuring them true honour, that it only renders their insignificance, perhaps their infamy, more conspicuous. By drawing attention to their conduct it discovers in the most glaring light how little they deserve the station which they possess.

I MUST next observe, that the proper honour of man arises not from some of those splendid actions and abilities which excite high admiration. Courage and prowess, military renown, signal victories and conquests, may render the name of a man famous, without rendering his character truly honourable. To many brave men, to many heroes renowned, in story we look up with wonder. Their exploits are recorded. Their praises are sung. They stand as on an eminence, above the rest of mankind. Their eminence, nevertheless, may not be of that sort before which we bow with inward esteem and respect. Something more is wanted for that purpose, than the conquering arm and the intrepid mind. The laurels of the warrior must at all times be dyed in blood, and bedewed with the tears of the widow and the orphan. But if they have been stained by

rapine and inhumanity ; if sordid avarice has marked his character ; or low and gross sensuality has degraded his life ; the great hero sinks into a little man. What at a distance, or on a superficial view, we admire, becomes mean, perhaps odious, when we examine it more closely. It is like the Colossal statue, whose immense size struck the spectator afar off with astonishment ; but when nearly viewed, it appears disproportioned, unshapely, and rude.

Observations of the same kind may be applied to all the reputation derived from civil accomplishments ; from the refined politics of the statesman ; or the literary efforts of genius and erudition. These bestow, and within certain bounds, ought to bestow, eminence and distinction on men. They discover talents which in themselves are shining, and which become highly valuable, when employed in advancing the good of mankind. Hence they frequently give rise to fame. But a distinction is to be made between fame and true honour. The former is a loud and noisy applause, the latter, a more silent and internal homage. Fame floats on the breath of the multitude ; Honour rests on the judgment of the thinking. Fame may give praise while it withholds esteem : True honour implies esteem mingled with respect. The one regards particular distinguished talents ; the other looks up to the whole character. Hence the statesman, the orator, or the poet, may be famous ; while yet the man himself is far from being honoured. We envy his abilities. We wish to rival them. But we would not choose to be classed with him who possessed them. Instances of this sort are too often found in every record of ancient or modern history.

FROM all this it follows, that, in order to discern where man's true honour lies, we must look, not to any adventitious circumstance of fortune ; not to any single sparkling quality ; but to the whole of what forms a man ; what entitles him, as such, to rank high among that class of beings to which he belongs ; in a word, we must look to the mind and the soul.—A mind superior to fear, to selfish interest and corruption ; a mind governed by the principles of uniform rectitude and integrity ; the same in prosperity and adversity ; which no bribe can seduce, or terror overawe ; neither by pleasure melted into effeminacy, nor by distress sunk into dejection ; such is the mind which forms the distinction and eminence of men. One, who in no situation of life is either ashamed or afraid of discharging his duty, and acting his proper part with firmness and constancy ; true to the God whom he worships, and true to the faith in which he professes to believe ; full of affection to his brethren of mankind ; faithful to his friends, generous to his enemies, warm with compassion to the unfortunate ; self-denying to little private interests and pleasures, but zealous for public interests

and happiness ; magnanimous, without being proud ; humble, without being mean ; just, without being harsh : simple in his manners, but manly in his feelings ; on whose word you can entirely rely ; whose countenance never deceives you ; whose professions of kindness are the effusions of his heart ; one, in fine, whom, independent of any views of advantage, you would choose for a superior, could trust in as a friend, and could love as a brother :—This is the man, whom in your heart above all others, you do, you must, honour.

SUCH a character, imperfectly as it has now been drawn, all must acknowledge to be formed solely by the influence of steady religion and virtue. It is the effect of principles which, operating on conscience, determine it uniformly to pursue *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise.** By those means, *wisdom*, as the text asserts, bringeth us to honour.

IN confirmation of this doctrine it is to be observed, that the honour which man acquires by religion and virtue is more independent and more complete, than what can be acquired by any other means. It is independent of any thing foreign or external. It is not partial, but entire respect which it procures. Wherever fortune is concerned, it is the station or rank which commands our deference. Where some shining quality attracts admiration, it is only to a part of the character that we pay homage. But when a person is distinguished for eminent worth and goodness, it is the man, the whole man, whom we respect. The honour which he possesses is intrinsic. Place him in any situation of life, even an obscure one ; let room only be given for his virtues to come forth and shew themselves, and you will revere him as a private citizen ; or as the father of a family. If in higher life he appear more illustrious, this is not owing merely to the respect created by rank. It is, because there a nobler sphere of action is opened to him ; because his virtues are brought forth into more extended exertion ; and placed in such conspicuous view, that he appears to grace and adorn the station which he fills. Even in the silence of retirement, or in the retreat of old age, such a man sinks not into forgotten obscurity ; his remembered virtues continue to be honoured, when their active exertions are over ; and to the last stage of life he is followed by public esteem and respect. Whereas, if genuine worth be wanting, the applause which may have attended a man for a while, by degrees dies away. Though for a part of his life, he had dazzled the world, this was owing to his deficiency

* Philip, iv. 8.

in the essential qualities having not been suspected. As soon as the imposture is discovered, the falling star sinks in darkness, There is, therefore, a standard of independent, intrinsic worth, to which we must bring in the end whatever claims to be honourable among men. By this we must measure it; and it will always be found, that nothing but what is essential to man has power to command the respect of man's heart.

It is to be farther observed, that the universal consent of mankind in honouring real virtue, is sufficient to shew what the genuine sense of human nature is on this subject. All other claims of honour are ambulatory and changeable. The degrees of respect paid to external stations vary with forms of government, and fashions of the times. Qualities which in one country are highly honoured, in another are lightly esteemed. Nay, what in some regions of the earth distinguishes a man above others, might elsewhere expose him to contempt or ridicule, But where was ever the nation on the face of the globe who did not honour unblemished worth, unaffected piety, steadfast, humane, and regular virtue? To whom were altars erected in the Heathen world, but to those whom their merits and heroic labours, by their invention of useful arts, or by some signal acts of beneficence to their country, or to mankind, were found worthy, in their opinion, to be transferred from among men, and added to the number of the Gods:—Even the counterfeited appearances of virtue, which are so often found in the world, are testimonies to its praise. The hypocrite knows that, without assuming the garb of virtue, every other advantage he can possess, is insufficient to procure him esteem. Interference of interest, or perversity of disposition, may occasionally lead individuals to oppose, even to hate, the upright and the good. But however the characters of such persons may be mistaken or misrepresented, yet, as far as they are acknowledged to be virtuous, the profligate dare not traduce them. Genuine virtue has a language that speaks to every heart throughout the world. It is a language which is understood by all. In every region, every clime, the homage paid to it is the same. In no one sentiment were ever mankind more generally agreed.

FINALLY, the honour acquired by religion and virtue is honour divine and immortal. It is honour, not in the estimation of men only, but in the sight of God; whose judgment is the standard of truth and right; whose approbation confers *a crown of glory that fadeth not away*. All the honour we can gain among men is limited and confined. Its circle is narrow. Its duration is short and transitory. But the honour, which is founded on true goodness, accompanies us through the whole progress of our existence. It enters with man into a future state; and continues to brighten throughout eternal ages. What procured him respect

on earth, shall render him estimable among the great assembly of angels and *spirits of just men made perfect*; where, we are assured, they who have been eminent in righteousness shall *shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever*.*—Earthly honours are both short-lived in their continuance, and, while they last, tarnished with spots and stains. On some quarter or other, their brightness is obscured; their exaltation is humbled. But the honour which proceeds from God, and virtue, is unmixed and pure. It is a lustre which is derived from Heaven; and is likened, in Scripture, *to the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; to the light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*.† Whereas, the honours which the world confers, resemble the feeble and twinkling flame of a taper; which is often clouded by the smoke it sends forth; is always wasting, and soon dies totally away.

LET him, therefore, who retains any sense of human dignity; who feels within him that desire of honour which is congenial to man, aspire to the gratification of this passion by methods which are worthy of his nature, Let him not rest on any of those external distinctions which vanity has contrived to introduce. These can procure him no more than the semblance of respect. Let him not be flattered by the applause which some occasional display of abilities may have gained him. That applause may be mingled with contempt. Let him look to what will dignify his character as a man. Let him cultivate those moral qualities which all men in their hearts respect. *Wisdom shall then give to his head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory shall she deliver to him*. This is an honour to which all may aspire. It is a prize, for which every one, whether of high or low rank, may contend. It is always in his power so to distinguish himself by worthy and virtuous conduct, as to command the respect of those around him; and what is highest of all, to obtain praise and honour from God.

LET no one imagine that in the religious part of this character there is any thing which casts over it a gloomy shade, or derogates from that esteem which men are generally disposed to yield to exemplary virtues. False ideas may be entertained of religion; as false and imperfect conceptions of virtue have often prevailed in the world. But to true religion there belongs no sullen gloom; no melancholy austerity, tending to withdraw men from human society, or to diminish the exertions of active virtue, On the contrary, the religious principle, rightly understood, not only unites with all such virtues, but supports, fortifies, and confirms them. It is so far from obscuring the lustre

* Daniel, xii. 3.

† 2 Sam. xxii. 4. Prov. iv. 18.

of a character, that it heightens and ennobles it. It adds to all the moral virtues a venerable and authoritative dignity. It renders the virtuous character more august. To the decoration of a palace it joins the majesty of a temple.

He who divides religion from virtue, understands neither the one nor the other. It is the union of the two, which consummates the human character and state. It is their union which has distinguished those great and illustrious men, who have shone with so much honour in former ages; and whose memory lives in the remembrance of succeeding generations. It is their union which forms that *wisdom which is from above*; that wisdom to which the text ascribes such high effects and to which belongs the sublime encomium given of it by an author of one of the apocryphal books of Scripture: with whose beautiful and emphatical expressions I conclude this discourse: *The memorial of virtue is immortal. It is known with God, and with men. When it is present, men take example at it; and when it is gone, they desire it: It weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever; having gotten the victory, striving for undefiled rewards. Wisdom is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty. Therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. She is the brightness of the everlasting light; the unspotted mirror of the power of God; and the image of his goodness. Remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and Prophets: For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with Wisdom. She is more beautiful than the sun; and above all the order of the stars. Being compared with light, she found before it.**

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 2, 3.—vii. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

SERMON XXXII.

ON SENSIBILITY.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. ROMANS, xii. 15.

THE amiable spirit of our holy religion appears in nothing more than in the care it hath taken to enforce on men the social duties of life. This is one of the clearest characteristics of its being a religion whose origin is divine: For every doctrine which proceeds from the Father of mercies will undoubtedly breathe benevolence and humanity. This is the scope of the two exhortations in the text, *to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep*; the one calculated to promote the happiness, the other to alleviate the sorrows, of our fellow creatures; both concurring to form that temper which interests us in the concerns of our brethren; which disposes us to feel along with them, to take part in their joys, and in their sorrows.— This temper is known by the name of Sensibility; a word which in modern times we hear in the mouth of every one; a quality which every one affects to possess, in itself a most amiable and worthy disposition of mind, but often mistaken and abused; employed as a cover, sometimes to a capricious humour, sometimes to selfish passions. I shall endeavour to explain the nature of true sensibility. I shall consider its effects; and, after shewing its advantages, shall point out the abuses and mistaken forms of this virtue.

THE original constitution of our nature with respect to the mixture of selfish and social affections, discovers in this, as in every other part of our frame, profound and admirable wisdom. Each individual is, by his Creator, committed particularly to himself and his own care. He has it more in his power to promote his own welfare than any other person can possibly have to promote it. It was therefore fit, it was necessary, that

in each individual self-love should be the strongest and most active instinct. This self-love, if he had been a being who stood solitary and alone, might have proved sufficient for the purpose both of his preservation and his welfare. But such is not the situation of man. He is mixed among multitudes, of the same nature. In these multitudes, the self-love of one man, or attention to his particular interest, encountering the self-love and the interests of another could not but produce frequent opposition, and innumerable mischiefs. It was necessary, therefore, to provide a counterbalance to this part of his nature; which is accordingly done by implanting in him those social and benevolent instincts which lead him in some measure out of himself, to follow the interest of others. The strength of these social instincts is, in general, proportioned to their importance in human life. Hence that degree of sensibility which prompts us to *weep with them that weep*, is stronger than that which prompts us to *rejoice with them that rejoice*; for this reason, that the unhappy stand more in need of our fellow-feeling and assistance than the prosperous. Still, however, it was requisite, that in each individual the quantity of self-love should remain in a large proportion, on account of its importance for the preservation of his life and well being. But as the quantity requisite for this purpose is apt both to engross his attention, and to carry him into criminal excesses, the perfection of his nature is measured by the due counterpoise of those social principles which, tempering the force of the selfish affection, render man equally useful to himself, and to those with whom he is joined in society. Hence the use and the value of that sensibility of which we now treat.

THAT it constitutes an essential part of a religious character, there can be no doubt. Not only are the words of the text express to this purpose, but the whole New Testament abounds with passages which enjoin the cultivation of this disposition.—Being *all one body and members one of another*, we are commanded to *love our neighbour as ourself; to look every man, not on his own things only, but on those of others also; to be pitiful, to be courteous, to be tender hearted; to bear one another's burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ.** The dispositions opposite to sensibility are cruelty, hardness of heart, contracted attachment to worldly interests; which every one will admit to be directly opposite to the Christian character. According to the different degrees of constitutional warmth in men's affections, sensibility may, even among the virtuous, prevail in different proportions. For all derive not from nature the same happy delicacy and tenderness of feeling. With some, the heart melts, and relents, in kind emotion, much more easily than with others. But with

* Luke, x. 27. Philip, ii. 4. 1 Peter, iii. 8. Ephes, iv. 23. Galat, vi. 2.

every one who aspires at the character of a good man, it is necessary that the humane and compassionate dispositions should be found. There must be that within him which shall form him to feel in some degree with the heart of a brother; and when he beholds others enjoying happiness, or sees them sunk in sorrow, shall bring his affections to accord, and if we may speak so, to sound a note in unison to theirs. This is *to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep*. How much this temper belongs to the perfection of our nature, we learn from one who exhibited that perfection in its highest degree. When our Lord Jesus, on a certain occasion, came to the grave of a beloved friend, and saw his relations mourning around it, he presently caught the impression of their sorrow; *he groaned in spirit and was troubled*. He knew that he was about to remove the cause of their distress, by recalling Lazarus to life: yet, in the moment of grief, his heart sympathized with theirs; and, together with the weeping friends, *Jesus wept*.*

LET us next proceed to consider the effect of this virtuous sensibility on our character and our state. I shall consider it in two views, its influence on our moral conduct, and its influence on our happiness.

FIRST, It powerfully influences the proper discharge of all the relative and social duties of life. Without some discharge of those duties there could be no comfort or security in human society. Men would become hordes of savages, perpetually harassing one another. In one way or other, therefore, the great duties of social life must be performed. There must be among mankind some reciprocal co-operation and aid. In this, all consent. But let us observe, that these duties may be performed from different principles, and in different ways. Sometimes they are performed merely from decency and regard to character; sometimes from fear, and even from selfishness, which obliges men to shew kindness, in order that they may receive returns of it. In such cases, the exterior of fair behaviour may be preserved. But all will admit, that when from constraint only, the offices of seeming kindness are performed, little dependance can be placed on them, and little value allowed to them.

By others, these offices are discharged solely from a principle of duty. They are men of cold affections, and perhaps of an interested character. But, overawed by a sense of religion, and convinced that they are bound to be beneficent, they fulfil the course of relative duties with regular tenor. Such men act from conscience and principle. So far they do well, and are worthy of praise. They assist their friends; they give to the poor:

* John ii. 35.

they do justice to all. But what a different complexion is given to the same actions, how much higher flavour do they acquire, when they flow from the sensibility of a feeling heart? If one be not moved by affection, even supposing him influenced by principle, he will go no further than strict principle appears to require. He will advance slowly and reluctantly. As it is justice, not generosity, which impels him, he will often feel as a task what he is required by conscience to perform. Whereas, to him, who is prompted by virtuous sensibility, every office of beneficence and humanity is a pleasure. He gives, assists, and relieves, not merely because he is bound to do so, but because it would be painful for him to refrain. Hence the smallest benefit he confers rises in its value, on account of its carrying the affection of the giver impressed upon the gift. It speaks his heart, and the discovery of the heart is very frequently of greater consequence than all that liberality can bestow. How often will the affectionate smile of approbation gladden the humble, and raise the dejected? How often will the look of tender sympathy, or the tear that involuntarily falls, impart consolation to the unhappy? By means of this correspondence of hearts, all the great duties which we owe to one another are both performed to more advantage, and endeared in the performance. From true sensibility flow a thousand good offices apparently small in themselves, but of high importance to the felicity of others; offices which altogether escape the observation of the cold and unfeeling, who, by the hardness of their manner, render themselves unamiable, even when they mean to do good. How happy then would it be for mankind, if this affectionate disposition prevailed more generally in the world! How much would the sum of public virtue and public felicity be increased, if men were always inclined to *rejoice with them that rejoice and to weep with them that weep!*

BUT, besides the effect of such a temper on general virtue and happiness, let us consider its effect on the happiness of him who possesses it, and the various pleasures to which it gives him access. If he be master of riches or influence, it affords him the means of increasing his own enjoyment, by relieving the wants or increasing the comforts, of others. If he command not these advantages, yet all the comforts which he sees in the possession of the deserving, become in some sort his, by his rejoicing in the good which they enjoy. Even the face of nature yields a satisfaction to him which the insensible can never know. The profusion of goodness which he beholds poured forth on the universe dilates his heart with the thought that innumerable multitudes around him are blest and happy. When he sees the labours of men appearing to prosper, and views a country flourishing in wealth and industry; when he beholds the spring coming forth

in its beauty, and reviving the decayed face of nature ; or in autumn beholds the fields loaded with plenty, and the year crowned with all its fruits ; he lifts his affections with gratitude to the great Father of all, and rejoices in the general felicity and joy.

It may indeed be objected, that the same sensibility lays open the heart to be pierced with many wounds from the distresses which abound in the world ; exposes us to frequent suffering from the participation which it communicates of the sorrows, as well as of the joys of friendship. But let it be considered, that the tender melancholy of sympathy is accompanied with a sensation which they who feel it would not exchange for the gratifications of the selfish. When the heart is strongly moved by any of the kind affections, even when it pours itself forth in virtuous sorrow, a secret attractive charm mingles with the painful emotion ; there is a joy in the midst of grief. Let it be farther considered, that the griefs which sensibility introduces are counterbalanced by pleasures which flow from the same source. Sensibility heightens in general the human powers, and is connected with acuteness in all our feelings. If it makes us more alive to some painful sensations, in return it renders the pleasing ones more vivid and animated. The selfish man languishes in his narrow circle of pleasures. They are confined to what affects his own interest. He is obliged to repeat the same gratifications till they become insipid. But the man of virtuous sensibility moves in a wider sphere of felicity. His powers are much more frequently called forth into occupations of pleasing activity. Numberless occasions open to him, of indulging his favourite taste, by conveying satisfaction to others. Often it is in his power, in one way or other, to sooth the afflicted heart, to carry some consolation into the house of woe. In the scenes of ordinary life, in the domestic and social intercourses of men, the cordiality of his affections cheers and gladdens him. Every appearance, every description of innocent happiness, is enjoyed by him. Every native expression of kindness and affection among others is felt by him, even though he be not the object of it. Among a circle of friends, enjoying one another, he is as happy as the happiest. In a word, he lives in a different sort of world from what the selfish man inhabits. He possesses a new sense, which enables him to behold objects which the selfish cannot see. At the same time, his enjoyments are not of that kind which remain merely on the surface of the mind. They penetrate the heart. They enlarge and elevate, they refine and ennoble it. To all the pleasing emotions of affection, they add the dignified consciousness of virtue.—
Children of Men, Men formed by nature to live and to feel as brethren ! How long will ye continue to estrange yourselves

from one another by competitions and jealousies, when in cordial union he might be so much more blest? How long will ye seek your happiness in selfish gratifications alone, neglecting those purer and better sources of joy, which flow from the affections and the heart?

HAVING now explained the nature, and shown the value and high advantages of true sensibility, I proceed to point out some of the mistaken forms and abuses of this virtue.—In modern times, the chief improvement of which we have to boast is a sense of humanity. This, notwithstanding the selfishness that still prevails, is the favourite and distinguishing virtue of the age. On general manners, and on several departments of society, it has had considerable influence. It has abated the spirit of persecution; it has even tempered the horrors of war; and man is now more ashamed, than he was in some former ages, of acting as a savage to man. Hence, sensibility is become so reputable a quality, that the appearance of it is frequently assumed when the reality is wanting. Softness of manners must not be mistaken for true sensibility. Sensibility indeed tends to produce gentleness of behaviour, and when such behaviour flows from native affection, it is valuable and amiable. But the exterior manner alone may be learned in the school of the world; and often, too often, is found to cover much unfeeling hardness of heart. Professions of sensibility on every trifling occasion, joined with the appearance of excessive softness, and a profusion of sentimental language, afford always much ground for distrust. They create the suspicion of a studied character. Frequently, under a negligent and seemingly rough manner, there lies a tender and feeling heart. Manliness and sensibility are so far from being incompatible, that the truly brave are for the most part generous and humane; while the soft and effeminate are hardly capable of any vigorous exertion of affection.

As sensibility supposes delicacy of feeling with respect to others, they who affect the highest sensibility are apt to carry this delicacy to excess. They are, perhaps, not incapable of the warmth of disinterested friendship; but they are become so refined in all their sensations; they entertain such high notions of what ought to correspond in the feelings of others to their own; they are so mightily hurt by every thing which comes not up to their ideal standard of reciprocal affection, as to produce disquiet and uneasiness to all with whom they are connected. Hence, unjust suspicions of their friends; hence, groundless upbraidings and complaints of unkindness; hence, a proneness to take violent offence at trifles. In consequence of examining their friends with a microscopic eye, what to an ordinary observer would not be displeasing, to them is grating and disgusting. At the bottom of the character of such persons there always lie

much pride and attention to themselves. This is indeed a false species of sensibility. It is the substitution of a capricious and irritable delicacy, in the room of that plain and native tenderness of heart, which prompts men to view others with an indulgent eye, and to make great allowances for the imperfections which are sometimes adherent to the most amiable qualities.

THERE are others who affect not sensibility to this extreme, but who found high claims to themselves upon the degree of interests which they take in the concerns of others. Although their sensibility can produce no benefit to the person who is its object, they always conceive that it entitles themselves to some profitable returns. These, often, are persons of refined and artful character; who partly deceive themselves, and partly employ their sensibility as a cover to interest. He who acts from genuine affection when he is feeling along with others in their joys and sorrows, thinks not of any recompense to which this gives him a title. He follows the impulse of his heart. He obeys the dictates of his nature; just as the vine by its nature produces fruit, and the fountain pours forth its streams. Wherever views of interest, and prospects of return mingle with the feelings of affection, sensibility acts an imperfect part, and entitles us to small share of praise.

BUT supposing it to be both complete and pure, I must caution you against resting the whole merit of your character on sensibility alone. It is indeed a happy constitution of mind. It fits men for the proper discharge of many duties, and gives them access to many virtuous pleasures. It is requisite for our acceptance either with God or man. At the same time, if it remain an instinctive feeling alone, it will form no more than an imperfect character. Complete virtue is of a more exalted and dignified nature. It supposes sensibility, good temper, and benevolent affections; it includes them as essential parts; but it reaches farther: It supposes them to be strengthened and confirmed by principle; it requires them to be supported by justice, temperance, fortitude, and all those other virtues which enable us to act with propriety in the trying situations of life.

It is very possible for a man to possess the kind affections in a high degree, while at the same time he is carried away by passion and pleasure into many criminal deeds. Almost every man values himself on possessing virtue in one or other of its forms. He wishes to lay claim to some quality which will render him estimable in his own eye, as well as in that of the public. Hence it is common for many, especially for those in the higher classes of life, to take much praise to themselves on account of their sensibility, though it be, in truth, a sensibility of a very defective kind. They relent at the view of misery when it is strongly set before them. Often too, affected chiefly by the powers of de-

scription, it is at feigned and pictured distress, more than at real misery, that they relent. The tears which they shed upon these occasions they consider as undoubted proofs of virtue. They applaud themselves for the goodness of their hearts; and conclude that with such feelings they cannot fail to be agreeable to Heaven. At the same time these transient relentings make slight impression on conduct. They give rise to few, if any, good deeds; and soon after such persons have wept at some tragical tale, they are ready to stretch forth the hand of oppression, to grasp at the gain of injustice, or to plunge into the torrent of criminal pleasures. This sort of sensibility affords no more than a fallacious claim to virtue, and gives men no ground to think highly of themselves. We must enquire not merely how they feel, but how their feelings prompt them to act, in order to ascertain their real character.

I SHALL conclude with observing, that sensibility, when genuine and pure, has a strong connexion with piety. That warmth of affection and tenderness of heart, which lead men to feel for their brethren, and to enter into their joys and sorrows, should naturally dispose them to melt at the remembrance of the divine goodness; to glow with admiration of the divine Majesty; to send up the voice of praise and adoration to that Supreme Being, who makes his creatures happy. He who pretends to great sensibility towards men, and yet has no feeling for the high objects of religion, no heart to admire and adore the great Father of the universe, has reason to distrust the truth and delicacy of his sensibility. He has reason to suspect, that in some corner of his heart there lodges a secret depravity, an unnatural hardness and callousness, which vitiates his character.—Let us study to join all the parts of virtue in proper union; to be consistently and uniformly good; just and upright, as well as pitiful and courteous; pious, as well as sympathizing. Let us pray to him who made the heart, that he would fill it with all proper dispositions; rectify all its errors; and render it the happy abode of personal integrity and social tenderness, of purity, benevolence, and devotion.

SERMON XXXIII.

ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF TIME.

And Pharoah said unto Jacob, How old art thou?

GENESIS, xlvii. 8.

TIME is of so great importance to mankind, that it cannot too often employ religious meditation. There is nothing in the management of which wisdom is more requisite, or where mankind display their inconsistency more. In its particular parcels they appear entirely careless of it; and throw it away with thoughtless profusion. But, when collected into some of its great portions, and viewed as the measure of their continuance in life, they become sensible of its value, and begin to regard it with a serious eye. While day after day is wasted in a course of idleness or vicious pleasures, if some incident shall occur which leads the most inconsiderate man to think of his age, or time of life; how much of it is gone; at what period of it he is now arrived; and to what proportion of it he can with any probability look forward, as yet to come; he can hardly avoid feeling some secret compunction, and reflecting seriously upon his state. Happy if that virtuous impression were not of momentary continuance, but retained its influence amidst the succeeding cares and pleasures of the world! To the good old Patriarch mentioned in the text, we have reason to believe that such impressions were habitual. The question put to him by the Egyptian monarch, produced, in his answer, such reflections as were naturally suited to his time of life. *And Jacob said unto Pharoah, the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pil-*

grimage. But the peculiar circumstances of the Patriarch, or the number of his years, are not to be the subject of our present consideration. My purpose is, to shew how we should be affected in every period of human life, by reflection upon our age, whether we be young, or advanced in years; in order that the question *How old art thou?* may never be put to any of us without some good effect. There are three different portions of our life which such a question naturally calls to view; that part of it which is past; that which is now present; and that to which we fondly look forward, as future. Let us consider in what manner we ought to be affected by attending to each of these.

I. LET US review that part of our time which is past. According to the progress which we have made in the journey of life, the field which past years present to our review will be more or less extensive. But to every one they will be found to afford sufficient matter of humiliation and regret. For where is the person who, having acted for any time in the world, remembers not many errors and many follies in his past behaviour? Who dares to say, that he has improved, as he might have done, the various advantages which were afforded him; and that he recalls nothing for which he has reason either to grieve or to blush? When we recollect the several stages of life through which we have passed; the successive occupations in which we have been engaged, the designs we have formed, and the hopes and fears which alternately have filled our breast; how barren for most part is the remembrance; and how few traces of any thing valuable or important remain! Like characters drawn on the sand, which the next wave washes totally away; so one trivial succession of events has effaced the memory of the preceding; and though we have seemed all along to be busy, yet for much of what we have acted, we are neither wiser nor better than if such actions had never been. Hence let the retrospect of what is past, produce, as its first effect, humiliation in our own eyes, and abasement before God. Much do human pride and self-complacency require some correction; and that correction is never more effectually administered, than by an impartial and serious review of former life.

But though pastime be gone, we are not to consider it as irredeemably lost. To a very profitable purpose it may yet be applied, if we lay hold of it while it remains in remembrance, and oblige it to contribute to future improvement. If you have gained nothing more by the years that are past, you have at least gained experience; and experience is the mother of wisdom. You have seen the weak parts of your character; and may have discovered the chief sources of your misconduct. To these let your attention be directed; on these, let the proper

guards be set. If you have trifled long, resolve to trifle no more. If your passions have often betrayed and degraded you, study how they may be kept, in future, under better discipline. Learn, at the same time, never to trust presumptuously in your own wisdom. Humbly apply to the Author of your being, and beseech his grace to guide you safely through those slippery and dangerous paths, in which experience has shown that you are so ready to err, and to fall.

In reviewing past life, it cannot but occur, that many things now appear of inconsiderable importance, which once occupied and attached us, in the highest degree. Where are those keen competitions, those mortifying disappointments, those violent enmities, those eager pursuits, which we once thought were to last for ever, and on which we considered our whole happiness or misery as suspended? We look back upon them now, as upon a dream which has passed away. None of those mighty consequences have followed which we had predicted. The airy fabric has vanished, and left no trace behind it. We smile at our former violence; and wonder how such things could have ever appeared so significant and great. We may rest assured, that what hath been shall again be. When time shall once have laid his lenient hand on the passions and pursuits of the present moment, they too shall loose that imaginary value which heated fancy now bestows upon them. Hence, let them already begin to subside to their proper level. Let wisdom infuse a tincture of moderation into the eagerness of contest, by anticipating that period of coolness, which the lapse of time will, of itself, certainly bring.—When we look back on years that are past, how swiftly do they appear to have fled away! How insensibly has one period of life stolen upon us after another, like the successive incidents in *a tale that is told!* Before we were aware, childhood had grown up into youth; youth had passed into manhood; and manhood now, perhaps, begins to assume the gray hair, and to decline into old age. When we are carrying our views forward, months and years to come seem to stretch through a long and extensive space. But when the time shall arrive of our looking back, they shall appear contracted with narrow bounds.—Time, when yet before us, seems to advance with slow and tardy steps; no sooner is it past, than we discern its wings.

It is a remarkable peculiarity in the retrospect of former life, that it is commonly attended with some measure of heaviness of heart. Even to the most prosperous, the memory of joys that are past is accompanied with secret sorrow. In the days of former years, many objects arise to view, which make the most unthinking, grave; and render the serious, sad. The pleasurable scenes of youth, the objects on which our affections had been

early placed, the companions and friends with whom he had spent many happy days, even the places and the occupations to which we have been long accustomed, but to which we have now bidden farewell, can hardly ever be recalled, without softening, nor sometimes, without piercing the heart. Such sensations to which few, if any, of my hearers are wholly strangers, I now mention, as affording a strong proof of that vanity of the human state, which is so often represented in the sacred writings; And vain indeed must that state be, where shades of grief tinge the recollection of its brightest scenes. But, at the same time, though it be very proper that such meditations should sometimes enter the mind, yet on them I advise not the gentle and tender heart to dwell too long. They are apt to produce a fruitless melancholy; to deject, without bringing much improvement; to thicken the gloom which already hangs over human life, without furnishing proportionable assistance to virtue.

Let me advise you rather to recall to view such parts of former conduct, if any such there be, as afford in the remembrance a rational satisfaction. And what parts of conduct are these? Are they the pursuits of sensual pleasure, the riots of jollity, or the displays of show and vanity? No: I appeal to your hearts, my friends, if what you recollect with most pleasure be not the innocent, the virtuous, the honourable parts of your past life; when you were employed in cultivating your minds, and improving them with useful knowledge; when, by regular application and preserving labour, you were laying the foundation of future reputation and advancement; when you were occupied in discharging with fidelity the duties of your station, and acquiring the esteem of the worthy and the good; when, in some trying situation, you were enabled to act your part with firmness and honour; or had seized the happy opportunity of assisting the deserving, of relieving the distressed, and bringing down upon your heads the *blessings of those that were ready to perish*.—These, these are the parts of former life which are recalled with most satisfaction! On them alone, no heaviness of heart attends. You enjoy them as a treasure which is now stored up, and put beyond all danger of being lost. These cheer the hours of sadness, lighten the burden of old age, and, through the mortifying remembrance of much of the past, dart a ray of light and joy. From the review of these, and the comparison of them with the deceitful pleasures of sin, let us learn how to form our estimate of happiness. Let us learn what is true, what is false in human pleasures; and from experience of the past, judge of the quarter to which we must in future turn, if we would lay a foundation for permanent satisfaction. After having thus reviewed the former years of our life, let us consider.

II. WHAT attention is due to that period of age in which we are at present placed. Here lies the immediate and principal object of our concern: For, the recollection of the past is only as far of moment as it acts upon the present. The past, to us now, is little; the future, as yet, is nothing. Between these two great gulphs of time subsists the present, as an isthmus or bridge, along which we are all passing. With hasty and inconsiderate steps let us not pass along it; but remember well, how much depends upon our holding a steady and properly conducted course. *Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it now with all thy might; for now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.* Many directions might be given for the wise and religious improvement of the present; a few of which only I shall hint.

Let us begin with excluding those superfluous avocations which unprofitably consume it. Life is short; much that is of real importance remains to be done. If we suffer the present time to be wasted either in absolute idleness or in frivolous employments, it will hereafter call for vengeance against us. Removing, therefore, what is merely superfluous, let us bethink ourselves of what is most material to be attended to at present: As, first and chief, the great work of our salvation; the discharge of the religious duties which we owe to God our Creator, and to Christ our Redeemer. *God waiteth as yet to be gracious;* whether he will wait longer, none of us can tell. Now, therefore, *seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.* Our spiritual interests will be best promoted by regular performance of all the duties of ordinary life. Let these, therefore, occupy a great share of the present hour. Whatever our age, our character, our profession, or station in the world, requires us to do, in that let each revolving day find us busy. Never delay till to-morrow, what reason and conscience tell you ought to be performed to-day. To-morrow is not your's; and though you should live to enjoy it, you must not overload it with a burden not its own. *Sufficient for the day will prove the duty thereof.*

The observance of order and method is of high consequence for the improvement of present time. He, who performs every employment in its due place and season, suffers no part of time to escape without profit. He multiplies his days; for he lives much in little space. Whereas, he who neglects order in the arrangement of his occupations, is always losing the present in returning upon the past, and trying, in vain, to recover it when gone.—Let me advise you frequently to make the present employment of time an object of thought. Ask yourselves, about what you are now busied? What is the ultimate scope of your

present pursuits and cares? Can you justify them to yourselves? Are they likely to produce any thing that will survive the moment, and bring forth some fruit for futurity? He, who can give no satisfactory answer to such questions as these, has reason to suspect that his employment of the present is not tending either to his advantage or his honour.—Finally, let me admonish you that, while you study to improve, you should endeavour also to enjoy the present hour. Let it not be disturbed with groundless discontents, or poisoned with foolish anxieties about what is to come; but look up to heaven, and acknowledge, with a grateful heart, the actual blessings you enjoy. If you must admit, that you are now in health, peace, and safety; without any particular or uncommon evils to afflict your condition; what more can you reasonably look for in this vain and uncertain world? How little can the greatest prosperity add to such a state! Will any future situation ever make you happy, if now, with so few causes of grief, you imagine yourselves miserable? The evil lies in the state of your mind, not in your condition of fortune; and by no alteration of circumstances is likely to be remedied. Let us now,

III. CONSIDER with what dispositions we ought to look forward to those years of our life that may yet be to come. Merely to look forward to them, is what requires no admonition. Futurity is the great object on which the imaginations of men are employed; for the sake of which the past is forgotten, and the present too often neglected. All time is in a manner swallowed up by it. On futurity men build their designs; on futurity they rest their hopes; and though not happy at the present, they always reckon on becoming so at some subsequent period of their lives. This propensity to look forward was, for wise purposes, implanted in the human breast. It serves to give proper occupation to the active powers of the mind, and to quicken all its exertions. But it is too often immoderately indulged and grossly abused. The curiosity which sometimes prompts persons to enquire by unlawful methods into what is to come, is equally foolish and sinful. Let us restrain all desire of penetrating farther than is allowed us into that dark and unknown region. Futurity belongs to God; and happy for us is that mysterious veil, with which his wisdom has covered it. Were it in our power to lift up the veil, and to behold what it conceals, many and many a thorn we should plant in our breasts. The proper and rational conduct of men with regard to futurity is regulated by two considerations: First, that much of what it contains, must remain to us absolutely unknown; next, that there are also some events in which it may be certainly known and foreseen.

First, much of futurity is, and must be, entirely unknown to us. When we speculate about the continuance of our life, and the events which are to fill it, we behold a river which is always flowing; but which soon escapes out of our sight, and is covered with mists and darkness. Some of its windings we may endeavour to trace; but it is only for a very short way that we are able to pursue them. In endless conjectures we quickly find ourselves bewildered; and often, the next event that happens, baffles all the reasons we had formed concerning the succession of events. The consequence which follows from this is, that all the anxiety about futurity, which passes the bounds of reasonable precaution, is unprofitable and vain. Certain measures are indeed necessary to be taken for our safety. We are not to rush forward inconsiderate and headlong. We must make, as far as we are able, provision for future welfare; and guard against dangers which apparently threaten. But having done this, we must stop; and leave the rest to Him who disposeth of futurity at his will. *He who sitteth in the heavens laughs at the wisdom and the plans of worldly men. Wherefore boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*—For the same reason, despair not of to-morrow; for it may bring forth good as well as evil. Vex not yourselves with imaginary fears. The impending black cloud, to which you look up with so much dread, may pass by harmless; or, though it should discharge the storm, yet before it breaks, you may be lodged in that lowly mansion which no storms ever touch.

In the next place, there are in futurity some events which may be certainly foreseen by us, through all its darkness. First, it may be confidently predicted, that no situation into which it will bring us, shall ever answer fully to our hopes, or confer perfect happiness. This is certain as if we already saw it, that life, in its future periods, will continue to be what it has heretofore been; that it will be a mixed and varied state; a chequered scene of pleasures and pains, of fugitive joys and transient griefs, succeeding in a round to one another. Whether we look forward to the years of youth, or to those of manhood and advanced life, it is all the same. The world will be to us what it has been to generations past. Set out, therefore, on what remains of your journey under this persuasion. According to this measure, estimate your future pleasures; and calculate your future gains. Carry always along with you a modest and a temperate mind. Let not your expectations from the years that are to come rise too high; and your disappointments will be fewer, and more easily supported.

Farther; this may be reckoned upon as certain, that, in every future situation of life, a good conscience, a well ordered

mind, and a humble trust in the favour of Heaven, will prove the essential ingredients of your happiness. In reflecting upon the past, you have found this to hold. Assure yourselves, that in future, the case will be the same. The principal correctives of human vanity and distress must be sought for in religion and virtue. Entering on paths which to you are new and unknown, place yourselves under the conduct of a divine guide. Follow the great *Shepherd of Israel*, who, amidst the turmoil of this world, leads his flock *into green pastures and by the still waters*. As you advance in life, study to improve both in good principles and in good practice. You will be enabled to look to futurity without fear, if, whatever it brings, it shall find you regularly employed in *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Lord your God*.

Lastly, Whatever other things may be dubious in futurity, two great events are undoubtedly certain, death and judgment. These, we all know, are to terminate the whole course of time; and we know them to be not only certain, but to be approaching nearer to us, in consequence of every day that passes over our heads. To these, therefore, let us look forward, not with the dread of children, but with that manly seriousness which belongs to men and Christians. Let us not avert our view from them, as if we could place them at some greater distance by excluding them from our thoughts. This indeed is the refuge of too many; but it is the refuge of fools, who aggravate thereby the terrors they must encounter. For *he that cometh, shall come, and will not tarry*. To his coming, let us look with a steady eye; and as life advances through its progressive stages, prepare for its close, and for appearing before Him who made us.

Thus I have endeavoured to point out the reflections proper to be made, when the question is put to any of us, *How old art thou?* I have shewn with what eye we should review the past years of our life; in what light we should consider the present; and with what dispositions look forward to the future: in order that such a question may always leave some serious impression behind it; and may dispose us *so to number the years of our life, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*.

SERMON XXXIV.

ON THE DUTIES BELONGING TO MIDDLE AGE.

—*When I became a man, I put away childish things.*

I CORINTHIANS, xiii. 11.

*TO every thing, says the wise man, there is a season ; and a time to every purpose under heaven.** As there are duties which belong to particular situations of fortune, so there are duties also which result from particular periods of human life. In every period of it, indeed, that comprehensive rule takes place, *Fear God and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole duty of man.†* Piety to God, and charity to men, are incumbent upon persons of every age, as soon as they can think and act. Yet these virtues, in different stages of life, assume different forms ; and when they appear in that form which is most suited to our age, they appear with peculiar gracefulness ; they give propriety to conduct, and add dignity to character. In former discourses I have treated of the virtues which adorn youth, and of the duties which especially belong to old age.‡ The circle of those duties which respect middle age is indeed much larger. As that is the busy period in the life of man, it includes in effect the whole compass of religion, and therefore cannot have its peculiar character so definitely marked and ascertained. At the same time, during those years wherein one is sensible that he has advanced beyond the confines of youth, but has not yet passed into the region of old age, there are several things which reflection on that portion of human life suggests, or at least ought to suggest, to the mind. Inconsiderate must he be, who, in his gradual progress throughout middle age, pauses not, at times, to think how far he is now receding from youth ; how near he

* Eccles. iii. 1.

† Eccles. xii. 13.

‡ See Sermons XI and XII.

draws to the borders of declining age; what part it is now incumbent on him to act; what duties both God and the world have a title to expect from him. To these I am at present to call your attention; as what materially concern the greatest part of those who are now my hearers.

I BEGIN with observing, that the first duty of those who are become men is, as the text expresses it, *to put away childish things*. The season of youthful levities, follies, and passions, is now over. These have had their reign; a reign perhaps too long; and to which a termination is certainly proper at last. Much indulgence is due to youth. Many things admit of excuse then, which afterwards become unpardonable. Some things may even be graceful in youth, which, if not criminal, are at least ridiculous, in persons of maturer years. It is a great trial of wisdom, to make our retreat from youth with propriety; to assume the character of manhood, without exposing ourselves to reproach, by an unseasonable remainder of juvenility on the one hand, or by precise and disgusting formality on the other. Nature has placed certain boundaries, by which she discriminates the pleasures, actions, and employments, that are suited to the different stages of human life. It becomes us neither to overleap those boundaries by a transition too hasty and violent; nor to hover too long on one side of the limit, when nature calls us to pass over to the other.

There are particularly two things in which middle age should preserve its distinction and separation from youth; these are levities of behaviour, and intemperate indulgence of pleasure. The gay spirits of the young often prompt an inconsiderate degree of levity, sometimes amusing, sometimes offensive; but for which, though betraying them occasionally into serious dangers, their want of experience may plead excuse. A more composed and manly behaviour is expected in riper years. The affectation of youthful vanities degrades the dignity of manhood; even renders its manners less agreeable; and by awkward attempts to please, produces contempt. Cheerfulness is becoming in every age. But the proper cheerfulness of a man is as different from the levity of the boy, as the flight of the eagle is from the fluttering of a sparrow in the air.

As all unseasonable returns to the levity of youth ought to be laid aside,—an admonition which equally belongs to both the sexes,—still more are we to guard against those intemperate indulgences of pleasure, to which the young are unhappily prone. From these we cannot too soon retreat. They open the path to ruin, in every period of our days. As long, however, as these excesses are confined to the first stage of life, hope is left, that when this fever of the spirits shall abate, sobriety may gain the ascendant, and wiser counsels have power to influence conduct,

But after the season of youth is past, if its intemperate spirit remain; if, instead of listening to the calls of honour, and bending attention to the cares and the business of men, the same course of idleness and sensuality continue to be pursued, the case becomes more desperate. A sad presumption arises, that long immaturity is to prevail; and that the pleasures and passions of the youth are to sink and overwhelm the man. Difficult, I confess, it may prove, to overcome the attachments which youthful habits had for a long while been forming. Hard, at the beginning, is the task, to impose on our conduct restraints which are altogether unaccustomed and new. But this is a trial which every one must undergo, in entering on new scenes of action, and new periods of life. Let those who are in this situation bethink themselves that all is now at stake. Their character and honour, their future fortune and success in the world, depend in a great measure on the steps they take, when first they appear on the stage of active life. The world then looks to them with an observing eye. It studies their behaviour; and interprets all their motions, as presages of the line of future conduct which they mean to hold. Now, therefore, *put away childish things*; dismiss your former trifling amusements, and youthful pleasures; blast not the hopes which your friends are willing to conceive of you. Higher occupations, more serious cares, await you. Turn your mind to the steady and vigorous discharge of the part you are called to act. This leads me,

II. To point out the particular duties which open to those who are in the middle period of life. They are now come forward to that field of action where they are to mix in all the stir and bustle of the world; where all the human powers are brought forth into full exercise; where all that is conceived to be important in human affairs is incessantly going on around them. The time of youth was the preparation for future action. In old age our active part is supposed to be finished, and rest is permitted. Middle age is the season when we are expected to display the fruits which education had prepared and ripened. In this world, all of us were formed to be assistants to one another. The wants of society call for every man's labour, and require various departments to be filled up. They require that some be appointed to rule, and others to obey; some to defend the society from danger, others to maintain its internal order and peace: some to provide the conveniences of life, others to promote the improvement of the mind; many to work; others to contrive and direct. In short, within the sphere of society there is employment for every one; and in the course of these employments, many a moral duty is to be performed; many a religious grace to be exercised. No one is permitted to be a mere blank in the world. No rank, nor station, no dignity

of birth, nor extent of possessions, exempt any man from contributing his share to public utility and good. This is the precept of God. This is the voice of nature. This is the just demand of the human race upon one another.

One of the first questions, therefore, which every man who is in the vigour of his age should put to himself, is, "What am I doing in this world? What have I yet done, whereby I may glorify God, and be useful to my fellows? Do I properly fill up the place which belongs to my rank and station? Will any memorial remain of my having existed on the earth? or are my days passing fruitless away, now when I might be of some importance in the system of human affairs?"—Let not any man imagine that he is of no importance, and has, upon that account, a privilege to trifle with his days at pleasure. *Talents* have been given to all; to some *ten*; to others *five*; to others *two*. *Occupy with these* till I come*, is the command of the great Master to all. Where superior abilities are possessed, or distinguished advantages of fortune are enjoyed, a wider range is afforded for useful exertion, and the world is entitled to expect it. But among those who fill up the inferior departments of society, though the sphere of usefulness be more contracted, no one is left entirely insignificant. Let us remember, that in all stations and conditions, the important relations take place, of masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and friends, citizens and subjects. The discharge of the duties arising from those various relations, forms a great portion of the work assigned to the middle age of man. Though the part we have to act may be confined within a humble line, yet if it be honourably acted, it will be always found to carry its own reward.

In fine, industry, in all its virtuous forms, ought to inspire and invigorate manhood. This will add to it both satisfaction and dignity; will make the current of our years, as they roll, flow along in a clear and equable stream, without the putrid stagnation of sloth and idleness. Idleness is the great corrupter of youth; and the bane and dishonour of middle age. He who, in the prime of life, finds time to hang heavy on his hands, may with much reason suspect, that he has not consulted the duties which the consideration of his age imposed upon him; assuredly he has not consulted his own happiness. But, amidst all the bustle of the world, let us not forget,

III. To guard with vigilance against the peculiar dangers which attend the period of middle life. It is much to be regretted, that in the present state of things there is no period of man's age in which his virtue is not exposed to perils. Plea-

* Luke, xix. 31.

sure lays its snares for youth ; and after the season of youthful follies is past, other temptations, no less formidable to virtue, presently arise. The love of pleasure is succeeded by the passion for interest. In this passion the whole mind is too often absorbed ; and the change thereby induced on the character is of no amiable kind. Amidst the excesses of youth virtuous affections often remain. The attachments of friendship, the love of honour, and the warmth of sensibility, give a degree of lustre to the character, and cover many a failing. But interest, when it is become the ruling principle, both debases the mind and hardens the heart. It deadens the feeling of every thing that is sublime or refined. It contracts the affections within a narrow circle ; and extinguishes all those sparks of generosity and tenderness which once glowed in the breast.

In proportion as worldly pursuits multiply, and competitions rise, ambition, jealousy, and envy, combine with interest to excite bad passions, and to increase the corruption of the heart. At first, perhaps, it was a man's intention to advance himself in the world by none but fair and laudable methods. He retained for some time an aversion to whatever appeared dishonourable. But here, he is encountered by the violence of an enemy. There, he is supplanted by the address of a rival. The pride of a superior insults him. The ingratitude of a friend provokes him. Animosities ruffle his temper. Suspicions poison his mind. He finds, or imagines that he finds, the artful and designing surrounding him on every hand. He views corruption and iniquity prevailing ; the modest neglected ; the forward and the crafty rising to distinction. Too easily from the example of others, he learns that mystery of vice, called the way of the world. What he has learned, he fancies necessary to practise for his own defence ; and of course assumes that supple and versatile character, which he observes to be frequent, and which often has appeared to him successful.

To these, and many more dangers of the same kind, is the man exposed, who is deeply engaged in active life. No small degree of firmness in religious principle, and of constancy in virtue, is requisite, in order to prevent his being assimilated to the spirit of the world, and carried away by the *multitude of evil doers*. Let him therefore call to mind those principles which ought to fortify him against such temptations to vice. Let him often recollect that, whatever his station in life may be, he is a man ; he is a Christian. These are the chief characters which he has to support ; characters superior far, if they be supported with dignity, to any of the titles with which courts can decorate him ; superior to all that can be acquired in the strife of a busy world. Let him think that though it may be desirable to in-

crease his opulence, or to advance his rank, yet what he ought to hold much more sacred is, to maintain his integrity and honour. If these be forfeited, wealth or station will have few charms left. They will not be able to protect him long from sinking into contempt in the eye of an observing world. Even to his own eye he will at last appear base and wretched.—Let not the affairs of the world entirely engross his time and thoughts. From that contagious air which he breathes in the midst of it, let him sometimes retreat into the salutary shade consecrated to devotion and to wisdom. There conversing seriously with his own soul, and looking up to the Father of spirits, let him study to calm those unquiet passions, and to rectify those internal disorders, which intercourse with the world had excited and increased. In order to render this medicine of the mind more effectual, it will be highly proper,

IV. THAT, as we advance in the course of years, we often attend to the lapse of time and life, and to the revolutions which these are ever affecting. In this meditation, one of the first reflections which should occur is, how much we owe to that God who hath hitherto helped us; who hath brought us on so far in life; hath guided us through the slippery paths of youth and now enables us to flourish in the strength of manhood.—Look back, my friends, to those who started along with yourselves in the race of life. Think how many of them have fallen around you. Observe how many blank spaces you can number in the catalogue of those who were once your companions. If, in the midst of so much devastation, you have been preserved and blessed; consider seriously what returns you owe to the goodness of Heaven. Inquire whether your conduct has corresponded to those obligations; whether in public, and in private, you have honoured, as became you, the God of your fathers; and whether, amidst the unknown occurrences that are yet before you, you have ground to hope for the continued protection of the Almighty.

Bring to mind the various revolutions which you have beheld in human affairs, since you became actors on this busy theatre. Reflect on the changes which have taken place in men and manners, in opinions and customs, in private fortunes, and in public conduct. By the observations you have made on these, and the experience you have gained, have you improved proportionably in wisdom? Have the changes of the world which you have witnessed, loosened all unreasonable attachment to it? Have they taught you this great lesson, that, while *the fashion of the world is ever passing away*, only in God and in virtue stability is to be found? Of great use, amidst the whirl of the world, are such pauses as these in life; such resting-places of

thought and reflection; whence we can calmly and deliberately look back on the past, and anticipate the future.

To the future we are often casting an eager eye, and fondly storing it, in our imagination, with many a pleasing scene. But if we would look to it, like wise men, let it be under the persuasion that it is nearly to resemble the past, in bringing forward a mixture of alternate hopes and fears, of griefs and joy. In order to be prepared for whatever it may bring, let us cultivate that manly fortitude of mind, which, supported by a pious trust in God, will enable us to encounter properly the vicissitudes of our state. No quality is more necessary than this, to them who are passing through that stormy season of life of which we now treat. Softness and effeminacy let them leave to the young and unexperienced, who are amusing themselves with florid prospects of bliss. But to those who are now engaged in the middle of their course, who are supposed to be well acquainted with the world, and to know that they have to struggle in it with various hardships: firmness, vigour, and resolution, are dispositions more suitable. They must buckle on well this armour of the mind, if they would issue forth into the contest with any prospect of success.—While we thus study to correct the errors and to provide against the dangers, which are peculiar to this stage of life, let us also,

V. **LAY** foundation for comfort in old age. That is a period which all expect and hope to see; and to which, amidst the toils of the world, men sometimes look forward, not without satisfaction, as to the period of retreat and rest. But let them not deceive themselves. A joyless and dreary season it will prove, if they arrive at it with an unimproved or corrupted mind. For old age, as for every other thing, a certain preparation is requisite; and that preparation consists chiefly in three particulars; in the acquisition of knowledge, of friends, of virtue. There is an acquisition of an other kind, of which it is altogether needless for me to give any recommendation, that of riches. But though this, by many, will be esteemed a more material acquisition than all the three I have named, it may be confidently pronounced, that without these other requisites, all the wealth we can lay up in store will prove insufficient for making our latter days pass smoothly away.

First, he who wishes to render his old age comfortable, should study betimes to enlarge and improve his mind; and by thought and enquiry, by reading and reflecting, to acquire a taste for useful knowledge. This will provide for him a great and noble entertainment, when other entertainments leave him. If he bring into the solitary retreat of age, a vacant, uninformed mind, where no knowledge dawns, where no ideas rise, which

has nothing to feed upon within itself, many a heavy and comfortless day he must necessarily pass. Next, when a man declines into the vale of years, he depends more on the aid of his friends, than in any other period of his life. Then is the time, when he would especially wish to find himself surrounded by some who love and respect him; who will bear with his infirmities, relieve him of his labours, and cheer him with their society. Let him, therefore, now, in the summer of his days, while yet active and flourishing, by acts of seasonable kindness and beneficence, ensure that love, and by upright and honourable conduct lay foundation for that respect, which in old age he would wish to enjoy.—In the last place, Let him consider a good conscience, peace with God, and the hope of Heaven, as the most effectual consolations he can possess, when the *evil days shall come*, wherein, otherwise, he is likely to find little pleasure. It is not merely by transient acts of devotion that such consolations are to be provided. The regular tenor of a virtuous and pious life, spent in the faithful discharge of all the duties of our station, will prove the best preparation for old age, for death, and for immortality.

AMONG the measures thus taken for the latter scenes of life, let me admonish every one not to forget to put his worldly affairs in order in due time. This is a duty which he owes to his character, to his family, or to those, whoever they be, that are to succeed him; but a duty too often unwisely delayed, from a childish aversion to entertain any thoughts of quitting the world. Let him not trust much to what he will do in his old age. Sufficient for that day, if he shall live to see it, will be the burden thereof. It has been remarked, that as men advance in years, they care less to think of death. Perhaps it occurs oftener to the thoughts of the young, than of the old. Feebleness of spirit renders melancholy ideas more oppressive; and after having been so long accustomed and inured to the world, men bear worse with any thing which reminds them that they must soon part with it.—However, as to part with it is the doom of all, let us take measures betimes for going off the stage, when it shall be our turn to withdraw, with decency and propriety; leaving nothing unfulfilled which it is expedient to have done before we die. To live long, ought not to be our favourite wish, so much as to live well. By continuing too long on earth, we might only live to witness a great number of melancholy scenes, and to expose ourselves to a wider compass of human woe. He who has served his generation faithfully in the world, has duly honoured God, and been beneficent and useful to mankind; he who in his life has been respected and beloved; whose death is accompanied with the sincere regret of

all who knew him, and whose memory is honoured ; that man has sufficiently fulfilled his course, whether it was appointed by Providence to be long or short. For *honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years ; but wisdom is the grey hair to man ; and an unspotted life is old age.**

* Wisdom, iv. 8, 9.

SERMON XXXV.

ON DEATH.

—*Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.*—ECCLESIASTES, xii. 5.

THIS is a sight which incessantly presents itself. Our eyes are so much accustomed to it, that it hardly makes any impression. Throughout every season of the year, and during the course of almost every day, the funerals which pass along the streets shew us *man going to his long home*. Were death a rare and uncommon object; were it only once in the course of a man's life, that he beheld one of his fellow-creatures carried to the grave, a solemn awe would fill him; he would stop short in the midst of his pleasures; he would even be chilled with secret horror. Such impressions, however, would prove unsuitable to the nature of our present state. When they became so strong as to render men unfit for the ordinary business of life, they would in a great measure defeat the intention of our being placed in this world. It is better ordered by the wisdom of Providence, that they should be weakened by the frequency of their recurrence; and so tempered by the mixture of other passions, as to allow us to go on freely in acting our parts on earth.

Yet, familiar as death is now become, it is undoubtedly fit that by an event of so important a nature, some impression should be made upon our minds. It ought not to pass over, as one of those common incidents which are beheld without concern, and awaken no reflection. There are many things which the funerals of our fellow-creatures are calculated to teach; and happy it were for the gay and dissipated, if they would listen more frequently to the instructions of so awful a monitor. In the context, the wise man had described, under a variety of im-

ages suited to the Eastern stile, the growing infirmities of old age, until they arrive at that period which concludes them all; when, as he beautifully expresses it, *the silver cord being loosened, and the golden bowl broken, the pitcher being broken at the fountain, and the wheel at the cistern, man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.* In discoursing from these words, it is not my purpose to treat, at present, of the instructions to be drawn from the prospect of our own death. I am to confine myself to the death of others; to consider death as one of the most frequent and considerable events that happen in the course of human affairs; and to shew in what manner we ought to be affected, first, by the death of strangers, or indifferent persons; secondly, by the death of friends; and thirdly, by the death of enemies.

I. By the death of indifferent persons, if any can be called indifferent to whom we are so nearly allied as brethren by nature, and brethren in mortality. When we observe the funerals that pass along the streets, or when we walk along the monuments of death, the first thing that naturally strikes us, is the undistinguishing blow, with which that common enemy levels all. We behold a great promiscuous multitude, all carried to the same abode; all lodged in the same dark and silent mansions. There, mingle persons of every age and character, of every rank and condition in life; the young and the old, the poor and the rich, the gay and the grave, the renowned and the ignoble. A few weeks ago, most of those whom we have seen carried to the grave, walked about as we do now on the earth; enjoyed their friends, beheld the light of the sun, and were forming designs for future days. Perhaps, it is not long since they were engaged in scenes of high festivity. For them, perhaps, the cheerful company assembled; and in the midst of the circle they shone with gay and pleasing vivacity. But now, to them, all is finally closed. To them, no more shall the seasons return, or the sun rise. No more shall they hear the voice of mirth, or behold the face of man. They are swept from the universe as though they had never been. They are *carried away, as with the flood: the wind has passed over them, and they are gone.*

When we contemplate this desolation of the human race; this final termination of so many hopes; this silence that now reigns among those who, a little while ago, were so busy or so gay; who can avoid being touched with sensations at once awful and tender? What heart but then warms with the glow of humanity? In whose eye does not the tear gather, on revolving the fate of passing and short-lived man? Such sensations are so congenial to human nature, that they are attended with a certain kind of sorrowful pleasure. Even voluptuaries themselves sometimes indulge a taste for funeral melancholy. After the festive assem-

bly is dismissed, they choose to walk retired in the shady grove, and to contemplate the venerable sepulchres of their ancestors. This melancholy pleasure arises from two different sentiments meeting at the same time in the breast; a sympathetic sense of the shortness and vanity of life, and a persuasion that something exists after death; sentiments which unite at the view of *the house appointed for all living*. A tomb, it has been justly said, is a monument situated on the confines of both worlds. It at once, presents to us the termination of the inquietudes of life, and sets before us the image of eternal rest. *There*, in the elegant expressions of Job, *the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master.* It is very remarkable, that in all languages, and among all nations, death has been described in a style of this kind; expressed by figures of speech, which convey every where the same idea of rest, or sleep, or retreat from the evils of life. Such a style perfectly agrees with the general belief of the soul's immortality; but assuredly conveys no high idea of the boasted pleasures of the world. It shews how much all mankind have felt this life to be a scene of trouble and care; and have agreed in opinion, that perfect rest is to be expected only in the grave.

There, says Job, *are the small and the great.* There the poor man lays down at last the burden of his wearisome life. No more shall he groan under the load of poverty and toil. No more shall he hear the insolent calls of the master, from whom he received his scanty wages. No more shall he be raised from needful slumber on his bed of straw, nor be hurried away from his homely meal, to undergo the repeated labours of the day. While his humble grave is preparing, and a few poor and decayed neighbours are carrying him thither, it is good for us to think that this man too was our brother; that for him the aged and destitute wife, and the needy children, now weep; that, neglected as he was by the world, he possessed perhaps both a sound understanding and a worthy heart; and is now carried by angels to rest in Abraham's bosom.—At no great distance from him, the grave is opened to receive the rich and proud man. For, as it is said with emphasis in the parable, *the rich man also died, and was buried.** He also died. His riches prevented not his sharing the same fate with the poor man; perhaps, through luxury, they accelerated his doom. Then, indeed, *the mourners go about the street*; and while, in all the pomp and magnificence of woe, his funeral is prepared, his heirs, in the mean time, impatient to examine his will, are looking on one another with

* Luke, xvi. 22.

jealous eyes, and already beginning to quarrel about the division of his substance.—One day, we see carried along the coffin of the smiling infant; the flower just nipped as it began to blossom in the parent's view; and the next day we behold a young man or young woman, of blooming form and promising hopes, laid in an untimely grave. While the funeral is attended by a numerous unconcerned company, who are discoursing to one another about the news of the day, or the ordinary affairs of life, let our thoughts rather follow to the house of mourning, and represent to themselves what is going on there. There we should see a disconsolate family, sitting in silent grief, thinking of the sad breach that is made in their little society; and, with tears in their eyes, looking to the chamber that is now left vacant, and to every memorial that presents itself of their departed friend. By such attention to the woes of others, the selfish hardness of our hearts will be gradually softened, and melted down into humanity.

Another day, we follow to the grave one who, in old age, and after a long career of life, has in full maturity sunk at last into rest. As we are going along to the mansion of the dead, it is natural for us to think, and to discourse of all the changes which such a person has seen during the course of his life. He has passed, it is likely, through varieties of fortune. He has experienced prosperity and adversity. He has seen families and kindreds rise and fall. He has seen peace and war succeeding in their turns; the face of his country undergoing many alterations; and the very city in which he dwelt, rising, in a manner, new around him. After all he has beheld, his eyes are now closed for ever. He was becoming a stranger in the midst of a new succession of men. A race who knew him not, had arisen to fill the earth. Thus passes the world way. Throughout all ranks and conditions, *one generation passeth and another generation cometh*; and this great inn is by turns evacuated, and replenished by troops of succeeding pilgrims.—Oh vain and inconstant world! Oh fleeting and transient life! When will the sons of men learn to think of thee as they ought? When will they learn humanity, from the afflictions of their brethren; or moderation and wisdom, from the sense of their own fugitive state?—But now to come nearer to ourselves, let us,

II. CONSIDER the death of our friends. Want of reflection, or the long habits either of a very busy, or a very dissipated life, may have rendered men insensible to all such objects as I have now described. The stranger, and the unknown, fall utterly unnoticed at their side. Life proceeds with them in its usual train, without being affected by events in which they take no personal concern. But the dissolution of those ties, which had

long bound men together in intimate and familiar union, gives a painful shock to every heart. When a family, who, for years, had been living in comfort and peace, are suddenly shattered by some of the most beloved or respected members being torn from them; when the husband or the spouse are separated for ever from the companion, who, amidst every vicissitude of fortune, solaced their life; who had shared all their joys, and participated in all their sorrows; when the weeping parent is folded in his arms the dying child whom he tenderly loved; when he is giving his last blessing, receiving the last fond adieu, looking for the last time on that countenance, now wasting and faded, which he had once beheld with much delight; then is the time, when the heart is made to drink all the bitterness of human woe.— But I seek not to wound your feelings by dwelling on these sad descriptions. Let us rather turn our thoughts to the manner in which such events ought to be received and improved, since happen they must in the life of man.

Then, indeed, is the time to weep. Let not a false idea of fortitude, or mistaken conceptions of religious duty, be employed to restrain the bursting emotion. Let the heart seek its relief, in the free effusion of just and natural sorrow. It is becoming in every one to shew, on such occasions, that he feels as a man ought to feel. At the same time let moderation temper the grief of a good man and a Christian. He must not *sorrow like those who have no hope*. As high elation of spirits befits not the joys, so continued and overwhelming dejection suits not the grief of this transitory world. Grief, when it goes beyond certain bounds, becomes unmanly; when it lasts beyond a certain time, becomes unseasonable. Let him not reject the alleviation which time brings to all the wounds of the heart, but suffer excessive grief to subside, by degrees, into a tender and affectionate remembrance. Let him consider, that it is in the power of Providence to raise him up other comforts in the place of those he has lost. Or, if his mind, at present, reject the thoughts of such consolation, let it turn for relief to the prospect of a future meeting in a happier world. This is indeed the chief soother of affliction; the most powerful balm of the bleeding heart. It assists us to view death as no more than a temporary separation from friends. They whom we have loved, still live, though not present to us. They are only removed into a different mansion in the house of the common Father. The toils of their pilgrimage are finished; and they are gone to the land of rest and peace. They are gone from this dark and troubled world, to join the great assembly of the just; and to dwell in the midst of everlasting light. In due time we hope to be associated with them in these blissful habitations. Until this season of reunion

arrive, no principle of religion discourages our holding correspondence of affection with them by means of faith and hope.

Meanwhile, let us respect the virtues, and cherish the memory of the deceased. Let their little failings be now forgotten. Let us dwell on what was amiable in their character, imitate their worth, and trace their steps. By this means the remembrance of those whom we loved shall become useful and improving to us, as well as sacred and dear; if we accustom ourselves to consider them as still speaking and exhorting us to all that is good; if, in situations where our virtue is tried, we call up their respected idea to view, and, as placed in their presence, think of the part which we could act before them without a blush.

Moreover, let the remembrance of the friends whom we have lost, strengthen our affection to those that remain. The narrower the circle becomes of those we love, let us draw the closer together. Let the heart that has been softened by sorrow, mellow into gentleness and kindness; make liberal allowance for the weakness of others; and divest itself of the little prejudices that may have formerly prepossessed it against them. The greater havoc that death has made among our friends on earth, let us cultivate connection more with God, and heaven, and virtue. Let those noble views which man's immortal character affords, fill and exalt our minds. Passengers only through this sublunary region, let our thoughts often ascend to that divine country, which we are taught to consider as the native seat of the soul. There we form connections that are never broken. There we meet with friends who never die. Among celestial things there is firm and lasting constancy, while all that is on earth changes and passes away.—Such are some of the fruits we should reap from the tender feelings excited by the death of friends. But they are not only our friends who die. Our enemies also must go to their *long home*: Let us, therefore,

III. CONSIDER how we ought to be affected, when they from whom suspicions have alienated, or rivalry has divided us; they with whom we have long contended, or by whom we imagine ourselves to have suffered wrong, are laid, or about to be laid, in the grave. How inconsiderable then appear those broils in which we had been long involved, those contests and feuds which we thought were to last for ever? The awful moment that now terminates them, makes us feel their vanity. If there be a spark of humanity left in the breast, the remembrance of our common fate then awakens it. Is there a man, who, if he were admitted to stand by the death-bed of his bitterest enemy,

and beheld him enduring that conflict which human nature must suffer at the last, would not be inclined to stretch forth the hand of friendship, to utter the voice of forgiveness, and to wish for perfect reconciliation with him before he left the world? Who is there that when he beholds the remains of his adversary deposited in the dust, feels not, in that moment, some relencings at the remembrance of those past animosities which mutually embittered their life?—"There lies the man with whom I contended so long, silent and mute for ever. He is fallen, and I am about to follow him. How poor is the advantage which I now enjoy? Where are the fruits of all our contest? In a short time we shall be laid together; and no remembrance remain of either of us under the sun. How many mistakes may there have been between us? Had not he his virtues and good qualities as well as I? When we both shall appear before the judgment-seat of God, shall I be found innocent and free of blame, for all the enmity I have borne to him?"—My friends, let the anticipation of such sentiments serve now to correct the inveteracy of prejudice, to cool the heat of anger, to allay the fierceness of resentment. How unnatural is it for animosities so lasting to possess the hearts of mortal men, that nothing can extinguish them but the cold hand of death? Is there not a sufficient proportion of evils in the short span of human life, that we seek to increase their number, by rushing into unnecessary contests with one another? When a few suns more have rolled over our heads, friends and foes shall have retreated together; and their love and their hatred be equally buried. Let our few days, then, be spent in peace. While we are all journeying onwards to death, let us rather *bear one another's burdens*, than harass one another by the way. Let us smooth and cheer the road as much as we can, rather than fill the valley of our pilgrimage with the hateful monuments of our contention and strife

THUS I have set before you some of those meditations which are naturally suggested by the prevalence of death around us; by the death of strangers, of friends, and of enemies. Because topics of this nature are obvious, let it not be thought that they are without use. They require to be recalled, repeated, and enforced. Moral and religious instruction derives its efficacy not so much from what men are taught to know, as from what they are brought to feel. It is not the dormant knowledge of any truths, but the vivid impression of them, which has influence on practice. Neither let it be thought that such meditations are unseasonable intrusions upon those who are living in health, in affluence, and ease. There is no hazard of their making too deep or painful an impression. The gloom which they occasion

is transient ; and will soon, too soon, it is probable, be dispelled by the succeeding affairs and pleasures of the world. To wisdom it certainly belongs that men should be impressed with just views of their nature and their state ; and the pleasures of life will always be enjoyed to most advantage when they are tempered with serious thought. There is *a time to mourn* as well as *a time to rejoice*. There is a *virtuous sorrow, which is better than laughter*. There is a *sadness of the countenance, by which the heart is made better*.

SERMON XXXVI.

ON THE PROGRESS OF VICE.

Be not deceived: Evil communications corrupt good manners.
1 CORINTHIANS, XV. 33.

THOUGH human nature be now fallen from its original honour, several good principles still remain in the hearts of men. There are few, if any, on whose minds the reverence for a Supreme Being continues not, in some degree, impressed. In every breast, some benevolent affections are found, and conscience still retains a sense of the distinction between moral good and evil. These principles of virtue are always susceptible of improvement; and, in favourable situations, might have a happy influence on practice. But such is the frailty of our nature, and so numerous are the temptations to evil, that they are in perpetual hazard of being either totally effaced or so far weakened as to produce no effect on conduct. They are good seeds originally sown in the heart; but which require culture, in order to make them rise to any maturity. If left without assistance, they are likely to be stifled by that profusion of noxious weeds which the soil sends forth around them.

Among the numerous causes which introduce corruption into the heart, and accelerate its growth, none is more unhappily powerful than that which is pointed out in the text, under the description of *evil communications*; that is, the contagion which is diffused by bad examples, and heightened by particular connections with persons of loose principles, or dissolute morals.—This, in a licentious state of society, is the most common source of those vices and disorders which so much abound in great cities; and often proves, in a particular manner, fatal to the young; even to them whose beginnings were once auspicious and promising. It may therefore be an useful employment of attention, to trace the progress of this principle of corruption, to examine the

means by which *evil communications* gradually undermine, and at last destroy, *good manners*, or (which here is the proper signification of the original word) *good morals*. It is indeed disagreeable to contemplate human nature, in this downward course of its progress. But it is always profitable to know our own infirmities and dangers. The consideration of them will lead me to suggest some of the means proper to be used, for preventing the mischiefs arising from *evil communications*

AGREEABLY to what I observed of certain virtuous principles being inherent in human nature, there are few but who set out at first in the world with good dispositions. The warmth which belongs to youth naturally exerts itself in generous feelings, and sentiments of honour; in strong attachments to friends, and the other emotions of a kind and tender heart. Almost all the plans with which persons who have been liberally educated begin the world, are connected with honourable views. At that period they repudiate whatever is mean or base. It is pleasing to them to think of commanding the esteem of those among whom they live, and of acquiring a name among men. But alas! how soon does this flattering prospect begin to be overcast! Desires of pleasure usher in temptation, and forward the growth of disorderly passions. Ministers of vice are seldom wanting to encourage, and flatter the passions of the young. Inferiors study to creep into favour, by servile obsequiousness to all their desires and humours. Glad to find any apology for the indulgences of which they are fond, the young too readily listen to the voice of those who suggest to them, that strict notions of religion, order, and virtue, are old-fashioned and illiberal; that the restraints which they impose are only fit to be prescribed to those who are in the first stage of pupillage; or to be preached to the vulgar, who ought to be kept within the closest bounds of regularity and subjection. But the goodness of their hearts, it is insinuated to them, and the liberality of their views, will fully justify their emancipating themselves, in some degree, from the rigid discipline of parents and teachers.

Soothing as such insinuations are to the youthful and inconsiderate, the first steps, however, in vice, are cautious and timid, and occasionally checked by remorse. As they begin to mingle more in the world, and emerge into the circles of gaiety and pleasure, finding these loose ideas countenanced by too general practice, they gradually become bolder in the liberties they take. If they had been bred to business, they begin to tire of industry, and look with contempt on the plodding race of citizens. If they be of superior rank, they think it becomes them to resemble their equals; to assume that freedom of behaviour, that air of forwardness, that tone of dissipation, that easy negligence of those with whom they converse, which appear fashionable in high life.

If affluence of fortune unhappily concur to favour their inclinations, and amusements and diversions succeed in a perpetual round; night and day are confounded; gaming fills up their vacant intervals; they live wholly in public places; they run into many degrees of excess, disagreeable even to themselves, merely from weak complaisance, and the fear of being ridiculed by their loose associates. Among these associates the most hardened and determined always take the lead. The rest follow them with implicit submission; and make proficiency in the school of iniquity in exact proportion to the weakness of their undertakings, and the strength of their passions.

How many pass away, after this manner, some of the most valuable years of their life, tost in a whirlpool of what cannot be called pleasure, so much as mere giddiness and folly? In the habits of perpetual connection with idle or licentious company, all reflection is lost; while circulated from one empty head, and one thoughtless heart, to another, folly shoots up into all its most ridiculous forms; prompts the extravagant unmeaning frolic in private; or sallies forth in public into mad rict; impelled sometimes by intoxication, sometimes by mere levity of spirits.

All the while, amidst this whole course of juvenile infatuation, I readily admit, that much good-nature may still remain. Generosity and attachments may be found; nay some awe of religion may still subsist, and some remains of those good impressions which were made upon the mind in early days. It might yet be very possible to reclaim such persons, and to form them for useful and respectable stations in the world, if virtuous and improving society should happily succeed to the place of that idle crew with whom they now associate; if important business should occur, to bring them into a different sphere of action; or if some reasonable stroke of affliction should in mercy be sent, to recall them to themselves, and to awaken serious and manly thought. But if youth, and vigour, and flowing fortune, continue; if a similar succession of companions go on to amuse them, to engross their time, and to stir up their passions; the day of ruin,—Let them take heed and beware!—the day of irrecoverable ruin begins to draw nigh. Fortune is squandered; health is broken; friends are offended, affronted, estranged; aged parents, perhaps, sent afflicted and mourning to the dust.

There are certain degrees of vice which are chiefly stamped with the character of the ridiculous and the contemptible; and there are also certain limits, beyond which if it pass, it becomes odious and execrable. If, to other corruptions which the heart has already received, be added the infusion of sceptical principles, that worst of all the *evil communications* of sinners, the whole of morals is then on the point of being overthrown. For every crime can then be palliated to conscience; every check

and restraint which had hitherto remained, is taken away. He who, in the beginning of his course, soothed himself with the thought that while he indulged his desires, he did hurt to no man; now pressed by the necessity of supplying those wants into which his expensive pleasures have brought him, goes on without remorse to defraud and to oppress. The lover of pleasure now becomes hardened and cruel; violates his trust, or betrays his friend; becomes a man of treachery, or a man of blood; satisfying, or at least endeavouring all the while to satisfy himself, that circumstances form his excuse; that by necessity he is impelled; and that, in gratifying the passions which nature had implanted within him, he does no more than follow nature.

Miserable and deluded man! to what art thou come at the last? Dost thou pretend to follow nature, when thou art contemning the laws of the God of nature? when thou art stifling his voice within thee, which remonstrates against thy crimes? when thou art violating the best part of thy nature, by counteracting the dictates of justice and humanity? Dost thou follow nature when thou renderest thyself an useless animal on the earth; and not useless only, but noxious to the society to which thou belongest, and to which thou art a disgrace; noxious, by the bad example thou hast set; noxious by the crimes thou hast committed; sacrificing innocence to thy guilty pleasures, and introducing shame and ruin into the habitations of peace; defrauding of their due the unsuspecting who have trusted thee; involving in the ruins of thy fortune many a worthy family; reducing the industrious and the aged to misery and want; by all which, if thou hast escaped the deserved sword of justice, thou hast at least brought on thyself the resentment and the reproach of all the respectable and the worthy?—Tremble then at the view of the gulph which is opening before thee. Look with horror at the precipice, on the brink of which thou standest, and if yet a moment be left for retreat; think how thou mayest escape, and be saved.

THIS brings to me what I proposed as the next head of discourse; to suggest some means that they may be used for stopping in time the progress of such mischiefs; to point out some remedies against the fatal infection of *evil communications*.

THE first and most obvious is, to withdraw from all associations with bad men, with persons either of licentious principles, or of disorderly conduct. I have shewn to what issue such dangerous connexions are apt to bring men at last. Nothing, therefore, is of more importance for the young, to whom I now chiefly address myself, than to be careful in the choice of their friends and companions. This choice is too frequently made, without much thought, or is determined by some casual connexion; and yet very often the whole fate of their future life depends upon it.

The circumstances which chiefly attract the liking and the friendship of youth, are vivacity, good humour, engaging manners, and a cheerful or easy temper; qualities, I confess, amiable in themselves, and useful and valuable in their place. But I intreat you to remember that these are not all the qualities requisite to form an intimate companion or friend. Something more is still to be looked for; a sound understanding, a steady mind, a firm attachment to principle, to virtue, and honour. As only solid bodies polish well, it is only on the substantial ground of these manly endowments, that the other amiable qualities can receive their proper lustre. Destitute of these essential requisites, they shine with no more than a tinsel brilliancy. It may sparkle for a little, amid a few circles of the frivolous and superficial; but it imposes not on the discernment of the public. The world in general seldom, after a short trial, judges amiss of the characters of men. You may be assured, that its character of you will be formed by the company you frequent; and how agreeable soever they may seem to be, if nothing is to be found among them but hollow qualities, and external accomplishments, they soon fall down into the class, at best of the insignificant, perhaps of the worthless; and you sink, of course, in the opinion of the public, into the same despicable rank.

Allow me to warn you, that the most gay and pleasing are sometimes the most insidious and dangerous companions; an admonition which respects both the sexes. Often they attach themselves to you from interested motives; and if any taint or suspicion lie on their character, under the cover of your rank, your fortune, or your good reputation, they seek protection for themselves. Look round you, then, with attentive eye, and weigh characters well, before you connect yourselves too closely with any who court your society. *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Wherefore, enter not thou into the council of the scorner. Walk not in the way with evil men; avoid it; pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.**

In order to prevent the influence of *evil communications*, it is farther needful that you fix to yourselves certain principles of conduct, and to be resolved and determined on no occasion to swerve from them. Setting the consideration of religion and virtue aside, and attending merely to interest and reputation, it will be found that he who enters on active life, without having ascertained some regular plan, according to which he is to guide himself, will be unprosperous in the whole of his subsequent progress. But when conduct is viewed in a moral and religious light, the effect of having fixed no principles of action, of having

* Prov. iv. 14. xiii. 20.

formed no laudable standard of character, becomes more obviously fatal. For hence it is, that the young and thoughtless imbibe so readily the poison of *evil communications*, and fall a prey to every seducer. They have no internal guide whom they are accustomed to follow and obey; nothing within themselves that can give firmness to their conduct. They are of course the victims of momentary inclination or caprice; religious and good by starts, when during the absence of temptation and tempers, the virtuous principle stirs within them; but never long the same; changing and fluctuating according to the passion that chances to rise, or the instigation of those with whom they have connected themselves. They are sailing on a dangerous sea, which abounds with rocks; without compass, by which to direct their course; or helm, by which to guide the vessel. Whereas, if they acted on a system, if their behaviour made it appear that they were determined to conduct themselves by certain rules and principles, not only would they escape innumerable dangers, but they would command respect from the licentious themselves.— Evil doers would cease to lay their snares for one whom they saw moving above them, in a higher sphere, and with a more steady course.

As a father corrective of *evil communications*, and as a foundation to those principles which you lay down for conduct, let me advise you sometimes to think seriously of what constitutes real enjoyment and happiness. Your days cannot be entirely spent in company and pleasure. How closely soever you are surrounded and besieged by evil companions, there must be some intervals, in which you are left by yourselves; when, after all the turbulence of amusement is over, your mind will naturally assume a graver and more pensive cast. These are precious intervals to you if you knew their value. Seize that sober hour of retirement and silence. Indulge the meditations which then begin to rise. Cast your eye backwards on what is past of your life; look forward to what is probably to come. Think of the part you are now acting; and of what remains to be acted, perhaps to be suffered, before you die. Then is the time to form your plans of happiness; not merely for the next day, but for the general course of your life. Remember, that what is pleasing to you at twenty, will not be equally so at forty or fifty years of age; and that what continues longest pleasing, is always most valuable. Recollect your own feelings in different scenes of life. Inquire on what occasions you have felt the truest satisfaction; whether days of sobriety and a rational employment have not left behind them a more agreeable remembrance, than nights of licentiousness and riot. Look round you on the world; reflect on the different societies which have fallen under your observation; and think who among them appear to enjoy life to most

advantage ; whether they who, encircled by gay companions, are constantly fatiguing themselves in quest of pleasure ; or they to whom pleasure comes unsought in the course of an active, virtuous, and manly life. Compare together these two classes of mankind, and ask your own hearts, to which of them you would choose to belong. If, in a happy moment, the light of truth begin to break in upon you, refuse not admittance to the ray. If your hearts secretly reproach you for the wrong choice you have made, bethink yourselves that the evil is not irreparable. Still there is time for repentance and retreat ; and a return to wisdom is always honourable.

Were such meditations often indulged, the *evil communications* of sinners would die away before them ; the force of their poison would evaporate ; the world would begin to assume in your eyes a new form and shape. Disdain not, in these solitary hours, to recollect what the wisest have said and have written concerning human happiness and human vanity. Treat not their opinions as effusions merely of peevishness or disappointment ; but believe them to be what they truly are, the result of long experience, and thorough acquaintance with the world. Consider that the season of youth is passing fast away. It is time for you to be taking measures for an establishment in life ; nay, it were wise to be looking forward to a placid enjoyment of old age. That is a period you wish to see ; but how miserable when it arrives, if it yield you nothing but the dregs of life ; and present no retrospect, except that of a thoughtless and dishonoured youth.

LET me once more advise you, to look forward sometimes beyond old age ; to look to a future world. Amidst *evil communications*, let your belief and your character as Christians arise to your view. Think of the sacred name in which you were baptised. Think of the God whom your fathers honoured and worshipped ; of the religion in which they trained you up ; of the venerable rites in which they brought you to partake. Their paternal cares have now ceased. They have finished their earthly course ; and the time is coming when you must follow them. You know that you are not to live always here ; and you surely do not believe that your existence is to end with this life. Into what world, then, are you next to go ? Whom will you meet with there ? Before whose tribunal are you to appear ? What account will you be able to give of your present trifling and irregular conduct to Him who made you ?—Such thoughts may be treated as unseasonable intrusions. But intrude they sometimes will, whether you make them welcome or not. Better, then, to allow them free reception when they come, and to consider fairly to what they lead. You have seen persons die ; at least, you have heard of your friends dying near you. Did it never enter into your minds, to think what their last reflections probably

were in their concluding moments; or what your own, in such a situation, would be? What would be then your hopes and fears; what part you would then wish to have acted; in what light your closing eyes would then view this life, and this world.

These are thoughts, my friends, too important to be always excluded. These are things too solemn and awful to be trifled with. They are superior to all the ridicule of fools. They come home to every man's bosom; and are entitled to every man's highest attention. Let us regard them as becomes reasonable and mortal creatures; and they will prove effectual antidotes to the *evil communications* of petulant scoffers. When vice or folly arise to tempt us under flattering forms, let the serious character which we bear as men come also forward to view; and let the solemn admonitions, with which I conclude, sound full in our ears: *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Come out from amongst them, and be separate. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. The way of life is above to the wise; and he that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.**

* Prov. i. 10. 2 Corinth. vi. 17. Eccles. xii. 1. Prov. xv. 24.

SERMON XXXVII.

ON FORTITUDE.

Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. PSALM XXVII. 3.

THIS world is a region of danger, in which perfect safety is possessed by no man. Though we live in times of established tranquillity, when there is no ground to apprehend that *an host* shall, in the literal sense, *encamp against us*; yet every man, from one quarter or other, has somewhat to dread. *Riches* often *make to themselves wings and flee away*. The firmest health may in a moment be shaken. The most flourishing family may unexpectedly be scattered. The appearances of our security are frequently deceitful. When our sky seems more settled and serene, in some unobserved quarter gathers the little black cloud, in which the tempest ferments, and prepares to discharge itself on our head. Such is the real situation of man in this world; and he who flatters himself with an opposite view of his state, only lives in the paradise of fools.

In this situation, no quality is more requisite than constancy, or fortitude of mind; a quality which the Psalmist appears, from the sentiment in the text, to have possessed in an eminent degree. Fortitude was justly classed, by the ancient philosophers, among the cardinal virtues. It is indeed essential to the support of them all; and it is most necessary to be acquired by every one who wishes to discharge with fidelity the duties of his station. It is the armour of the mind, which will fit him for encountering the trials and surmounting the dangers, that are likely to occur in the course of his life. It may be thought, perhaps, to be a quality, in some measure constitutional; dependent on firmness of nerves, and strength of spirits. Though, partly, it is so, yet experience shews that it may also be acquired by prin-

ciple, and be fortified by reason; and it is only when thus acquired, and thus fortified, that it can be accounted to carry the character of virtue. Fortitude is opposed, as all know, to timidity, irresolution, a feeble and a wavering spirit. It is placed, like other virtues, in the middle between two extremes; standing at an equal distance from rashness on the one hand, and from pusillanimity on the other. In discoursing on this subject, I propose, first, to shew the importance of fortitude or constancy; next to ascertain the grounds on which it must rest; and lastly, to suggest some considerations for assisting the exercise of it.

I. THE high importance of fortitude will easily appear, if we consider it as respecting either the happiness of human life, or the proper discharge of its duties.

Without some degree of fortitude there can be no happiness; because, amidst the thousand uncertainties of life, there can be no enjoyment of tranquility. The man of feeble and timorous spirit lives under perpetual alarms. He foresees every distant danger, and trembles. He explores the regions of possibility, to discover the dangers that may arise. Often he creates imaginary ones; always magnifies those that are real. Hence, like a person haunted by spectres, he loses the free enjoyment even of a safe and prosperous state. On the first shock of adversity, he desponds. Instead of exerting himself to lay hold on the resources that remain, he gives up all for lost; and resigns himself to abject and broken spirits.—On the other hand, firmness of mind is the parent of tranquillity. It enables one to enjoy the present without disturbance; and to look calmly on dangers that approach, or evils that threaten in future. It suggests good hopes. It supplies resources. It allows a man to retain the full possession of himself, in every situation of fortune. Look into the heart of this man, and you will find composure, cheerfulness, and magnanimity. Look into the heart of the other, and you will see nothing but confusion, anxiety, and trepidation. The one is the castle built on a rock, which defies the attacks of surrounding waters. The other is a hut placed on the shore, which every wind shakes, and every wave overflows.

IF fortitude be thus essential to the enjoyment of life, it is equally so to the proper discharge of all its most important duties. He who is of a cowardly mind is, and must be, a slave to the world. He fashions his whole conduct according to its hopes and fears. He smiles, and fawns, and betrays, from abject considerations of personal safety. He is incapable of either conceiving, or executing any great design. He can neither stand the clamour of the multitude nor the frowns of the mighty. The

wind of popular favour, or the threats of power, are sufficient to shake his most determined purpose. The world always knows where to find him. He may pretend to have principles; but on every trying occasion, it will be seen, that his pretended principles bend to convenience and safety.—The man of virtuous fortitude, again, follows the dictates of his heart, unembarrassed by those restraints which lie upon the timorous. Having once determined what is fit for him to do, no threatenings can shake, nor dangers appal him. He rests upon himself, supported by a consciousness of inward dignity. I do not say that this disposition alone will secure him against every vice. He may be lifted up with pride. He may be seduced by pleasure. He may be hurried away by passion. But at least on one quarter he will be safe; by no object fears misled into evil.

Without this temper of mind, no man can be a thorough Christian. For his profession, as such, requires him to be superior to that *fear of man which bringeth a snare*; enjoins him, for the sake of a good conscience, to encounter every danger; and to be prepared, if called, even to lay down his life in the cause of religion and truth. All who have been distinguished as servants of God, or benefactors of men; all who, in perilous situations, have acted their part with such honour as to render their names illustrious through succeeding ages, have been eminent for fortitude of mind. Of this we have one conspicuous example in the apostle Paul, whom it will be instructive for us to view in a remarkable occurrence of his life. After having long acted as the Apostle of the Gentiles, his mission called him to go to Jerusalem, where he knew that he was to encounter the utmost violence of his enemies. Just before he set sail, he called together the elders of his favourite church at Ephesus, and in a pathetic speech, which does great honour to his character, gave them his last farewell. Deeply affected by their knowledge of the certain dangers to which he was exposing himself, all the assembly were filled with distress, and melted into tears. The circumstances were such as might have conveyed dejection even to a resolute mind; and would have totally overwhelmed the feeble. *They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him; sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.* What were then the sentiments, what was the language of this great and good man? Hear the words which spoke his firm and undaunted mind. *Behold, I go bound in the spirit into Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there! save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth, in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the*

*Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.** There was uttered the voice, there breathed the spirit, of a brave and a virtuous man. Such a man knows not what it is to shrink from danger when conscience points out his path. In that path he is determined to walk; let the consequences be what they will. *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.†* “For me there is a part appointed to act. “I go to perform it. My duty I shall do to-day. Let “*to-morrow take thought for the things of itself.*”—Having thus shown the importance, I proceed,

II. To show the proper foundations of constancy and fortitude of mind. They are principally two; a good conscience, and trust in God.

A corrupted and guilty man can possess no true firmness of heart. He who, by crooked paths, pursues dishonourable ends, has many things to dismay him. He not only dreads the disappointment of his designs, by some of those accidents to which all are exposed; but he has also to dread the treachery of his confederates, the discovery and reproach of the world, and the just displeasure of Heaven. His fears he is obliged to conceal; but while he assumes the appearance of intrepidity before the world, he trembles within himself; and the bold and steady eye of integrity frequently darts terror into his heart. There is, it is true, a sort of constitutional courage, which sometimes has rendered men daring in the most flagitious attempts. But this foolhardiness of the rash, this boldness of the ruffian, is altogether different from real fortitude. It arises merely from warmth of blood, from want of thought, and blindness to danger. As it forms no character of value, so it appears only in occasional sallies; and never can be uniformly maintained. It requires adventitious props to support it; and, in some hour of trial, always fails. There can be no true courage, no regular presevering constancy, but what is connected with principle, and founded on a consciousness of rectitude of intention. This, and this only, erects that brazen wall, which we can oppose to every hostile attack. It clothes us with an armour, on which fortune will spend its shafts in vain. All is sound within. There is no weak place, where we particularly dread a blow. There is no occasion for false colours to be hung out. No disguise is needed to cover us. We would be satisfied if all mankind could look into our hearts. What has he to fear, who not only acts on a plan which his conscience approves, but who knows that every good man, nay the whole unbiassed world, if they could trace his intentions, would justify and approve his conduct?

* Acts, xx. 22, 23, 24-37, 38.

† Job, xxvii. 5, 6.

HE knows, at the same, time that he is acting under the immediate eye and protection of the Almighty. *Behold, my witness is in heaven ; and my record is on high.** Here opens a new source of fortitude to every virtuous man. The consciousness of such an illustrious spectator invigorates and animates him. He trusts, that the eternal Lover of righteousness not only beholds and approves, but will strengthen and assist ; will not suffer him to be unjustly oppressed, and will reward his constancy in the end, with glory, honour, and immortality. A good conscience, thus supported, bestows on the heart a much greater degree of intrepidity than it could otherwise inspire. One who rests on an almighty, though invisible, Protector, exerts his powers with double force ; acts with vigour not his own. Accordingly, it was from this principle of trust in God, that the Psalmist derived that courage and boldness which he expresses in the text. He had said immediately before, *The Lord is my light and my salvation ; the Lord is the strength of my life.* The consequence which directly follows is, *Of whom shall I be afraid ? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.* It remains.

III. THAT I suggest a few considerations which may prove auxiliary to the exercise of virtuous fortitude in the midst of dangers.

From what was just now said, it appears, first, that it is of high importance to every one, who wishes to act his part with becoming resolution, to cultivate a religious principle, and to be inspired with trust in God. The imperfections of the best are indeed so numerous, as to give them no title to claim, on their own account, the protection of Heaven. But we are taught to believe, that the merciful God, who made us, and who *knows our frame*, favours the sincere and upright ; that the supreme administration of the universe is always on the side of truth and virtue ; and that therefore, every worthy character, and every just and good cause, though, for a while it should be depressed, is likely to receive countenance and protection in the end. The more firmly this belief is rooted in the heart, its influence will be more powerful, in surmounting the fears which arise from a sense of our own weakness or danger. The records of all nations afford a thousand remarkable instances of the effect of this principle, both on individuals, and on bodies of men. Animated by the strong belief of a just cause and a protecting God, *the feeble have waxed strong*, and have despised dangers, sufferings, and death. Handfuls of men have defied *host that were encamped against them* ; and have gone forth, conquering and to conquer. *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon* have called forth a

* Job, xvi 19

valour which astonished the world ; and which could have been exerted by none but those who fought under a divine banner.

IN the next place, let him who would preserve fortitude in difficult situations, fill his mind with a sense of what constitutes the true honour of man. It consists not in the multitude of riches, or the elevation of rank ; for experience shews that these may be possessed by the worthless, as well as by the deserving. It consists in being deterred by no danger when duty calls us forth ; in fulfilling our allotted part, whatever it may be, with faithfulness, bravery, and constancy of mind. These qualities never fail to stamp distinction on the character. They confer on him who discovers them, an honourable superiority, which all, even enemies, feel and revere. Let every man, therefore, when the hour of danger comes, bethink himself, that now is arrived the hour of trial, the hour which must determine, whether he is to rise, or to sink for ever, in the esteem of all around him. If, when put to the test, he discovers no firmness to maintain his ground, no fortitude to stand a shock, he has forfeited every pretension to a manly mind. He must reckon on being exposed to general contempt ; and, what is worse, he will feel that he deserves it. In his own eyes he will be contemptible ; than which, surely, no misery can be more severe.

BUT in order to acquire habits of fortitude, what is of the highest consequence is to have formed a just estimate of the goods and evils of life, and of the value of life itself. For here lies the chief source of our weakness and pusillanimity. We overvalue the advantages of fortune, rank, and riches, ease and safety. Deluded by vain opinions, we look to these as our ultimate goods. We hang upon them with fond attachment ; and to forfeit any hope of advancement, to incur the least discredit with the world ; or to be brought down but one step from the station we possess, is regarded with consternation and dismay. Hence, a thousand weights hang upon the mind, which depress its courage, and bend it to mean and dishonourable compliances. What fortitude can he possess, what worthy or generous purpose can he form, who conceives diminution of rank, or loss of fortune, to be the chief evils which man can suffer ? Put these into the balance with true honour, with conscious integrity, with the esteem of the virtuous and the wise, with the favour of Almighty God, with peace of mind and hope of Heaven ; and then think, whether those dreaded evils are sufficient to intimidate you from doing your duty. Look beyond external appearances to the inside of things. Suffer not yourselves to be imposed on by that glittering varnish, with which the surface of the world dazzles the vulgar. Consider how many are contented and happy without those advantages of fortune, on which you put so extravagant a value. Consider whether it is possible for you to

be happy with them, if, for their sake, you forfeit all that is estimable in man. The favour of the great, perhaps, you think, is at stake; or that popularity with the multitude, on which you build plans of advancement. Alas! how precarious are the means which you employ in order to attain the end you have in view; and the end itself, how little is it worthy of your ambition! That favour which you pursue, of dubious advantage when gained, is frequently lost by servile compliance. The timid and abject are detected, and despised even by those whom they court; while the firm and resolute rise in the end to those honours, which the other pursued in vain.

PUT the case at the worst. Suppose not your fortune only, but your safety, to be in hazard? your life itself to be endangered, by adhering to conscience and virtue. Think, what a creeping and ignominious state you would render life, if, when your duty calls, you would expose it to no danger? If by a dastardly behaviour, you would, at any expense, preserve it. That life which you are so anxious to preserve, can at any rate be prolonged only for a few years more; and those years may be full of woe. He, who will not risk death when conscience requires him to face it, ought to be ashamed to live.—Consider, as a man, and a Christian, for what purpose life was given thee by Heaven. Was it, that thou mightest pass a few years in low pleasures and ignoble sloth; flying into every corner to hide thyself, when the least danger rises to view? No: life was given that thou mightest come forth to act some useful and honourable part, on that theatre where thou hast been placed by Providence; mightest glorify him that made thee; and, by steady perseverance in virtue, rise in the end to an immortal state.

Son of Man, remember thy original honours! Assert the dignity of thy nature! Shake off this pusillanimous dread of death; and seek to fulfil the ends for which thou wert sent forth by thy Creator!—The sentiment of a noble mind is, *I count not my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.* To the *finishing of his course*, let every one direct his eye; and let him now appreciate life according to the value it will be found to have when summed up at the close. This is the period which brings every thing to the test. Illusions may formerly have imposed on the world; may have imposed on the man himself. But all illusion then vanishes. The real character comes forth. The estimate of happiness is fairly formed. Hence it has been justly said, that no man can be pronounced either great or happy, until his last hour come. To that last hour, what will bring such satisfaction or add so much dignity, as the reflection on having surmounted with firmness all the discouragements of the world, and having persevered to the end in one uniform course of fidelity and honour? We remarked, before, the magnanimous beha-

viour of the Apostle Paul, when he had persecution and distress full in view. Hear now the sentiments of the same great man, when the time of his last suffering approached; and remark the majesty and ease with which he looked on death. *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.** How many years of life does such a dying moment overbalance? Who would not chuse in this manner to go off the stage, with such a song of triumph in his mouth, rather than prolong his existence through a wretched old age, stained with sin and shame.

ANIMATED by these considerations, let us nourish that fortitude of mind, which is so essential to a man and Christian.—Let no discouragement nor danger deter us from doing what is right. Through *honour and dishonour, through good report and bad report*, let us preserve fidelity to our God and our Saviour. *Though an host should encamp against us*, let us not fear to discharge our duty. God assists us in the virtuous conflict; and will crown the conqueror with eternal rewards. *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. To him that overcometh*, saith our blessed Lord, *I will grant to sit with me on my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne.†*

* 2 Timothy, iv. 6, 7.

† Rev. ii. 10.—iii. 21.

SERMON XXXVIII.

ON ENVY.

Charity envieth not.—1 CORINTHIANS, XIII. 4.

ENVY is a sensation of uneasiness and disquiet, arising from the advantages which others are supposed to possess above us, accompanied with malignity towards those who possess them. This is universally admitted to be one of the blackest passions in the human heart. In this world we depend much on one another; and were therefore formed by God to be mutually useful and assisting. The instincts of kindness and compassion which belong to our frame, shew how much it was the intention of our Creator that we should be united in friendship. If any infringe this great law of nature, by acts of causeless hostility, resentment may justly arise. No one is to be condemned for defending his rights, and shewing displeasure against a malicious enemy. But to conceive ill-will at one who has attacked none of our rights, nor done us any injury, solely because he is more prosperous than we are is a disposition altogether unnatural; it suits not the human constitution, and partakes more of the rancor of an evil spirit. Hence, the character of an envious man is universally odious. All disclaim it; and they who feel themselves under the influence of this passion, carefully conceal it.

But it is proper to consider, that among all our passions, both good and bad, there are many different gradations. Sometimes they swim on the surface of the mind, without producing any internal agitation. They proceed no farther than the beginnings of passion. Allayed by our constitution, or tempered by the mixture of other dispositions, they exert no considerable influence on the temper. Though the character in which envy forms the ruling passion, and reigns in all its force, be one too odious,

I hope, to be common; yet some shade, some tincture, of this evil disposition mixes with most characters in the world. It is, perhaps, one of the most prevailing infirmities to which we are subject. There are few but who, at one time or other, have found somewhat of this nature stirring within them; some lurking uneasiness in their mind, when they looked up to others, who enjoyed a greater share than had fallen to their lot, of some advantages which they wished, and thought themselves entitled, to possess. Though this should not embitter their disposition; though it should create the uneasiness only, without the malignity, of envy; yet still it is a disturbed state of mind; and always borders upon, if it actually include not, some vicious affections. In order, as far as possible, to remedy this evil, I shall now consider what are the most general grounds of the envy which men are apt to bear to others; and shall examine what foundation they afford, for any degree of this troublesome and dangerous passion.—The chief grounds of envy may be reduced to three: Accomplishments of mind; advantages of birth, rank, and fortune; superior success in worldly pursuits.

I. ACCOMPLISHMENTS, or endowments of the mind. The chief endowment for which man deserves to be valued, is virtue. This unquestionably forms the most estimable distinction among mankind. Yet this, which may appear surprising, never forms any ground of envy. No man is envied for being more just, more generous, more patient, or forgiving than others. This may, in part, be owing to virtue producing in every one who beholds it, that high degree of respect and love, which extinguishes envy. But, probably, it is more owing to the good opinion which every one entertains of his own moral qualities. Some virtues, or at least the seeds of them, he finds within his breast. Others he vainly attributes to himself. Those in which he is plainly deficient, he undervalues, as either not real virtues, or virtues of very inferior rank, and rests satisfied that on the whole, he is as worthy and respectable as his neighbour.

The case is different, with regard to those mental abilities and powers which are ascribed to others. As long as these are exerted in a sphere of action remote from ours, and not brought into competition with talents of the same kind, to which we have pretensions, they create no jealousy. They are viewed as distant objects, in which we have not any concern. It is not until they touch our own line, and appear to rival us in what we wish to excel, that they awaken envy. Even then envy is, properly speaking, not grounded on the talents of others. For here, too, our self-complacency brings us relief; from the persuasion that,

were we thoroughly known, and full justice done to us, our abilities would be found not inferior to those of our rivals. What properly occasions envy, is the fruit of the accomplishments of others; the pre-eminence which the opinion of the world bestows, or which we dread it will bestow, on their talents above ours. Hence, distinguished superiority in genius, learning, eloquence, or any other of those various arts that attract the notice of the world, often become painful grounds of envy; not indeed to all indifferently, but to those who follow the same line of pursuit. Mere rivalry, inspired by emulation, would carry no reproach; were not that rivalry joined with obliquity, and a malignant spirit; did it not lead to secret detraction, and unfair methods of diminishing the reputation of others. Too frequently has such a spirit tarnished the character of those who sought to shine in the elegant arts; and who, otherwise, had a just title to fame.—Let such as are addicted to this infirmity consider how much they degrade themselves. Superior merit, of any kind, always rests on itself. Conscious of what it deserves, it disdains low competitions and jealousies. They who are stung with envy especially when they allow its malignity to appear, confess a sense of their own inferiority; and in effect, pay homage to that merit from which they endeavour to detract.

But in order to eradicate the passion, and to cure the disquiet which it creates, let such persons farther consider, how considerable the advantage is which their rivals have gained, by any superiority over them. They whom you envy, are themselves inferior to others who follow the same pursuits. For how few, how very few, have reached the summit of excellence, in the art or study which they cultivate? Even that degree of excellence which they have attained, how seldom is it allowed to them by the world, till after they die? Public applause is the most fluctuating and uncertain of all rewards. Admired as they may be by a circle of their friends, they have to look up to others, who stand above them in public opinion; and undergo the same mortifications which you suffer in looking up to them. Consider what labour it has cost them to arrive at that degree of eminence they have gained; and, after all their labour, how imperfect their recompense is at last. Within what narrow bounds is their fame confined? With what a number of humiliations is it mixed? To how many are they absolutely unknown? Among those who know them, how many censure and decry them?—Attending fairly to these considerations, the envious might come in the end to discern, that the fame acquired by any accomplishment of the mind, by all that skill can contrive, or genius can execute, amounts to no more than a small elevation; raises the

possessor to such an inconsiderable height above the crowd, that others may, without disquiet, sit down contented with their own mediocrity.

II. **ADVANTAGES** of fortune, superiority in birth, rank, and riches, even qualifications of body and form, become grounds of envy. Among external advantages, those which relate to the body ought certainly, in the comparative estimation of ourselves and others, to hold the lowest place; as in the acquisition of them we can claim no merit, but must ascribe them entirely to the gift of nature. But envy has often shewed itself here in full malignity; though a small measure of reflection might have discovered that there was little or no ground for this passion to arise. It would have proved a blessing to multitudes, to have wanted those advantages for which they are envied. How frequently, for instance, has beauty betrayed the possessors of it into many a snare, and brought upon them many a disaster? Beheld with spiteful eyes by those who are their rivals, they, in the mean time, glow with no less envy against others by whom they are surpassed; while, in the midst of their competitions, jealousies, and concealed enmities, the fading flower is easily blasted; short-lived at the best, and trifling at any rate, in comparison with the higher and more lasting beauties of the mind.

But of all the grounds of envy among men, superiority in rank and fortune is the most general. Hence the malignity which the poor commonly bear to the rich, as engrossing to themselves all the comforts of life. Hence the evil eye, with which persons of inferior station scrutinize those who are above them in rank, and if they approach to that rank, their envy is generally strongest against such as are just one step higher than themselves.—Alas! my friends, all this envious disquietude, which agitates the world, arises from a deceitful figure which imposes upon the public view. False colours are hung out: the real state of men is not what it seems to be. The order of society requires a distinction of ranks to take place; but, in point of happiness, all men come much nearer to equality than is commonly imagined; and the circumstances, which form any material difference of happiness among them, are not of that nature which renders them grounds of envy. The poor man possesses not, it is true, some of the conveniencies and pleasures of the rich; but, in return, he is free from any embarrassments to which they are subject. By the simplicity and uniformity of his life, he is delivered from that variety of cares, which perplex those who have great affairs to manage, intricate plans to pursue, many enemies, perhaps, to encounter in the pursuit. In the tranquillity of his small habitation and private family,

he enjoys a peace which is often unknown at courts. The gratifications of nature, which are always the most satisfactory, are possessed by him to their full extent; and if he be a stranger to the refined pleasures of the wealthy, he is unacquainted also with the desire of them, and by consequence feels no want. His plain meal satisfies his appetite, with a relish, probably higher than that of the rich man who sits down to his luxurious banquet. His sleep is more sound; his health more firm; he knows not what spleen, langour, or listlessness are. His accustomed employments or labours are not more oppressive to him, than the labour of attendance on courts and the great, the labours of dress, the fatigue of amusements, the very weight of idleness, frequently are to the rich. In the mean time, all the beauty of the face of nature, all the enjoyments of domestic society, all the gaiety and cheerfulness of an easy mind, are as open to him as to those of the highest rank. The splendour of retinue, the sound of titles, the appearances of high respect, are indeed soothing, for a short time, to the great. But, become familiar, they are soon forgotten. Custom effaces their impression. They sink into the rank of those ordinary things which daily recur, without raising any sensation of joy. Cease, therefore, from looking up with discontent and envy to those whom birth or fortune have placed above you. Adjust the balance of happiness fairly. When you think of the enjoyments you want, think also of the troubles from which you are free. Allow their just value to the comforts you possess; and you will find reason to rest satisfied, with a very moderate, though not an opulent and splendid, condition of fortune. Often, did you know the whole, you would be inclined to pity the state of those whom you now envy.

III. SUPERIOR success in the course of worldly pursuits is a frequent ground of envy. Among all ranks of men, competitions arise. Wherever any favourite object is pursued in common, jealousies seldom fail to take place among those who are equally desirous of attaining it; as in that ancient instance of envy recorded of Joseph's brethren, who *hated their brother, because their father loved him more than all the rest.** “I could easily bear,” says one, “that some others should be more reputable or famous, should be richer or greater than I.” —It is but just, that this man should enjoy the distinction to which his splendid abilities have raised him. It is natural for that man, to command the respect to which he is entitled by his birth or his rank. But when I, and another, have started in the race of life, upon equal terms, and in the same

* Gen. xxvii. 4.

“rank; that he, without any pretension to uncommon merit, should have suddenly so far outstripped me; should have engrossed all that public favour to which I am no less entitled than he; this is what I cannot bear; my blood boils, my spirit swells with indignation, at this undeserved treatment I have suffered from the world.”—Complaints of this nature are often made, by them who seek to justify the envy which they bear to their more prosperous neighbours. But if such persons wish not to be thought unjust, let me desire them to enquire, whether they have been altogether fair in the comparison they have made of their own merit with that of their rivals? and whether they have not themselves to blame more than the world, for being left behind in the career of fortune? The world is not always blind or unjust, in conferring its favours.—Instances, indeed, sometimes occur, of deserving persons prevented, by a succession of cross incidents, from rising into public acceptance. But in the ordinary course of things, merit, sooner or later, receives a reward, while the greater part of men’s misfortunes and disappointments can, generally, be traced, to some misconduct of their own. *Wisdom bringeth to honour: The hand of the diligent maketh rich*; and, it has been said, not altogether without reason, that, of his own fortune in life, every man is the chief artificer. If Joseph was preferred by the father to all his brethren, his subsequent conduct shewed how well he merited the preference.

Supposing, however, the world to have been unjust, in an uncommon degree, with regard to you, this will not vindicate malignity and envy towards a more prosperous competitor. You may accuse the world; but what reason have you to bear ill-will to him, who has only improved the favour which the world shewed him? If, by means that are unfair, he has risen, and, to advance himself, has acted injuriously by you, resentment is justifiable; but, if you cannot accuse him of any such improper conduct, his success alone gives no sanction to your envy. You, perhaps, preferred the enjoyment of your ease, to the stir of a busy, or to the cares of a thoughtful life. Retired from the world, and following your favourite inclinations, you were not always attentive to seize the opportunities which offered for doing justice to your character, and improving your situation. Ought you then to complain, if the more active and labourious have acquired what you were negligent to gain?—Consider, that if you have obtained less preferment, you have possessed more indulgence and ease. Consider, moreover, that the rival to whom you look up with repining eyes, though more fortunate in the world, may perhaps, on the whole, not be more

happy than you. He has all the vicissitudes of the world before him. He may have much to encounter, much to suffer, from which you are protected by the greater obscurity of your station. Every situation in life has both a bright and a dark side. Let not your attention dwell only on what is bright on the side of those you envy, and dark on your own. But, bringing into view both sides of your respective conditions, estimate fairly the sum of felicity.

Thus I have suggested several considerations, for evincing the unreasonableness of that disquietude which envy raises in our breasts; considerations, which tend at least to mitigate and allay the workings of this malignant passion, and which, in a sober mind, ought totally to extinguish it. The scope of the whole has been to promote, in every one, contentment with his own state. Many arguments of a different nature may be employed against envy; some taken from its sinful and criminal nature; some from the mischiefs to which it gives rise in the world; others from the misery which it produces to him who nourishes this viper in his bosom. But, undoubtedly, the most efficacious arguments are such as shew, that the circumstances of others, compared with our own, afford no ground for envy. The mistaken ideas which are entertained of the high importance of certain worldly advantages and distinctions, form the principal cause of our repining at our own lot, and envying that of others. To things light in themselves, our imagination has added undue weight. Did we allow reflection and wisdom to correct the prejudices which we have imbibed, and to disperse those phantoms of our own creating, the gloom which overcasts us would gradually vanish. Together with returning contentment, the sky would clear up, and every object brighten around us. It is in the sullen and dark shade of discontent, that noxious passions, like venomous animals, breed and prey upon the heart.

Envy is a passion of so odious a nature, that not only it is concealed as much as possible from the world, but every man is glad to dissemble the appearances of it to his own heart. Hence it is apt to grow upon him unperceived. Let him who is desirous to keep his heart chaste and pure from its influence, examine himself strictly on those dispositions which he bears towards his prosperous neighbours. Does he ever view, with secret uneasiness, the merit of others rising into notice and distinction? Does he hear their praises with unwilling ear? Does he feel an inclination to depreciate what he dares not openly blame? When obliged to commend, does his cold and awkward approbation insinuate his belief of some unknown defects in the applauded character?—From such symptoms as these he may

infer that the disease of envy is forming; that the poison is beginning to spread its infection over his heart.

THE causes that nourish envy are principally two; and two which, very frequently, operate in conjunction; these are, pride and indolence. The connection of pride with envy, is obvious and direct. The high value which the proud set on their own merit, the unreasonable claims which they form on the world, and the injustice which they suppose to be done to them by any preference given to others, are perpetual sources, first of discontent, and next of envy. When indolence is joined to pride, the disease of the mind becomes more inveterate and incurable. Pride leads men to claim more than they deserve. Indolence prevents them from obtaining what they might justly claim. Disappointments follow; and spleen, malignity, and envy, rage within them. The proud and indolent are always envious. Wrapt up in their own importance, they sit still, and repine, because others are more prosperous than they; while, with all their high opinion of themselves, they have done nothing either to deserve, or to acquire prosperity. As, therefore, we value our virtue, or our peace, let us guard against these two evil dispositions of mind. Let us be modest in our esteem, and, by diligence and industry, study to acquire the esteem of others. So shall we shut up the avenues that lead to many a bad passion; and shall learn, *in whatsoever state we are*, therewith to be content.

FINALLY, in order to subdue envy, let us bring often into view those religious considerations which regard us particularly as Christians. Let us remember how unworthy we are in the sight of God; and how much the blessings which each of us enjoy, are beyond what we deserve. Let us nourish reverence and submission to that Divine Government, which has appointed to every one such a condition in the world as is fittest for him to possess. Let us recollect how opposite the Christian spirit is to envy; and what sacred obligations it lays upon us, to walk in love and charity towards one another. Indeed, when we reflect on the many miseries which abound in human life; on the scanty proportion of happiness which any man is here allowed to enjoy; on the small difference which the diversity of fortune makes on that scanty proportion; it is surprising that envy should ever have been a prevalent passion among men, much more that it should have prevailed among Christians. Where so much is suffered in common, little room is left for envy. There is more occasion for pity and sympathy, and inclination to assist each other. To our own good endeavours for rectifying our dispositions, let us not forget to add serious prayers to the Author of our being, that

he who made the heart of man, and knows all its infirmities, would thoroughly purify our hearts from a passion so base and so criminal, as envy. *Create in me, Oh God, a clean heart; and renew a right spirit within me. Search me, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**

* Psalm, li. 10. cxxxix. 23, 24.

SERMON XXXIX.

ON IDLENESS.

—*Why stand ye here all the day idle?*—MATTHEW, XX. 6.

IT is an observation which naturally occurs, and has been often made, that all the representations of the Christian life in Scripture are taken from active scenes; from carrying on a warfare, running a race, striving to enter in at a strait gate; and, as in this context, labouring in a vineyard. Hence the conclusion plainly follows, that various active duties are required of the Christian; and that sloth and indolence are inconsistent with his hope of Heaven.

But it has been sometimes supposed, that industry, as far as it is matter of duty, regards our spiritual concerns and employments only; and that one might be very busy as a Christian, who was very idle as a man. Hence, among some denominations of Christians, an opinion has prevailed, that the perfection of religion was to be found in those monastic retreats where every active function of civil life was totally excluded, and the whole time of men filled up with exercises of devotion. They who hold such opinions, proceed on the supposition that religion has little or no concern with the ordinary affairs of the world? that its duties stand apart by themselves, and mingle not in the intercourse which men have with one another. The perfect Christian was imagined to live a sort of angelic life, sequestered from the business or pleasures of this contemptible state. The Gospel, on the contrary, represents the religion of Christ, as intended for the benefit of human society. It assumes men as engaged in the business of active life; and directs its exhortations, accordingly, to all ranks and stations; to the magistrate and the subject, to the master and the servants, to the rich and the poor, to them that buy and them that sell, them that

use and them that *abuse* the world. Some duties, indeed, require privacy and retreat. But the most important must be performed in the midst of the world, where we are commanded to *shine as lights and by our good works to glorify our Father which is in Heaven*. This world, as the context represents it, is God's vineyard, where each of us has a task assigned him to perform. In every station, and every period of life, labour is required. At the third, the sixth, or the eleventh hour, we are commanded to work, if we would not incur, from the great Lord of the vineyard, this reproof, *Why stand ye here all the day idle?*—We may, I confess, be busy about many things, and yet be found negligent of the *One thing needful*. We may be very active, and, withal, very ill employed. But though a person may be industrious without being religious, I must at the same time admonish you that no man can be idle without being sinful. This I shall endeavour to show in the sequel of the discourse; wherein I purpose to reprove a vice which is too common among all ranks of men. Superiors admonish their inferiors, and parents tell their childeon, that idleness is the mother of every sin; while, in their own practice, they often set the example of what they reprobate severely in others. I shall study to show, that the idle man is, in every view, both foolish and criminal; that he neither lives to God; nor lives to the world; nor lives to himself.

I. HE lives not to God. The great and wise Creator certainly does nothing in vain. A small measure of reflexion might convince every one that for some useful purpose he was sent into the world. The nature of man bears no mark of insignificancy, or neglect. He is placed at the head of all things here below. He is furnished with a great preparation of faculties and powers. He is enlightened by reason with many important discoveries; even taught by revelation to consider himself as ransomed, by the death of Christ, from misery; and intended to rise, by gradual advances, to a still higher rank in the universe of God. In such a situation, thus distinguished, thus favoured and assisted by his Creator, can he hope to be forgiven, if he aim at no improvement, if he pursue no useful design, live for no other purpose but to indulge in sloth, consume the fruits of the earth, and to spend his days in a dream of vanity? Existence is a sacred trust; and he who thus misemploys and squanders it away, is treacherous to its Author.—Look around you, and you will behold the whole universe full of active powers. Action is, to speak so, the genius of nature. By motion and exertion, the system of being is preserved in vigour. By its different parts always acting in subordination one to another, the perfection of the whole is carried on. The

heavenly bodies perpetually revolve. Day and night incessantly repeat their appointed course. Continual operations are going on in the earth, and in the waters. Nothing stands still. All is alive and stirring throughout the universe.—In the midst of this animated and busy scene is man alone to remain idle in his place? Belongs it to him, to be the sole inactive and slothful being in the creation when he has so much allotted him to do; when in so many various ways he might improve his own nature; might advance the glory of the God who made him; and contribute his part to the general good?

Hardly is there any feeling of the human heart more natural, or more universal, than that of our being accountable to God. It is what the most profligate can never totally erase. Almost all nations have agreed in the belief, that there is to come some period when the Almighty will act as the Judge of his creatures. Presentiments of this, work in every breast. Conscience has already erected a tribunal, on which it anticipates the sentence which at that period shall be passed. Before this tribunal let us sometimes place ourselves in serious thought, and consider what account we are prepared to give of our conduct to Him who made us. “I placed you,” the great Judge may then be supposed to say, “in a station where you had many occasions for action, and many opportunities of improvement. You were taught, and you knew your duty. Throughout a course of years I continued your life. I surrounded you with friends to whom you might be useful. I gave you health, ease, leisure, and various advantages of situation.—Where are the fruits of those talents which you possessed? What good have you done with them to yourselves? What good to others? How have you filled up your place or answered your destination in the World? Produce some evidence of your not having existed altogether in vain.”—Let such as are now mere blanks in the world, and a burden to the earth, think what answer they will give to those awful questions.

II. THE idle live not to the world and their fellow creatures around them, any more than they do to God. Had any man a title to stand alone, and to be independent of his fellows, he might then consider himself as at liberty to indulge in solitary ease and sloth, without being responsible to others for the manner in which he chose to live. But on the face of the earth, there is no such person, from the king on his throne, to the beggar in his cottage. We are all connected with one another by various relations; which create a chain of mutual dependence, reaching from the highest to the lowest station in society. The order and happiness of the world cannot be maintained, without perpetual circulation of active duties and offices, which all are

called upon to perform in their turn. Superiors are no more independent of their inferiors, than these inferiors are of them. Each have demands and claims upon the other; and he, who in any situation of life, refuses to act his part, and to contribute his share to the general stock of felicity, deserves to be proscribed from society as an unworthy member. *If any man will not work*, says the Apostle Paul, *neither should he eat.** If he will do nothing to advance the purposes of society, he has no title to enjoy the advantages of it.

It is sometimes supposed, that industry and diligence are duties required of the poor alone, and that riches confer the privilege of being idle. This is so far from being justified by reason, how often soever it may obtain in fact, that the higher one is raised in the world, his obligation to be useful is proportionably increased. The claims upon him from various quarters multiply. The sphere of his active duties widens on every hand. Even supposing him exempted from exerting himself in behalf of his inferiors, supposing the relation between superiors and inferiors abolished, the relation among equals must still subsist. If there be no man, however high in rank, who stands not frequently in need of the good offices of his friends, does he think that he owes nothing to them in return? Can he fold his arms in selfish indolence, and expect to be served by others, if he will not exert himself in doing service to any?—Were there no other call to industry, but the relation in which every one stands to his own family, the remembrance of this alone should make the man of idleness blush. Pretends he to love those with whom he is connected by the dearest ties, and yet will he not bestir himself for their guidance, their support, or their advancement in the world?—How immoral, and cruel, is the part he acts, who slumbers in sensual ease, while the wants and demands of a helpless family cry aloud, but cry in vain, for his vigorous exertions. Is this a husband, is this a father, that deserves to be honoured with those sacred names?—How many voices will be lifted up against him at the last day! Let such persons remember the awful words in Scripture, and tremble. It is written in the First Epistle to Timothy, the fifth chapter and eighth verse, *If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

III. THE idle man lives not to himself with any more advantage than he lives to the world. It is indeed on a supposition entirely opposite, that persons of this character proceed. They imagine that, how deficient soever they may be in point of duty,

* 2 Thess. iii. 10.

they at least consult their own satisfaction. They leave to others the drudgery of life; and betake themselves, as they think, to the quarter of enjoyment and ease. Now, in contradiction to this, I assert, and hope to prove, that the idle man, first, shuts the door against all improvement; next, that he opens it wide to every destructive folly; and, lastly, that he excludes himself from the true enjoyment of pleasure.

FIRST, He shuts the door against improvement of every kind, whether of mind, body, or fortune. The law of our nature, the condition under which we are placed from our birth, is, that nothing good or great is to be acquired without toil and industry. A price is appointed by Providence to be paid for every thing: and the price of improvement is labour. Industry, may, indeed, be sometimes disappointed. *The race may not be always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.* But, at the same time it is certain, that, in the ordinary course of things, without strength, the battle cannot be gained; without swiftness, the race cannot be run with success. *In all labour, says the wise man, there is profit: but the soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing.**—If we consult either the improvement of the mind, or the health of the body, it is well known that exercise is the great instrument of promoting both. Sloth enfeebles equally the bodily and the mental powers. As in the animal system it engenders disease, so on the faculties of the soul it brings a fatal rust, which corrodes and wastes them; which, in a short time, reduces the brightest genius to the same level with the meanest understanding. The great differences which take place among men, are not owing to a distinction, that nature has made in their original powers, so much as to the superior diligence with which some have improved these powers beyond others. To no purpose do we possess the seeds of many great abilities, if they are suffered to lie dormant within us. It is not the latent possession, but the active exertion of them, which gives them merit. Thousands whom indolence has sunk into contemptible obscurity, might have come forward to the highest distinction, if idleness had not frustrated the effect of all their powers.

Instead of going on to improvement, all things go to decline with the idle man. His character falls into contempt. His fortune is consumed. Disorder, confusion, and embarrassment, mark his whole situation. Observe in what lively colours the state of his affairs is described by Solomon. *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding: and lo! it was all grown over with thorns; and nettles had covered the face thereof: and the stone wall thereof was broken*

* Prov. xiv. 23. xiii. 4

down, *Then I saw and considered it well ; I looked upon it, and received instruction.** In the midst too of those distresses which idleness brings on its votaries, they must submit to innumerable mortifications, which never fail to attend their shameful conduct. They must reckon on seeing themselves contemned by the virtuous and wise, and slighted by the thriving part of mankind. They must expect to be left behind by every competitor for rank or fortune. They will be obliged to humble themselves before persons, now far their superiors in the world, whom, once, they would have disdained to acknowledge as their equals.—Is it in this manner that a man lives to himself? Are these the advantages which were expected to be found in the lap of ease? The down may at first have appeared soft: But it will soon be found to cover thorns innumerable. *How long wilt thou sleep, Oh sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, yet a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth: and thy want as an armed man.†*—But this is only a part of the evils which persons of this description bring on themselves: For,

In the second place, while in this manner they shut the door against every improvement, they open it wide to the most destructive vices and follies. The human mind cannot remain always unemployed. Its passions must have some exercise. If we supply them not with proper employment, they are sure to run loose into riot and disorder. While we are unoccupied by what is good, evil is continually at hand; and hence it is said in Scripture, that as soon as Satan *found the house empty*, he took possession, and filled it with *evil spirits.‡* Every man who recollects his conduct, may be satisfied, that his hours of idleness have always proved the hours most dangerous to virtue. It was then that criminal desires arose; guilty pursuits were suggested; and designs were formed, which, in their issue, have disquieted and embittered his whole life. If seasons of idleness be dangerous, what must a continued habit of it prove? Habitual indolence, by a silent and secret progress, undermines every virtue in the soul. More violent passions run their course, and terminate. They are like rapid torrents, which foam, and swell, and bear down every thing before them. But after having overflowed their banks, their impetuosity subside. They return by degrees into their natural channel; and the damage which they have done can be repaired. Sloth is like the slowly-flowing, putrid stream, which stagnates in the marsh, breeds venomous animals, and poisonous plants; and infects with pestilential vapours the whole country round it. Having once tainted the soul,

* Prov. xxiv. 30. 31. 32.

† Prov. xxiv. 33. 34.

‡ Matth. xii. 44.

it leaves no part of it sound; and at the same time gives not those alarms to conscience, which the eruptions of bolder and fiercer emotions often occasion. The disease which it brings on, is creeping and insidious; and is, on that account, more certainly mortal.

One constant effect of idleness is, to nourish the passions, and, of course, to heighten our demands for gratification; while it unhappily withdraws from us the proper means of gratifying these demands. If the desires of the industrious man be set upon opulence or rank, upon the conveniences or the splendour of life, he can accomplish his desires by methods which are fair and allowable. The idle man has the same desires with the industrious, but not the same resources for compassing his ends by honourable means. He must therefore turn himself to seek by fraud, or by violence, what he cannot submit to acquire by industry. Hence the origin of those multiplied crimes to which idleness is daily giving birth in the world; and which contribute so much to violate the order, and to disturb the peace of society.—In general the children of idleness may be ranked under two denominations or classes of men; both of whom may, too justly, be termed, the Children of the devil. Either incapable of any effort, they are such as sink into absolute meanness of character, and contentedly wallow with the drunkard and debauchee, among the herd of the sensual; until poverty overtake them, or disease cut them off: Or they are such as, retaining some remains of vigour, are impelled, by their passions, to venture on a desperate attempt for retrieving their ruined fortunes. In this case, they employ the art of the fraudulent gamester to ensnare the unwary. They issue forth with the highwayman to plunder on the road; or with the thief and the robber, they infest the city by night. From this class, our prisons are peopled; and by them the scaffold is furnished with those melancholy admonitions, which are so often delivered from it to the crowd.—Such are frequently the tragical, but well-known consequences of the vice against which I now warn you.

In the third, and last place, how dangerous soever idleness may be to virtue, are there not pleasures, it may be said, which attend it? Is there not ground to plead, that it brings a release from the oppressive cares of the world; and soothes the mind with a gentle satisfaction, which is not to be found amidst the toils of a busy and active life?—This is an advantage which, least of all others, we admit it to possess. In behalf of incessant labour, no man contends. Occasional release from toil, and indulgence of ease, is what nature demands, and virtue allows. But what we assert is, that nothing is so great an enemy to the lively and spirited enjoyment of life, as a relaxed and indolent

habit of mind. He who knows not what it is to labour, knows not what it is to enjoy. The felicity of human life depends on the regular prosecution of some laudable purpose or object, which keeps awake and elivens all our powers. Our happiness consists in the pursuit, much more than in the attainment, of any temporal good. Rest is agreeable; but it is only from preceding labours that rest requires its true relish. When the mind is suffered to remain in continued inaction, all its powers decay. It soon languishes and sickens; and the pleasures which it proposed to obtain from rest, end in tediousness and insipidity. To this, let that miserable set of men bare witness, who, after spending great part of their life in active industry, have retired to what they fancied was to be a pleasing enjoyment of themselves in wealthy inactivity, and profound repose. Where they expected to find an elysium, they have found nothing but a dreary and comfortless waste. Their days have dragged on, in uniform languor; with the melancholy remembrance often returning, of the cheerful hours they passed, when they were engaged in the honest business and labours of the world.

We appeal to every one who has the least knowledge or observation of life, whether the busy, or the idle, have the most agreeable enjoyment of themselves? Compare them in their families. Compare them in the societies with which they mingle; and remark, which of them discover most cheerfulness and gaiety; which possess the most regular flow of spirits; whose temper is most equal; whose good humour most unclouded. While the active and diligent both enliven and enjoy society, the idle are not only a burden to themselves, but a burden to those with whom they are connected; a nuisance to all whom they oppress with their company. On whom does time hang so heavy, as on the slothful and lazy? To whom are the hours so lingering? Who are so often devoured with spleen, are obliged to fly to every expedient which can help them to get rid of themselves? Instead of producing tranquillity, indolence produces a fretful restlessness of mind; gives rise to cravings which are never satisfied; nourishes a sickly effeminate delicacy, which soars and corrupts every pleasure.

ENOUGH has now been said to convince every thinking person, of the folly, the guilt, and the misery, of an idle state. Let these admonitions stir us up, to exert ourselves in our different occupations, with that virtuous activity which becomes men and Christians. Let us arise from the bed of sloth; distribute our time with attention and care; and improve to advantage the opportunities which Providence has bestowed. The material business in which our several stations engage us, may often prove not sufficient to occupy the whole of our time and attention. In

the life even of busy men, there are frequent intervals of leisure. Let them take care, that into these, none of the vices of idleness creep. Let some secondary, some subsidiary employment, of fair and laudable kind, be always at hand to fill up those vacant spaces of life, which too many assign, either to corrupting amusements, or to mere inaction. We ought never to forget, that entire idleness always borders either on misery or on guilt.

AT the same time, let the course of our employments be ordered in such a manner, that in carrying them on, we may be also promoting our eternal interest. With the business of the world let us properly intermix the exercises of devotion. By religious duties and virtuous actions, let us study to prepare ourselves for a better world. In the midst of our labours for this life, it is never to be forgotten, that we must *first seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; and *give diligence to make our calling and election sure*. Otherwise, how active soever we may seem to be, our whole activity will prove only a laborious idleness: We shall appear, in the end, to have been busy to no purpose, or to a purpose worse than none. Then only we fulfil the proper character of Christians, when we join that pious zeal which becomes us as the servants of God, with that industry which is required of us, as good members of society; when, according to the exhortation of the Apostle, we are found *not slothful in business*, and, at the same time, *servent in spirit, serving the Lord*.*

* Rom. xii. 2.

SERMON XL.

ON THE SENSE OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE.

—*I am continually with thee.*—PSALM lxxiii. 23.

WE live in a world which is full of the divine presence and power. We behold every where around us the traces of that supreme goodness which enlivens and supports the universe. *Day uttereth speech of it to-day ; and night sheweth knowledge of it to-night.* Yet, surrounded as we are with the perfections of God, meeting him wherever we go, and called upon by a thousand objects, to confess his presence, it is both the misfortune and the crime of a great part of mankind that they are strangers to Him, in whose world they dwell. Occupied with nothing but their pursuits of interest and pleasure, they pass through this world, as though God were not there. The virtuous and reflecting are particularly distinguished from the giddy and dissolute, by that habitual sense of the Divine presence which characterises the former. To them, nothing appears void of God. They contemplate his perfections in the works of nature ; and they trace his providence in the incidents of life. When retired from the world, he often employs their meditation. When engaged in action, he always influences their conduct. Wherever a pious man is, or whatever he does, in the style of the text, he is *continually with God.*

The happy effect of this sentiment on the heart, is fully displayed in the context. We see it allaying all the disquiet which the Psalmist, in the preceding verses, describes himself to have suffered on account of the prosperity of the wicked. The first reflection which restored tranquillity to his mind, was the remembrance of the presence of God. *Nevertheless, I am continu-*

ally with thee ; thou hast holden me by my right hand. He became sensible, that whatever distresses the righteous might suffer for a time, they could not fail of being compensated in the end, by that Almighty Protector, whose propitious presence ever continued to surround them. Whereupon follow those memorable expressions of his trust and joy in God. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel ; and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee.*

THERE are principally two effects, which the sense of the Divine presence is fitted to produce upon men. One is, to restrain them from vice ; the other to encourage their virtue. Its operation, as a check upon the sinner, is obvious. The perpetual presence of so powerful and venerable a witness, is one of the most awful considerations which can be addressed to the dissolute. It removes all the security which secrecy can be supposed to give to crimes. It aggravates the guilt of them, from being committed in face of the Almighty ; and has power to strike terror into the heart of the greatest criminal, in the midst of his misdeeds. While this principal of religion thus checks and terrifies the sinner, it produces also another effect, that of strengthening, and comforting the good man, in the practice of his duty. It is the influence of the Divine presence on good men which, in consequence of the Psalmist's sentiment, I propose to consider. To their character it belongs to *be continually with God.* I shall endeavour to shew the high benefit and comfort which they derive from such a habit of mind ; and shall, for this end, first consider their internal moral state ; and next, view them as they are affected by several of the external accidents and situations of life.

LET us begin with considering them in their internal state. The belief of Divine presence acts upon them here, first, as an incitement to virtue. The presence of one whom we highly esteem and revere, of a sovereign, for instance, a father, or a friend, whose approbation we are solicitous to gain, is always found to exalt the powers of men, to refine and improve their behaviour. Hence, it has been given as a rule by ancient moralists, that in order to excel in virtue, we should propound to ourselves some person of eminent and distinguished worth ; and should accustom ourselves to act, as if he were standing by, and beholding us. To the esteem and approbation of their fellow-creatures, none are insensible. There are few who, in the conspicuous parts of their life, when they know the eyes of the public to be fixed on them, act not their part with propriety and decorum. But what is the observation of the public ; what is the presence of the greatest or wisest men on earth, to that pre-

sence of the Divinity which constantly surrounds us. The man who realizes to his mind this august presence, feels a constant incentive for acquitting himself with dignity. He views himself as placed on an illustrious theatre. To have the Almighty for the spectator and witness of his conduct, is more to him than if the whole world were assembled to observe him. Men judge often falsely, always imperfectly, of what passes before them. They are imposed on by specious appearances; and the artful carry away the praise which is due to the deserving. Even supposing them to judge fairly, we may want the opportunity of doing justice to our character, by any proper display of it in the sight of the world. Our situation may bury in obscurity those talents and virtues which were entitled to command the highest esteem. But He, in whose presence the good man acts, is both an impartial, and an unerring, judge of worth. No fallacious appearances impose on him. No secret virtue is hidden from him. He is attentive equally to the meanest and the greatest; and his approbation confers eternal rewards. The man therefore, who *sets the Lord always before him*, is prompted to excel in virtue by motives which are peculiar to himself, and which engage, on the side of duty, both honour and interest. *I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee.**

SUPPOSING, however, his virtuous endeavours to be faithful, many imperfections will attend them. A faultless tenor of unblemished life is beyond the reach of man. Passions will sometimes overcome him; and ambition or interest, in an unguarded hour, will turn him aside into evil. Hence he will be ashamed of himself, and disquieted by a sense of guilt and folly. In this state, to which we are often reduced by the weakness of human nature, the belief of God's continual presence brings relief to the heart. It acted before as an animating principle. It now acts as a principle of comfort. In the midst of many imperfections, a virtuous man appeals to his Divine witness, for the sincerity of his intentions. He can appeal to him who *knows his frame*, that, in the general train of his conduct, it is his study to keep the law of God.

Mere law, among men, is rigid and inflexible. As no human law-giver can look into the hearts of his subjects, he cannot, even though he were ever present with them, estimate their character exactly. He can make no allowance for particular situations. He must prescribe the same terms to all whom he rules; and treat all alike, according to their outward actions. But every minute diversity of character, temper, and situation, is known to God. It is not only from what his servants do, but

* Psalm cxix. 168.

from what they seek to do, that he forms his judgment of them. He attends to all those circumstances which render the trial of their virtue, at any time, peculiarly hard. He hears the whisper of devotion as it rises in the soul. He beholds the tear of contrition which falls in secret. He sees the good intention struggling in its birth; and pursues it, in its progress, through those various obstacles which may prevent it from ripening into action. Good men, therefore, in their most humbled and dejected state, draw some consolation from his knowledge of their heart. Though they may sometimes have erred from the right path, they can look up to Him who is ever with them, and say, as an Apostle, who had grievously offended, once said to his great Master, *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.**

Appealing thus to their omniscient witness, they are naturally soothed and encouraged by the hope of his clemency. At the same time, it is the peculiar advantage of his Sentiment of the Divine presence, that it prevents such hope from flattering them too much, or rising into undue presumption. For while it encourages, it tends also to humble, a pious man. If it encourage him by the reflection on all his good dispositions being known and attended to by God, it humbles him, by the remembrance, that *his secret sins also are ever in the light of the divine countenance.* So that, by dwelling under the sense of God being continually with us, we keep alive the proper temper of a Christian in the soul; humility without dejection; fear mingled with hope. We are cheered, without being lifted up. We feel ourselves obnoxious to the all-observing eye of justice; but are comforted with the thoughts of that mercy which, through Jesus Christ, the Discerner of all hearts, holds forth to the sincere and penitent. Such are the blessed effects which this principle of religion produces upon the inward moral state of a good man. Let us now,

IN the second place, consider his external circumstances; and examine the influence which the same principle has upon his happiness, in several different situations of life

Let us first view him in what the world calls prosperity; when his circumstances are easy or affluent, and his life flows in a smooth untroubled stream. Here it might be thought, that a sense of the Divine presence could operate upon him only, or chiefly, for promoting temperance, and restraining the disorders incident to a prosperous state. Valuable effects, indeed, these are; and most conducive to the true enjoyment of all that is agreeable in life. But though it, doubtless, does exert this sa-

* John, xxi. 17.

lutory influence, yet it stops not there. It not only preserves the virtue of a good man amidst the temptations of pleasure, but it gives to his prosperity a security, and a peculiar relish, which to others is unknown. He who is without a sense of God upon his mind, beholds in human affairs nothing but a perpetual fluctuation, and vicissitude of events. He is surrounded with unknown causes, which may be working his destruction in secret. He cannot avoid perceiving, that there hangs over him the irresistible arm of that Providence, whose displeasure he has done nothing to stay or avert. But he who, in the days of prosperity, dwells with God, is delivered from those disquieting alarms. He dwells as with a friend and protector, from whence he conceives his blessings to proceed. He can appeal to him, for the thankfulness with which he receives them; and for his endeavours to employ them well. He trusts that the God whom he serves will not forsake him; that the goodness which he has already experienced, will continue to bless him; and though he believes himself not exempted from the changes of the world, yet, in the midst of these, he has ground to hope, that sources of comfort and happiness shall always be left open to him.

Moreover, the pleasures of life, while they last, are unspeakably heightened by the presence of that Benefactor who bestows them. The pleasing emotion of gratitude to the giver, mingles with the enjoyment of the gift. While to the mere worldly man, the whole frame of nature is only a vast irregular fabric; and the course of human affairs no more than a confused succession of fortuitous events; all nature is beautified, and every agreeable incident is enlivened to him who beholds God in all things. Hence arise a variety of pleasing sensations, to fill up those solitary hours, in which external prosperity supplies him with no entertainment. In the smiling scenes of nature, he contemplates the benignity of its author. In its sublime objects, he admires his majesty. In its awful and terrible ones, he adores his power. He dwells in this world as in a magnificent temple; which is full of the glory of its founder; and every where views nature offering up its incense to him, from a thousand altars. Such ideas, exalt, and ennoble the human mind; and reflect an additional lustre on the brightness of prosperity.

FROM the prosperous, let us next turn to the afflicted condition of a good man. For as prosperity may, affliction certainly will, at one time or other, be his lot. It enters into the appointed trial of his virtue; and, in one degree or other, is the doom of all. Here we shall find various situations occur, in which no relief is equal to what a virtuous and holy man derives from a sense of the perpetual presence of God.

Is he, for instance, thrown into an obscure condition in the world, without friends to assist him, or any to regard and con-

sider his estate? He enjoys the satisfaction of thinking, that though he may be neglected by men, he is not forgotten of God. Inconsiderable as he is in himself, he knows, that he will not be overlooked by the Almighty, amidst the infinite variety of being, or lost in the immensity of his works. The poor man can, with as much encouragement as the rich or great, lift up his eyes to Heaven, and say, *Nevertheless, Oh Lord, I am continually with thee: Thou holdest me by my right hand.* The gracious presence of that Supreme Being is affected by no diversity of rank or fortune. It imparts itself alike to all the virtuous and upright; like its glorious image, the sun in the firmament, which sheds its rays equally upon the humble cottage, and upon the palace of kings. In the presence of the great Lord of heaven and earth, all the distinctions which vanity has contrived to make among men totally disappear. All ranks are on one level. *The rich and the poor here indeed meet together;* without any other distinction than what arises from the heart and the soul. The sense of this lifts the poor man above contempt; supports his spirits when apt to be dejected; and bestows dignity on the part which he acts. How inconsiderable soever that part may appear in the estimation of an injudicious world, it is ennobled, when virtuously performed by the approbation of his Divine witness. He can bear with indifference the scorn of the proud as long as he knows, that there is one higher than the highest to regard him. He can enjoy himself with pleasure in his mean habitation, because he believes that God dwells with him there. The Divine Presence cheers to him the most lonely retreat. It accompanies his steps to the most distant regions of the earth. If he should be driven into exile from all his friends, and obliged to *dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,* even there *God's hand would hold him, and his right hand would guide him.* Though left without companion or friend, he never thinks himself desolate, as long as he can say, *I am still with God.*

BUT though raised above obscurity or poverty, yet, in any situation of fortune, calumny and reproach may be the lot of the servant of God. His good intentions may be misconstrued; his character unjustly traduced; and, to the open reviling of enemies, the more bitter unkindness of friends may sometimes be joined. In this situation, when wounded in spirit, and, perhaps, unable to make his innocence appear, to whom shall he have recourse for defence, to whom make his last appeal. but to that God who is ever present with him, and who knoweth his heart? How frequently amidst the injustice and oppression of the world, has distressed innocence had no other relief but this?—"God is my witness. God is my avenger. He hath seen it, and he will repay." A good conscience, it is true, is of itself, a powerful support. But God is Lord of the conscience; and it is

only when connected with a sense of Divine presence and approbation, that a good conscience becomes a steady principle of fortitude in the mind, under all discouragements. Hence, a virtuous man possesses a high degree of independence, both on the praise and on the censure of the world. It is enough to him if, when undergoing the same reproaches which Job suffered from his mistaken friends, he can say with him, *Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.** He affects not to divulge his good deeds to the world. He is without concern whether the world be acquainted with him or not. He knoweth that his *Father which is in Heaven seeth in secret*; and that *his prayers and his alms come up in grateful memorial before him. With me it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment; he that judged me is the Lord.†* He shall bring forth my righteousness, at last, as the light, and my judgment, as the noon day. In this consciousness of integrity he looks down with indifference, as from a superior station, upon the harsh censures of a giddy and ignorant world. The sense of being continually with God diffuses over his soul a holy calm, which unjust reproach cannot disturb. In the presence of that august and venerable witness, all the noise and clamours of men, like the murmurings of a distant storm, die away.

LASTLY, Supposing the character of a good man to be untainted by reproach, supposing also his external situation to be opulent or distinguished; many, notwithstanding, and severe, are the distresses to which he may be exposed. Secret griefs may be preying upon him; and his heart left to feed in silence on his own bitterness. He may labour under sore disease, and discern his earthly frame gradually moulder into dust. He may be deprived of those friends and relatives who had been the chief comforts of his state; or may be obliged to prepare himself for taking farewell of them for ever. In the midst of these various afflicting scenes of human life, no consolation can be more powerful than what arises from the presence of a Divine protector and guardian, to whom our case, with all its sorrows, is perfectly known. *To him, says the Psalmist, I poured out my complaint. I shewed before him my trouble. I looked on my right hand and viewed; but, behold, there was no man who cared for my soul. I said unto thee, Oh Lord, thou art my refuge. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.‡*

We all know that to communicate our grief to a faithful friend, often gives ease and relief to the burdened heart. Such communication we are encouraged to make, and such relief we may expect to find, in pouring out our heart before that God *in*

* Job, xvi. 19.

† 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

‡ Psalm cxlii. 2, 3, 4.

whom compassions flow. We may have no earthly friend to whom we can with full confidence disclose all our sorrows; or we may want words in which to express them. But God is the searcher of all hearts; and the hearer of all prayers. To the secret anguish of the soul, he is no inattentive witness. Every groan which is heaved from the labouring bosom, though heard by no human ear, reaches his throne. As he *knows our frame*, so he *remembers we are dust*; and thence *light arises to the upright in darkness*. For the hope naturally springs, that this beneficent Being will pity them *as a father pitieth his children*; and in the midst of those distresses which the present circumstances of man render unavoidable, will *send them help from his sanctuary*. Surrounded with this compassionate presence of the Almighty, good men never view themselves as left in this vale of tears, to bear, solitary and alone, the whole weight of human woe. In their dark, as well as in their brighter hours, God is with them. Even in that valley of the shadow of death, where no friend, no comforter, can go along to aid them, he is with them still. In the last extremity of nature, *the rod and staff of the Shepherd of Israel support them*.

THUS I have shewn, though in an imperfect manner, what benefits holy men derive from an habitual sense of the Divine presence. It animates and strengthens their virtue. It enlivens and brightens their prosperity. Under various forms of adversity, it affords them consolation and relief.—Such considerations, undoubtedly, form a strong argument in favour of a devout spirit, and a virtuous life. But they are considerations which may, probably, be regarded, by some, as ideal and visionary; requiring aid from a heated, or an enthusiastic fancy, in order to give them force. I readily admit that, amidst the hurry and turbulence of the world, it may be difficult to bring these religious sentiments as fully into view as is necessary for their making a just impression on the soul. This requires the effort of an intelligent and feeling mind; and therefore cannot be expected to be commonly found. To the unreflecting crowd, nothing appears real, but what is exposed to sense. What is invisible, is the same to them, as if it had no existence. But by the grossness of their own conceptions, they have no title to measure those of others. While they affect to treat all considerations, taken from the sense of the Divine presence, as visionary and enthusiastic, it can, on the contrary, be clearly shown, that they are founded on the most certain and unquestionable principles of reason. They essentially belong not to revealed only, but to natural religion. Their reality can be denied by none, but those who deny that God exists, or that he governs the world. For if he exists, he must undoubtedly pervade and inspect the world which he governs. He must know what is going on throughout his own universe; and

especially must know what passes in the hearts which he has made, and of which he is to judge. To be every where present, is the attribute of his nature, which, of all others, is the most necessary to his administration of the universe. This, accordingly, is an attribute which all religions have ascribed to him. All nations have believed in it. All societies appeal to it, in the solemnities of an oath, by which they determine controversies. This attribute being once admitted to belong to the Deity, the consequences which I have deduced from it, plainly and naturally follow: And every good man has ground to say, *Oh Lord, I am continually with thee.*

SERMON XLI.

ON PATIENCE.

In your Patience possess ye your souls.—LUKE XXI. 19.

THE *possession of our souls* is a very emphatical expression. It describes that state in which a man has both the full command, and the undisturbed enjoyment, of himself; in opposition to his undergoing some inward agitation which discomposes his powers. Upon the least reflection it must appear, how essential such a state of mind is to happiness. He only who thus *possesses his soul* is capable of possessing any other thing with advantage; and in order to attain and preserve this self-possession, the most important requisite is, the habitual exercise of patience.

I know that patience is apt to be ranked, by many, among the more humble and obscure virtues; belonging chiefly to those who groan on a sick bed, or who languish in a prison. If their situation be, happily, of a different kind, they imagine that there is no occasion for the discipline of patience being preached to them. But I hope to make it appear, that, in every circumstance, of life, no virtue is more important, both to duty and to happiness; or more requisite for forming a manly and worthy character. It is not confined to a situation of continued adversity. It principally, indeed, regards the disagreeable circumstances which are apt to occur. But in our present state, the occurrence of these is so frequent, that in every condition of life, patience is incessantly called forth. Prosperity cannot be enjoyed, any more than adversity supported, without it. It must enter into the temper, and form the habit of the soul, if we would pass through the world with tranquility and honour. What I propose is to point out some of the chief occasions on which patience is required; and to recommend and enforce the exercise of it, in order to *our possessing our souls*.

I. PATIENCE under provocations. The wide circle of human society is diversified by an endless variety of characters, dispositions, and passions. Uniformity is, in no respect, the genius of the world. Every man is marked by some peculiarity which distinguishes him from another; and no where can two individuals be found who are exactly, and in all respects, alike. Where so much diversity obtains, it cannot but happen, that, in the intercourse which men are obliged to maintain, their tempers shall often be ill adjusted to that intercourse; shall jar, and interfere with each other. Hence, in every station, the highest as well as the lowest, and in every condition of life, public, private, and domestic, occasions of irritation frequently arise. We are provoked, sometimes, by the folly and levity of those with whom we are connected; sometimes by their indifference, or neglect; by the incivility of a friend, the haughtiness of a superior, or the insolent behaviour of one in lower station. Hardly a day passes, without somewhat or other occurring, which serves to ruffle the man of impatient spirit. Of course such a man lives in a continual storm. He knows not what it is to enjoy a train of good humour. Servants, neighbours, friends, spouse, and children, all, through the unrestrained violence of his temper become sources of disturbance and vexation to him. In vain is affluence; in vain are health and prosperity. The least trifle is sufficient to discompose his mind, and poison his pleasures. His very amusements are mixed with turbulence and passion.

I would beseech this man to consider, of what small moment the provocations which he receives, or at least imagines himself to receive, are really in themselves; but of what great moment he makes them, by suffering them to deprive him of the possession of himself. I would beseech him to consider, how many hours of happiness he throws away, which a little more patience would allow him to enjoy; and how much he puts it in the power of the most insignificant persons to render him miserable. "But who can expect," we hear him exclaim, "that he is to possess the insensibility of a stone? How is it possible for human nature to endure so many repeated provocations? or to bear calmly with such unreasonable behaviour?—My brother! If you can bear with no instances of unreasonable behaviour, withdraw yourself from the world. You are no longer fit to live in it. Leave the intercourse of men. Retreat to the mountain and the desert; or shut yourself up in a cell. For here, in the midst of society, *offences must come*. You might as well expect, when you beheld a calm atmosphere, and a clear sky, that no clouds were ever to rise, and no winds to blow, as that your life was long to proceed without receiving provocations from human frailty. The careless and the imprudent, the giddy and the fickle, the ungrateful and the interested, every

where meet us. They are the briars and the thorns, with which the paths of human life are beset. He only who can hold his course among them with patience and equanimity, he who is prepared to bear what he must expect to happen, is worthy of the name of man.

Did you only preserve yourself composed for a moment, you would perceive the insignificance of most of those provocations which you magnify so highly. When a few suns more have rolled over your head, the storm will have, of itself, subsided: the cause of your present impatience and disturbance will be utterly forgotten. Can you not, then, anticipate this hour of calmness to yourself; and begin to enjoy the peace which it will certainly bring? If others have behaved improperly, leave them to their own folly, without becoming the victim of their caprice, and punishing yourself on their account.—Patience, in this exercise of it, cannot be too much studied by all who wish their life to flow in a smooth stream. It is the reason of a man, in opposition to the passion of a child. It is the enjoyment of peace, in opposition to uproar and confusion. *He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down and without walls.**—The next important exercise of patience is,

II. PATIENCE under disappointments. These will often happen to the best and wisest men; sometimes to the wisest and best-concerted plans. They may happen, too, not through any imprudence of those who have devised the plan, not even through the malice or ill design of others; but merely in consequence of some of those cross incidents of life which could not be foreseen. On such occasions persons of a warm and sanguine temper are presently in a ferment. They had formed their hopes, as they think, upon the justest grounds. They had waited long for success; and borne with many delays. But when their designs are brought to so unexpected an issue; when, without any fault of their own, they find their hopes finally blasted, all patience forsakes them; they no longer possess their souls; the most passionate exclamations break forth. “To whom, except to them, could such a disappointment have happened? Since the creation of the world, was such a combination of disastrous incidents ever beheld? Why are they doomed to be so unfortunate beyond all others?”—Alas! how unskillfully have you calculated the course of human events! How rashly and presumptuously had you trusted to success! To whom was it ever given, to guard against all the vicissitudes, which the fluctuating *fashion of the world*, is incessantly bringing about? If one friend, to whom you looked up, has died, or another has lost

* Prov. xxv. 28.

his influence and power; if the opinion of the public is changed, and its favour has been withdrawn; if some mistakes have occurred to lessen the good-will of a patron on whom you depended; if through the concurrence of these, or such like circumstances, a more fortunate rival has prevailed against you; what is there in all this, that differs from the ordinary lot of man? Are we not, each in his turn, doomed to experience the uncertainty of worldly pursuits? Why, then, aggravate our misfortunes by the unreasonable violence of an impatient spirit?—If our designs have failed through rashness or misconduct, let us blame ourselves. If they have failed through circumstances which we could not prevent, let us submit to the fate of man; and wait, with patience, till a more favourable opportunity shall occur of regaining success.

Meanwhile let us turn to the other side of the prospect; and calmly consider how dubious it was, whether the success which we longed for, would have proved a blessing. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* Perhaps the accomplishment of our designs might have been pregnant with misery. Perhaps from our present disappointment, future prosperity may rise. Of such unlooked-for issues, we all know there have been many examples. Who can tell, whether our case may not add one to the number?—At any rate, let us recollect, that there is a Supreme Ruler, who disposes of the affairs of men; under whom, all second causes work only as subordinate agents. Looking up to that irresistible arm which is stretched over our heads, let us be calm; let us submit and adore. Either to despair, or to rage, under disappointments, is sinful. By the former we injure ourselves, by the latter we insult Providence, and provoke its displeasure to continue. *To possess our souls in patience* is, at once, our wisdom as men, and our duty as Christians. The benefits of this virtue are so often repeated in this world, that good policy alone would recommend it to every thinking man. Disappointments derange, and overcome vulgar minds. The patient and the wise, by a proper improvement frequently make them contribute to their high advantage.—Let me next recommend,

III. PATIENCE under restraints. Numerous are the restraints imposed on us, by the nature of the human condition. To the restraints of authority and law, all must submit. The restraints of education and discipline lie on the young. Considerations of health restrain the indulgence of pleasure. Attentions to fortune restrain expensé. Regard to friends, whom we are bound to please; respect to established customs, and to the opinions of society, impose restraint on our general behaviour. There is no man, in any rank of life, who is always at liberty to act according as he would incline. In some quarter or other, he is limited

by circumstances, that either actually confine, or that ought at least to confine and restrain him.

These restraints, the impatient are apt to scorn. They will needs burst the barriers which reason had erected, or their situation had formed; and, without regard to consequences, give free scope to their present wish. Hence, many dangerous excesses flow; much confusion and misery are produced in human life. Had men the patience to submit to their condition, and to wait till it should allow them a freer indulgence of their desires, they might, in a short time, obtain the power of gratifying them with safety. If the young, for instance, would undergo with patience, the labours of education, they would rise at a proper period, to honours, riches or ease. If the infirm would, with patience, bear the regulations which their constitution demands, they might regain the comforts of health. If persons of straitened fortune had patience to conform themselves to their circumstances, and to abridge their pleasures, they might, by degrees, improve and advance their state. Whereas, by eagerness of temper, and precipitancy of indulgence, they forfeit all the advantages which patience would have procured; and incur the opposite evils to their full extent.

In the present state of human affairs, no lesson is more necessary to be learned by all, to be inculcated on the young, and to be practised by the old, than that of patient submission to necessity. For under the law of necessity, we are all inevitably placed. No man is, or can be, always his own master. We are obliged, in a thousand cases, to submit and obey. The discipline of patience preserves our minds easy, by conforming them to our state. By the impetuosity of an impatient and unsubmitting temper, we fight against an unconquerable power, and aggravate the evils we must endure.—Another important exercise of the virtue concerning which we discourse, is,

IV. PATIENCE under injuries and wrongs. To these, amidst the present confusion of the world, all are exposed. No station is so high, no power so great, no character so unblemished, as to exempt men from being attacked by rashness, malice, or envy. To behave under such attacks with due patience and moderation, is, it must be confessed, one of the most trying exercises of virtue. But, in order to prevent mistakes on this subject, it is necessary to observe, that a tame submission to wrongs is not required by religion. We are by no means to imagine that religion tends to extinguish the sense of honour, or to suppress the exertion of a manly spirit. It is under a false apprehension of this kind, that Christian patience is sometimes stigmatized in discourse as no other than a different name for cowardice. On the contrary, every man of virtue ought to feel what is due to

his character, and to support properly his own rights. Resentment of wrong, is an useful principle in human nature; and for the wisest purposes was implanted in our frame. It is the necessary guard of private rights, and the great restraint on the insolence of the violent, who, if no resistance were made, would trample on the gentle and peaceable.

Resentment, however, if not kept within due bounds, is in hazard of rising into fierce and cruel revenge. It is the office of patience, to temper resentment by reason. In this view, it is most properly described in the text, by a man's *possessing his soul*; acting the part which self-defence, which justice, or honour require him to act, without being transported out of himself by the vehemence of anger, or insisting on such degrees of reparation as bear no proportion to the wrong that he has suffered. What proportion, for instance, is there between the life of a man, and an affront received by some rash expression in conversation, which the wise would have slighted; and which, in the course of a few weeks, would have been forgotten by every one? How fantastic, then, how unjustifiable, are those supposed laws of modern honour, which, for such an affront, require no less reparation than the death of a fellow-creature? and which, to obtain this reparation, require a man to endanger his own life? Laws, which as they have no foundation in reason, never received the least sanction from any of the wise and polished nations of antiquity, but were devised in the darkest ages of the world, and are derived to us from the ferocious barbarity of Gothic manners.

Nothing is so inconsistent with self-possession as violent anger. It overpowers reason; confounds our ideas; distorts the appearance, and blackens the colour, of every object. By the storm which it raises within, and by the mischiefs which it occasions without, it generally brings, on the passionate and revengeful man, greater misery than he can bring on his enemy. Patience allays this destructive tempest, by making room for the return of calm and sober thought. It suspends the blow which sudden resentment was ready to inflict. It disposes us to attend to the alleviating circumstances, which may be discovered in the midst of the wrongs we suppose ourselves to have suffered. Hence it naturally inclines to the moderate and gentle side; and while it allows all proper measures to be taken, both for safety, and for just redress, it makes way for returning peace. Without some degree of patience exercised under injuries, human life would be rendered a state of perpetual hostility; offences and retaliations would succeed to one another in endless train; and the world would become a field of blood——It now remains to recommend,

V. PATIENCE under adversity and affliction. This is the most common sense in which this virtue is understood; as it respects disease, poverty, old age, loss of friends, and the other calamity which are incident to human life. *Though a man live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.** The various duties to which patience, under this view, gives rise, afford a larger subject to discourse than I am at present to pursue. In general, there are two chief exercises of patience under adversity; one respecting God, and another respecting men.

Patience, with respect to God, must, in the days of trouble, suppress the risings of a murmuring and rebellious spirit. It must appear in that calm resignation to the will of Heaven, which is expressed in those pious sentiments of ancient good men; *I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it. It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good in his eyes. Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also?* This is loyalty to the great Governor of the universe. This is that reverence which so well becomes creatures who know they are dependant, and who must confess themselves to be sinful. Such a spirit is fitted to attract the favour of Heaven, and to bring the severe visitation sooner to a close. Whereas the stubborn and impatient, who submit not themselves to the decrees of the Most High, require to be humbled and subdued by a continuance of chastisement.

Patience in adversity, with respect to men, must appear by the composure and tranquillity of our behaviour. The loud complaint, the querulous temper, and fretful spirit, disgrace every character. They shew a mind that is unmanned by misfortunes. We weaken thereby the sympathy of others; and estrange them from the offices of kindness and comfort. The exertions of pity will be feeble, when it is mingled with contempt. At the same time, by thus weakly yielding to adversity, we allow its weight to bear us down with double pressure. Patience, by preserving composure within, resists the impression which trouble makes from without. By leaving the mind open to every consolation, it naturally tends to alleviate our burden.—To maintain a steady and unbroken mind, amidst all the shocks of the world, forms the highest honour of a man. Patience, on such occasions, rises to magnanimity. It shews a great and noble mind, which is able to rest on itself, on God, and a good conscience; which can enjoy itself amidst all evils; and would rather endure the greatest hardships, than submit to what was dishonourable in order to obtain relief. This gives proof of a

* Eccles. xi. 8.

strength that is derived from Heaven. It is a beam of the immortal light, shining on the heart. Such patience is the most complete triumph of religion and virtue; and accordingly it has ever characterized those whose names have been transmitted with honour to posterity. It has ennobled the hero, the saint, and the martyr. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.**

THUS I have traced Patience through several of its most important operations in different circumstances of life; under provocations; under disappointments; under restraints; under injuries; and under afflictions. We now see that it is a virtue of universal use. No man, in any condition, can pass his days with tolerable comfort who has not learned to practice it. His prosperity will be continually disturbed; and his adversity will be clouded with double darkness. He will be uneasy and troublesome to all with whom he is connected; and will be more troublesome to himself than to any other.—Let me particularly advise those who wish to cultivate so necessary a virtue, to begin their cultivation of it, on occasions when small offences and provocations arise. It is a great but common error, to imagine, that we are at liberty to give loose reins to temper among the trivial occurrences of life. No excuse for irritation and impatience can be worse, than what is taken from the person being inconsiderable, or the incident being slight, which threw us off our guard. With inconsiderable persons we are surrounded. Of slight incidents the bulk of human life is composed. In the midst of these the ruling temper of the mind is formed. It is only by moderation and self-command then acquired, that we can inure ourselves to patience, when the great conjunctures of life shall put it to a severer trial. If neglected then, we shall afterwards solicit its return in vain. *If thou hast run with footmen and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace wherein thou trustest, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan!†*

IN order to assist us in the acquisition of this grace, let us often contemplate that great model of it, which is displayed in the whole life of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Whose temper was ever tried by more frequent provocations, more repeated disappointments, more flagrant injuries, or more severe distress? Yet amidst them all, we behold him patiently enduring *the contradiction of sinners*; to their rudeness opposing a mild and unruffled, though firm spirit, and, in the cause of mankind, generously bearing with every indignity. Well might he say, *Learn of*

* 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

† Jer. xii. 5.

*me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.** Having such a high example before our eyes, let us be ashamed of those sallies of impatience which we so often suffer to break forth in the midst of prosperity. By a more manly tranquillity and self-command, let us discover to the world, that, as men, and as christians, we have learned *in patience to possess our souls.*

* Matth. xi. 29

END OF VOL. I.

