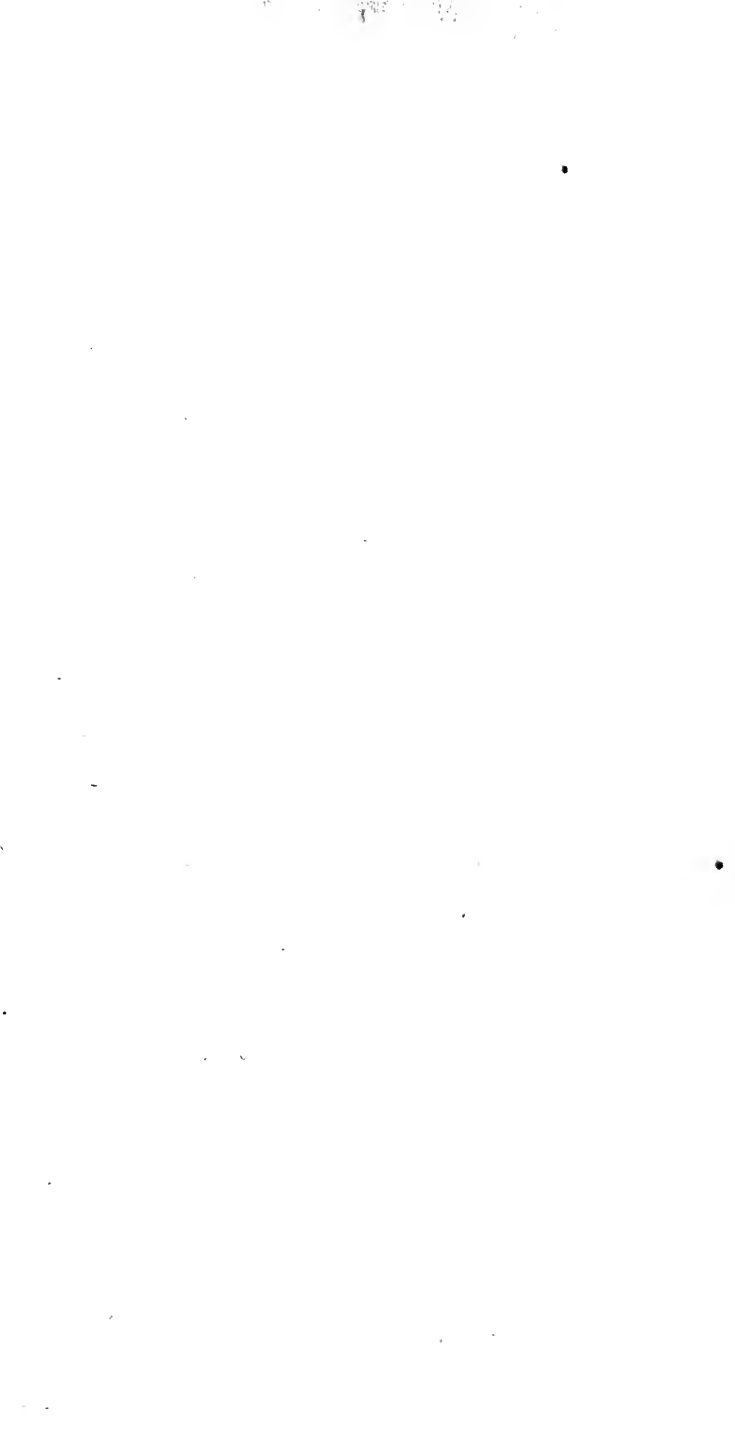


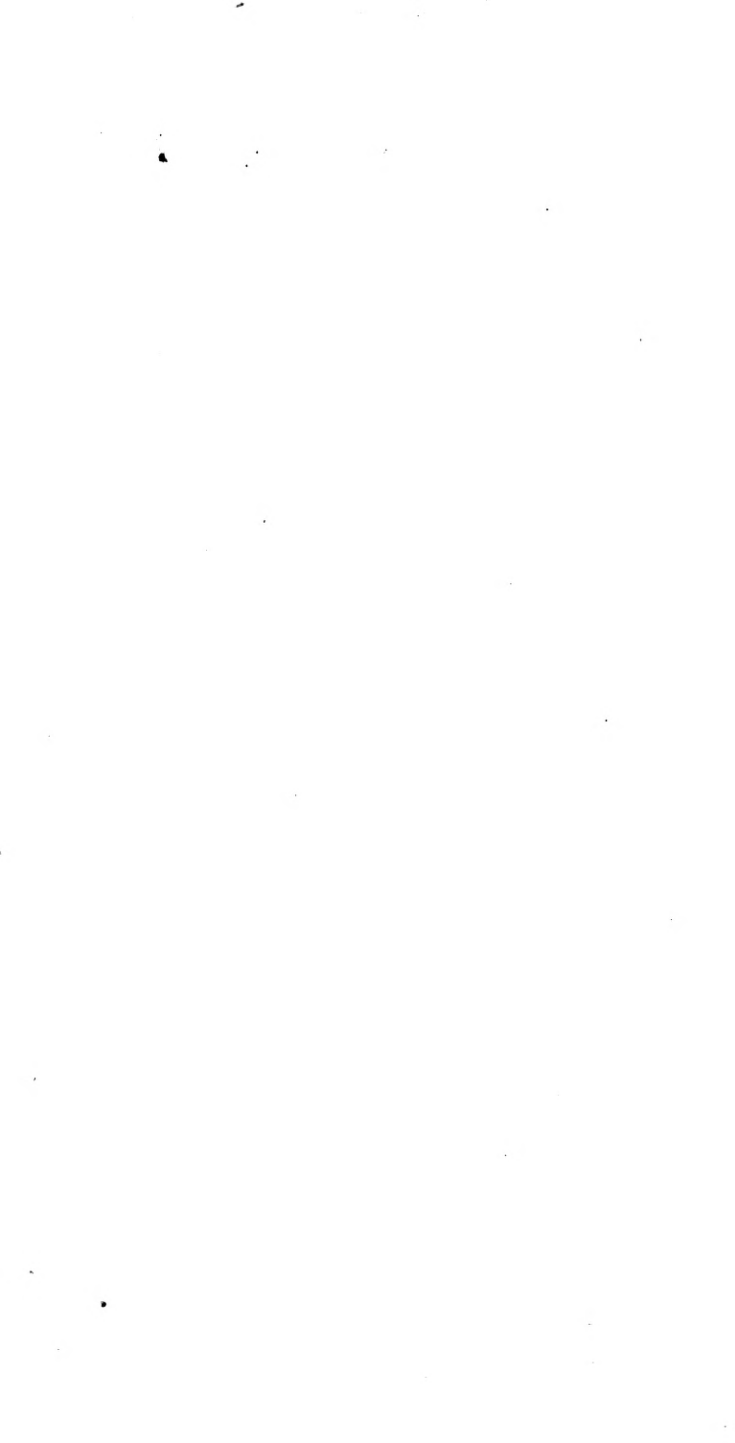


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SERMONS

DELIVERED ON

VARIOUS OCCASIONS.

FIRST PUBLISHED SINGLY,

NOW REPUBLISHED AND COLLECTED INTO A
VOLUME, WITH TWO NEW ONES,

NEVER BEFORE PRINTED.

BY JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WESTSPRINGFIELD.



PUBLISHED AT BOSTON :
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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, to wit:

District Clerk's Office.

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“Sermons delivered on various occasions. First published singly, now republished and collected into a volume, with two new ones, never before printed By Joseph Lathrop, D. D. pastor of the first church in West-springfield.”

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WILLIAM S. SHAW,

Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.

PREFACE.

A FEW of the author's Occasional Sermons, have been inserted in his volumes lately printed. His Discourses on Baptism, and on Christ's Warning against False Teachers, have been recently published in two small volumes. In this volume are contained the rest of his Occasional Sermons, except those, the subjects of which are too trite and common, or the occasions too local and temporary, to entitle them to public attention. Perhaps on the same principle, some here inserted might have been excluded. The two last sermons in this collection were never before printed. This work the author offers to the public, relying on that candor, which he has before experienced, and hoping that, by the divine blessing, it may be useful to the reader.

May 14, 1812.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

ON THE TWO FIRST SERMONS.



AT a time, when the author was by infirmity taken off from his ministerial labors, a foreigner, who called himself a minister, being allowed to preach to the people of the author's charge, excited among them a controversy relative to the qualifications for communion, and perplexed some serious minds by teaching, that, as all true Christians certainly knew their own, and each other's hearts, none ought to come into the church, but those, who know themselves to be real saints, and the church ought to admit none but those, whom *she* knows to be such. Hence the author took occasion, as soon as his health would permit, to compose and deliver the two following sermons. The good effect of them among his own people, encouraged him to offer them to the public.

SERMON I.



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The Nature and Design of a Christian Church.



1 CORINTHIANS i. 2.

Unto the Church of God, which is at Corinth ; to them who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

THAT we may better understand the apostle's idea of a church of God, we must bear in mind that the Corinthians, before the gospel was preached among them, were *gentiles carried away unto dumb idols, even as they were led*. Those of them who received the doctrine preached by the apostles, renounced the idolatrous forms and places of worship, and united together to worship God through Jesus Christ, in the manner which the gospel prescribes. *These are called a church*, which in the original language, properly signifies a *select company*, or an assembly called forth from the rest of mankind for some particular purpose, more especially for the purpose of religious worship. The church in Corinth was that number of persons, who had come out from among their idolatrous

fellow-citizens for the true worship of God in Christ.

The apostle describes them, *as sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints*. We cannot suppose, that by this description he intended to represent *all* the members of the Corinthian church to be *gracious, godly* persons : many passages, in this and his second epistle to them, import that he thought otherwise ; but these phrases rather signify, that they had been called out of the world, and separated from others, that they might be a peculiar people to God. *They were called to be holy*. The words, *sanctified, saints, and holy*, applied to bodies of men, are usually to be taken in the same general sense, as *christians, disciples, and brethren* ; to express their *visible* relation and *professed* character, rather than a certain judgment concerning their habitual temper. The sabbath, the temple, its utensils, and the ground on which it stood, are called *holy*, and said to be *sanctified*, because they were separated from a common to a sacred use. The nation of the Jews, in which, at its best state, were great numbers of ungodly men, is called *holy*, as being separated from other nations for the service of the true God. Moses says, *Ye are a holy people to the Lord, a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests*. So the christian church is called *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people*. The word *saints*, in many places, stands opposed, not to unsound Christians, but to the heathen world, particularly in the passages which speak of persecution against the *saints*, of ministering to the *saints*, and of distributing to the necessities of the *saints* ; and in that remarkable passage which denominates the children of a believer *holy*, in distinction from the children of the unbelieving, who are called *unclean*.

The apostle farther describes the Corinthian church, as consisting of those who *call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*; who own him to be their Lord and Saviour, profess to hope for salvation through him, and worship God in his name.

He directs his epistle *to all, who, in every place, call on the name of Christ Jesus the Lord, both theirs and ours*. In this address, he signifies, that there is a sacred relation subsisting among all Christians in every place, and that, as they profess subjection to one common Lord, so they ought to maintain communion one with another.

The words of our text will naturally lead us to consider,

I. The *nature* of a church of God.

II. The *end* of its institution.

III. The relation which *children* bear to it.

IV. The *qualifications* requisite for admission into it. And,

V. The *fellowship*, which ought to subsist among its members.

I. We are to consider the *nature* of a church of God.

Its general nature, as a select company, called forth from the world, for the worship and service of God, we have already stated in the opening of our text. Some further illustrations, however, will be necessary.

The church is sometimes distinguished into the *invisible* and the *visible* church. By the *invisible* church is intended the whole number of real saints in all places and ages; the whole family in Heaven and earth; those whom Christ will gather together in one body in Heaven. This is that MOUNT ZION, THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD, THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM, which consists of an innumerable company of angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, and the general assembly and church of the

first born, who were enrolled in Heaven. By the *visible* church are meant all those who have been visibly dedicated to God in Christ, and have not, by infidelity, heresy, or scandal, cut themselves off from the society of Christians; or, in the words of our apostle, *all who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The visible church is again distinguished into the *catholic* or *general* church, and into *local* or *particular* churches. The word is often used to denote all the *professed* people of God in all nations and ages. In this large sense it is to be understood, when Christ is said to be made head of the church, and the church is described as subject to him. The whole Jewish nation, which was chosen of God to be a peculiar people to himself, is called *the church*. It is said of Moses, *he was in the church in the wilderness.*

When this people, by their great and increasing corruption, were ripening apace for destruction, God sent his own Son, the promised Redeemer, to rescue from ruin his sinking church, and place it on a larger and surer establishment. By his teaching, and the ministry of his apostles, who were trained up under his immediate discipline, a considerable number of subjects were gained over to his kingdom, while he was on earth. Just before his ascension, he gave these apostles a commission to go forth, and spread his doctrine, and collect subjects among all nations. His church, which before stood on the foundation of the prophets, now stands on the foundation of the apostles also, he himself being the corner stone, in which both parts of the foundation meet and are united. The church was formerly limited to one nation, but now it is indiscriminately extended to all. In the city of Jerusalem there were many, who, before the descent of the Holy Ghost, consorted for the worship of God in Christ. To

these were soon added multitudes, who continued in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. These were called *the church*. After the gospel was spread to such an extent, that it was no longer possible for all the believers to attend the worship of God in the same place, particular religious societies, in divers places, were formed for the convenience of worship, each of which had the name of *a church*.

These societies of Christians, united in different places for mutual edification in the joint worship of God, are what we mean by *particular churches*, in distinction from the *catholic* or *universal church*. Thus the Christians in Corinth, those in Galatia, those in Ephesus, those in Thessalonica, are called *a church*. But as all these particular churches received the same gospel, maintained the same form of worship, and professed subjection to the same Lord, so they are often considered as *one church*. Though we read of many churches, yet these are only so many different parts of the same universal church. They are members of the same great body, apartments of the same house, provinces of the same empire. With regard to their several jurisdictions and places of worship, they are distinct; but yet one in the main, as they call on the same Jesus, their common Saviour and Lord.

As there was in the apostolic times, so there is now, frequent occasion for new churches to be formed. But from the preceding observations it appears, that whenever a new church is erected, careful regard should be had to her communion with other churches, as well as to the communion of her own members among themselves; otherwise the body of Christ is divided, and the bond of peace is broken.

Among the members of every particular church, there is always supposed to be a solemn covenant and agreement to walk together in the commands and ordinances of Christ, to watch over one another in meekness and love, and to be fellow-helpers to the kingdom of God. The church in Corinth is said to *come together into one place*. The church in Jerusalem is cautioned *not to forsake the assembling of themselves together*; and required to *exhort one another, and to consider one another, that they may provoke to love and to good works*. And Christians are enjoined to *be subject one to another*.

The covenant between the members of a particular church, to walk together in the ordinances of Christ, is of sacred obligation; and when any of them have occasion to remove to another church, they should do it in a manner consistent with Christian order, peace and communion. When a number of Christians unite in a new church, still they must consider themselves as members of the general body, and seek, not merely their own profit, but the profit of many.

II. The *end* for which a church was instituted, and the purpose for which we are called into it, is what we proposed, in the second place, to consider.

Christ's kingdom is not of this world. As the nature, so the design of it is purely spiritual; it is, that in the enjoyment of suitable means we may be trained up in knowledge and holiness; and thus formed to a meetness for future glory.

It is said, *the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*. This is not to be understood as importing that all who joined themselves to the church were finally saved. There were in that, as there are in all ages, many who call Christ their Lord, and eat and drink in his presence, but still are workers of iniquity. But they are called *the saved*, because they are admitted to the offers and

means of salvation. In this sense also, baptism is said to *save* us; not as conveying an immediate right to salvation, but as being the appointed way of introduction into the visible church, where the means of salvation are afforded. In the same sense we are to understand those passages, where salvation is promised to whole families on the faith of the head. Not that *his* faith entitles *them* to eternal life, but that it brings them into the visible church, and to the enjoyment of the means of salvation. *Noah, by faith, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; the like figure whereunto, even baptism doth now save us.*

As without holiness, none can be admitted into God's heavenly kingdom, *Christ gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.* The church, in our text, is described, as consisting of those *who are called to be holy.* Christ has set in his church, teachers for her edification, *that we might all come in the unity of faith and knowledge, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; and professing the truth in love, might grow up into him in all things.*

Love is a most important branch of gospel holiness. Christians are chosen in Christ, *that they might be holy and without blame before him in love; and might purify their souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren.* Christ has, therefore, appointed that his disciples, dwelling together in social connection, and maintaining fellowship in religious duties, should increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men. They are directed *to forbear one another in love, and keep the unity of the spirit in*

the bond of peace, because there is one body, or church, of which they are all members, and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. In order to their enjoying the grace of God for their increase and edification, they must, like the parts of a building, be fitly framed into each other, and be builded together for an habitation of God through the spirit.

Having illustrated the nature and design of a church of God, we will now attend to the next proposed inquiry.

III. What relation *children* bear to the church ?

This will be necessary previously to our stating the qualifications of adult proselytes.

When first the apostles went forth to preach the gospel and erect churches in the world, mankind in general were in a state of *heathenism*, or *judaism*; and either had not heard of the gospel, or did not believe it to be divine. From among these were they to make proselytes to Christianity.

What they required of the proselytes, whom they admitted into the church of God, was a professed belief that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. This profession of faith in Christ necessarily implied a promise of obedience to him.

Now as the apostles admitted adult proselytes into the church by baptism, so there is sufficient ground to believe, that they admitted to this ordinance the children of proselytes, in token of God's merciful regard to them, and of their parents' obligation to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In this general sense, the baptised offspring of believers are within the church, having God's covenant seal upon them, and being under the care of those who have covenanted to bring them up for him.

As many as are comprehended within God's covenant, and are the subjects of its gracious promises,

undeniably belong to the church ; for this is founded on the covenant. That the children of professed believers are within the covenant, is evident from passages of scripture, too numerous to be here particularly recited. The promise to Abraham was made also to his infant seed, who were to receive the seal and token of the promise, as well as he ; and as many as received it not, were said to have broken God's covenant ; and these were to be cut off, or excluded from among their people. Had they not been within the covenant, and among the people of God, their want of the seal could not have been a breach of the covenant, or an exclusion from the people. Moses says to the congregation of Israel, *Ye stand all of you before the Lord your God ; all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives ; that thou shouldst enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, that he may establish thee for a people to himself, as he hath sworn to Abraham.* Express promises are made to children, as the seed of those who are in covenant, particularly the promise of God's word, and of his Spirit. *God established a testimony in Jacob, which he commanded the fathers, that they should make it known to their children, that the generation to come might also know it. Circumcision has much the advantage every way, chiefly because to them are committed the oracles of God. To Jacob his servant, and to Israel his chosen, God promises, I will pour my spirit on thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring, and they shall spring up as among the grass, and as willows by the water courses.* This is God's covenant with them who turn from transgression in Jacob ; *My Spirit which is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed.* Infants are called the children of the church ; and the gentiles are described in prophecy, as coming to the church with their

children in their arms. *All these gather themselves together and come to thee; to Zion, God's church, they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.* The children of those who are in covenant, are distinguished from others as God's children, born unto him. God says to his ancient church, *I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine; but thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, which thou hast born unto me, and hast sacrificed them: thou hast slain my children.* It is foretold, that in the time of the church's prosperity, *the people shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble, for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.* The Redeemer is described by Isaiah, as one *who shall feed his flock like a shepherd, and shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom.* When he appeared on earth, he commanded that children should be brought to him: those who were brought, he took into his arms, and blessed, declaring them subjects of his kingdom. But in what sense are they such, if they belong not to his church, but to the kingdom of Satan? When Christ instituted the ordinance of baptism he pointed out the subjects of it in such general terms, as might naturally be supposed to include children; and his apostles, who knew how he had ever treated children, who had heard his directions concerning them, and who could not be ignorant, that, under former dispensations of the covenant children were comprehended with their parents, must understand them to be included in this instruction, *disciple all nations, baptising them.* Accordingly, in the first instance of their administering baptism, after this commission, they placed the reason of it, and the right to it, on a basis which alike supports the baptism of believers, and of their children. *Repent and be baptized for*

the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, for the promise is to you and to your children. They considered the children of believers as holy, in distinction from the children of unbelievers. And it appears to have been their practice, when they baptized a believing householder, to baptize also his household ; those who were *his*, and under his government. And it is observable, that among all the instances of baptism, mentioned in the New Testament, we find not one baptised at adult age, who appears to have been born of Christian parents ; but they were all proselytes from judaism, or from heathenism.

Our English word CHURCH, signifies the house, or family of the Lord. It is a well chosen word ; for the church is often called, a *family* or *household*. But who needs to be told, that children are members of the family in which they are born ? It is often called a *city*, a *nation*, a *people*. But who ever imagined that these terms excluded children ? If a city is incorporated are not children members of the corporation, as well as their parents ? If a privilege is granted to a people, do not children become intitled to it. If a form of government is settled in a nation, do not children come under the form.

You will ask, how can children be brought within the church without their own consent ? But as well may you ask, how should they be born under the gospel ; or how should they be created rational beings without their own consent ? If it is a privilege to enjoy the example, instruction and prayers of good men, and to be placed under the care of those who are solemnly bound to give them a pious education, then it is a privilege to be born within the church, and to receive in childhood the seal of the covenant. And will any complain, that God bestows on them mercies, before they had consented to take them ?

Certain religious duties are incumbent on children, as soon as they arrive to a natural capacity to perform them. But has not God a right to enjoin such duties as his wisdom sees fit? Must he consult his creatures to know what laws he may make for them? Was not the covenant in the plains of Moab made with little ones, as well as with the men of Israel? With those who were not, as well as with those who were then present? Are there not moral obligations which result from our rational nature, and from our place in the creation, as well as from our special covenant relation to God? Shall we conclude that all these obligations are void, for want of our previous consent? To the validity of contracts between man and man, who stand on the foot of equality, mutual consent is necessary: But God is a sovereign, and "his covenant he *commands* us." When he promises us blessings, and enjoins duties as conditions of the blessings, he states to us the tenor of his covenant, and, by his supreme authority, brings us under the obligations of it, whether we have consented to it, or not.

Now if the children of believers are under the covenant, and within the church of God, they ought to receive the seal and token of their relation to him; to be taught, as soon as they are able to understand, the nature of religion; and to be considered, when they come forward in life, as under the watch of the church. They should be nursed at her side; and, when they have competency of knowledge, should be invited to her actual communion. If they behave in a manner unworthy of their relation, they should be treated with, and exhorted to repentance. If they prove contumacious and incorrigible, they are, after due patience, to be cut off from their people. Such appears to be the state of children.

IV. We proceed to inquire, what qualifications are requisite for the admission of adults into the

church, and for their enjoyment of all gospel ordinances ?

The question is twofold : *First*, What a church ought to require of those whom she admits to her communion ? And, *Secondly*, What qualifications a person must find in himself to justify his coming to the communion.

The first question is, What a church ought to require of those whom she admits to her communion ?

The answer in general is, She is to require the same as the apostles required.

Those whom the apostles admitted to fellowship with them in breaking of bread and in prayer, being first instructed in the doctrines and evidences of Christianity, professed to believe, that *this* was a divine religion.

The Jews, who were baptized on the day of pentecost, gladly received the word of the gospel. The eunuch, who was baptized by Philip, declared his belief, that Jesus was the Son of God. The heart of Lydia was opened to attend to the doctrine of Paul ; and she was judged faithful to the Lord. The jailor is said to have believed in God. When the people of Samaria believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, they were baptized, both men and women.

The churches were enjoined to put away from among them those wicked persons who would not be reclaimed. We may, therefore, conclude, that such were not received without a profession of repentance.

A Christian church is, then, to require of those, whom she admits to her communion, these three things ; a competent knowledge of the essential doctrines and precepts of religion ; a professed belief of, and subjection to them ; and a blameless conversation ; or, where this had been wanting, a

profession of repentance. These things are, in the nature of the case, necessary ; for it is palpably absurd for a man to join himself to a Christian church, and attend upon its ordinances, unless he understands the nature, and believes the truth of that religion on which it is founded ; and has such a sense of its importance, as to resolve that he will be governed by it. And every person of competent knowledge, a good profession, and a correspondent life, has a right, in the view of the church, to the enjoyment of gospel ordinances, whenever he claims it.

Whatever may be the opinion of a church, concerning the necessity of saving grace to qualify one, in the sight of God, for Christian communion, she cannot justly exclude the person we have described ; because a good profession, and a conversation agreeable to it, is all the evidence which she can have in his favor. She can judge the heart only by visible fruits. The controversy concerning the necessity of internal holiness, in the present case, can have no reference to the real practice of the church in admitting members ; for whether she judges this to be a necessary qualification or not, still she must conduct in the same manner, and admit the same persons. Namely, those, and only those, who have sufficient knowledge of the gospel, profess a belief of, and subjection to the gospel, and contradict not that profession by an ungodly conversation. She may, perhaps, think proper to require of her members a particular relation of their Christian experiences. But be this relation ever so full, still it is but the evidence of words—of a good profession. The real sincerity of the heart, after all, is known only to him, who seeth not as man seeth.

A church has no right, *on mere jealousy*, to exclude from her communion any one who offers himself. She must first make it appear, that he is, by

ignorance, heresy or wickedness, disqualified for communion. It is not incumbent on him to demonstrate his inward grace ; but on the church to prove his want of it. The burden of proof, in this case, lies wholly on the church ; not on the claimant. If one claims privileges, the church is not to reject him in a sovereign, arbitrary manner, of her own will, without offering reasons : She is either to admit him, or shew cause why she refuses. If she shall convict him of any disqualification, still she is not to treat him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother : She is not to abandon him at once, but labour for his amendment. To reject claimants, in any other way, than by conviction on fair and open trial, is to set up a tyranny in the church, which Christ has no where warranted. It is to subvert that liberty with which Christ has made us free. The church ought to caution all against hypocrisy and dissimulation in their approaches to divine ordinances ; but she is not to assume the judgment of men's hearts, rashly intruding into things, which she has not seen, and which belong only to God.

We are to aim at perfection, both as private christians, and as churches. But we are to pursue this aim in a scriptural way ; not by usurping God's prerogative, or by excluding from our charity and fellowship, all who hope humbly and speak modestly ; all who cannot give the highest proof of their godly sincerity ; but by cleansing *ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and by considering one another to provoke unto love and good works.

After all, there will be bad, as well as good, in Christian societies. *The kingdom of Heaven is like a net cast into the sea, which gathered of every kind ; and when it was full, they drew it to shore, and gathered the good into vessels and cast the bad away. So shall it be in the end of the world ; then the wicked shall be severed from among the just.*

Having shewn what a church is to require of those whom she admits to her communion, we proceed to the second question.

What qualifications a person must find in himself to justify him in entering into the church, and attending on all gospel ordinances ?

That we may bring this question within a narrow compass, and reduce it to a single point, it will be necessary to remove some things, which have often been blended with it, and occasioned much confusion in thinking and arguing upon it.

1. The question is not, Whether every person educated under the gospel, is *in duty bound* to attend on all divine ordinances in some Christian church ? For this is universally granted.

Religion, in all its branches, is indispensibly enjoined on all men. Christ calls all men to be his disciples, to profess themselves such, and to act accordingly, on pain of final rejection from his presence. No man can free himself from his obligation to enter into the church, any more than he can free himself from his obligation to prayer, or any other duty. His wickedness may be a *bar* in the way of his admission ; but it cannot be an excuse for his voluntary neglect. It is absurd to suppose, that one's sins should vacate his obligations to obedience. They who apprehend that they have no right to the communion of saints, ought by no means to make themselves easy in this state. The command still extends to them ; and their immediate concern should be, to repent of that sinfulness, which obstructs their compliance with it.

2. The question is not, whether one ought to come to the communion in an *impenitent, unconverted* state ; for no man is allowed to continue in such a state. The scripture never proposes, or answers this question, whether a man may attend on this, or that ordinance, while he remains impenitent

in his sins ? because it grants no man permission to remain so ; but now commands all men, every where, to repent. It requires them to perform every duty in a pious and holy manner. It allows no neglect of, or hypocrisy and formality in duty. The man, who calls himself a sinner, is not to imagine, that the same duties, or the same tempers are not required of him, as of others ; for all are required to be holy in all manner of conversation, and to be deeply humble for all the corruptions of their heart and errors of their life. But,

3. It will be said, though no man ought to remain in a sinful state, yet there are many who know themselves to be in such a state ; many who evidently find, that they have no governing regard to God and his commands, but are under the prevailing love of sin and the world : Now, ought they, while they perceive themselves to be in this state, to come into the church and attend on the holy communion ?

If any ask this question, my answer is, it is a question in which no body is concerned. It cannot possibly be a case of conscience with any man. The person here supposed is one, who knows himself to be an habitual sinner ; one who has no governing regard to his duty ; but is prevailingly bent to wickedness ; and, therefore, he cannot be supposed to have any conscientious solicitude about his duty in this matter. It is absurd to imagine, he should be solicitous to know and do his duty here, and yet have no regard to it in any thing else. If in other external acts of duty he is influenced by unworthy motives, the same unworthy motives, and not a regard to the will of God, would influence him in coming into the church. The question is merely a matter of speculation ; it concerns no man's practice. One, who lives regardless of the will of God in general, is just as regardless of it in the case un-

der consideration. He does not wish to be instructed in the matter, that he may conform to the divine will : if he did, he would be as careful to conform to it in things which are already plain. The scripture puts no such case, for it is not a supposable case, that a man, whose heart is set in him to do evil, should have any conscientious scruples in this point, or any other. The proper answer to such an enquirer will be, you are in a most awful state, under the power and guilt of sin. So long as you live in subjection to the flesh, you cannot please God. You are exposed to everlasting condemnation. Repent, therefore, of your wickedness, seek God's forgiveness, and henceforward walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless.

4. The only question which can be a case of conscience, and which it concerns us to answer, is this ; what a *serious* person ought to do, who is in doubt concerning his spiritual state ?

He believes the gospel to be divine, has some sense of its importance, and feels a concern to obtain the salvation which it brings. It is his desire to know, and his purpose to do, the will of God. But still he finds so many corruptions in his heart, and deviations from duty in his practice, that he dares not conclude himself in a state of grace. If he has hopes, they are mingled with painful fears. Now ought such a person to come within the church, and participate in all divine ordinances ? Or is he to delay till his fears are dispelled ?

This is the real state of the question ; and can any hesitate what answer to give ?

We have before shewn, that the purpose, for which men are called into a church state, is that, in the enjoyment of suitable means, they may be trained up in knowledge and holiness to a preparation for future glory. And if we have the same end in attending on ordinances, as God had in institut-

ing them, it cannot be doubted but we are qualified for the enjoyment of them. If then we can say, "our end in coming to the communion is, that we may conform to God's will, may be in the way of his blessing, and may be directed and quickened in his service," we are undoubtedly warranted to approach it.

For a person to judge whether he may come to the communion, the question rather is, what are his *present* views, desires and purposes; than what is the habitual state of his soul? The former may be known by immediate inward reflection: the latter is to be discovered only by a course of examination and experience.

Let us now attend to the practice of the apostles.

The Jews who assembled at the temple, on the day of pentecost, to celebrate that festival, beheld with indignation, and treated with mockery, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, then bestowed on the disciples of Jesus in confirmation of his divine authority. Peter, on this occasion, rose up, and, in a pertinent discourse, laid before them such striking evidence of Jesus being the promised Messiah, that thousands were convinced of their great guilt in rejecting and crucifying the Lord of glory, and anxiously enquired what they must do? Being told, that they must repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, they gladly received the word, and were baptized and admitted to the apostle's fellowship. It is the doctrine of this same Peter, that believers must make their calling and election sure, by adding to their faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge and every other grace. But does Peter tell these new converts, that, because they had not had time thus to prove the sincerity of their conversion, it was not safe to receive baptism, and enter into the church? Does he advise them to wait awhile, till they could manifest the reality of their repentance by

its fruits? No; he admits them to fellowship immediately; but with this important caution, *save yourselves from this untoward generation.*

In the same manner the apostles conducted in the baptism of Cornelius, the people of Samaria, the Jailor, Lydia, and the Ethiopian Eunuch.

Had they considered assurance, as a qualification necessary to justify persons in coming into the church, would they not, on these occasions, have cautioned their proselytes against receiving baptism immediately? Would they not have advised them to a greater trial of themselves than could have been made in a few hours?

It cannot be pretended, that these proselytes had a certain knowledge of their own sincerity. Much less can it be supposed, that the apostles knew them to be sound converts. *They* knew men's hearts no otherwise, than *we* may know them, by a view of what appears in their lives. They could only, hence, form a rational judgment, a charitable presumption. The disciples at Jerusalem believed not Paul to be a disciple, nor did even the apostles venture to receive him as such, till they had evidence from the testimony of Barnabas. Yea, we find in fact, that they admitted into the Christian church many, who afterward appeared to be ungodly. Simon, the sorcerer, is a remarkable instance. We learn from Paul's epistles, that in most of the churches to which he wrote, there were great numbers of unsound professors. The apostles, therefore, did not know, that all, whom they received into the church, were savingly converted; for it is manifest, that many of them were not so. And since they received new proselytes, whose sincerity must, at present, be doubtful to themselves, as well as others, without the least intimation of a necessity of delaying for the removal of doubts, we may with great safety conclude, that a serious person, who believes the gos-

pel, and desires to be found in the way of duty, and of the divine blessing, though still in doubt concerning the gracious sincerity of his heart, has a right to come to the communion of the church.

And indeed, if Christians were to delay, till all their doubts were removed, I am afraid few would come to it at all. And perhaps these few would not be of the better sort. While the self confident hypocrite drew near, the meek, the modest, the humble, would stand afar off.

The members of the church in Corinth, as we learn from Paul's first letter to them, ran into most scandalous disorders in their attendance on the Lord's supper. They behaved in such a riotous manner, as made it evident that they discerned not the Lord's body; distinguished not this ordinance from a common meal, or even from a Pagan festival. One took before others his own supper; and one was hungry, having eaten nothing before he came to it: and another was drunken, having indulged to excess there; and the poorer members were despised. This unworthy partaking the apostle rebukes in the severest terms; and warns them, that they were eating and drinking judgment to themselves, of which they had melancholy proof in the sickness and mortality which had been sent among them.

But what advice does he give them in the case? Does he direct them to withdraw from the Lord's table? No; he shews them the danger of coming in this manner, and exhorts them to come better prepared and disposed. *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat.* He does not say, let a man examine himself and withdraw; but let him examine and partake. *And when ye come together, tarry for one another; and if any man hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not together to condemnation.* This passage, far from being a just ground of dis-

couragement, proves the point which we have stated, that such as have a desire to comply with a divine institution, are not to delay on account of their humble doubts concerning their conversion. If the fear of unworthy partaking were a reason for not partaking at all, as well might the fear of praying, or reading and hearing the word in an unworthy manner, be a reason for omitting these; for it is evident that the scripture enjoins the same temper of heart in *these* duties, as in *that*. The truth is, we are required to attend on every ordinance with godly sincerity; and a suspicion of our insincerity is not an excuse for neglect; but a reason for examination, repentance and amendment.

Some perhaps will say, for some have said, we have sensible desires to approach to God in all his ordinances; but there may be desires which are not gracious; and we fear *ours* are such; we, therefore, dare not approach, for we think less guilt is incurred by abstinence, than by attendance.

But consider; God requires your attendance; and you must either attend or forbear, comply or refuse: There is no medium; and certainly there can be no more grace in your *fears*, than there may be in your *desires*. If your desires to attend an ordinance are not spiritual, neither can the fears, which restrain you from attending, be called spiritual: You can, therefore, be no better accepted in your neglect, than in your compliance; for you act on no better principles in the former, than in the latter.

It is vain to inquire, in what way you shall contract least guilt: Your business is not to contrive how you can sin at the cheapest rate: Your care should be not to sin at all.

If you say, you decline the communion through fear of offending God; examine whether you are not deceived. Are you as conscientious in every thing else, as you would seem to be in this? Are

you as much afraid to offend God in other matters, as you pretend to be in this? If you allow yourselves in any sin, or in the neglect of any duty, be assured it is not the fear of offending God, but something else, that hinders your approach to his table. But if you really have such a fear running through all your conduct, and operating in all your deliberate actions, you have a very good evidence of your right to the holy communion: for, in all acts of worship, you serve God acceptably, when you serve him with reverence and godly fear.

The man found at the marriage feast without a wedding garment, fell under the awful censure of the king, who commanded that he should be bound and cast into outer darkness.

Will you say then, it is the safer part not to come to the marriage feast at all, lest, being found unworthy, we share the fate of this guest? Remember; they who made light of the king's invitation, and refused to come to his son's marriage, were treated with no more lenity than the unworthy guest. He sent forth his armies and destroyed them, and burnt up their city. What then shall we conclude? Why; that a wicked man is safe no where. He who will not forsake iniquity, is secure neither in the church nor out of it.

The crime of this guest was, not that he was found at the *feast*; but that he was found *unsuitably attired*. The same dirt and rags would have been offensive elsewhere.

The servants were ordered to go out into the highways, and call to the marriage as many as they found; and they accordingly gathered together both bad and good. The man, you see, was a poor beggar, called into the king's house, from out of the street. How should he obtain a wedding garment? He had none of his own. He must come to the king's house to receive one: for there was

clean raiment, as well as meat and drink. Where then lay his great crime? Surely not in coming to the king's house, for he was bidden to come; and such as refused were destroyed; but in sitting among the guests in his ragged and defiled condition, and refusing to wear the pure raiment provided for him. And such will be the condemnation of false professors at the last day; not simply that they have come within God's church, and attended on his ordinances; but that, while they have sat under the gospel dispensation, made a good profession, and enjoyed all the means of holiness, they have continued in the love and practice of their sins; that while they have heard Christ teach in their streets, and have eaten and drunk in his presence, they have been workers of iniquity. We are not to imagine that we may safely work iniquity, if we will only keep out of the church. Such will be condemned wherever they are found. The kingdom of God is come nigh to us; his word and ordinances are given to us. We cannot place ourselves in the condition of heathens, if we would; for God has placed us in a very different condition. The light has risen upon us; the word of salvation is sent unto us. And now what choice shall we make? If we treat God's ordinances with utter contempt, we are condemned; if we attend upon them in such a manner as to receive no benefit from them, still we are condemned. Our only safety then is, to profess the gospel, and obey it; name the name of Christ and depart from iniquity; this is to come to the marriage supper, and put on the wedding garment.

Let us fear lest we receive the grace of God in vain. Let us beware lest our privileges, instead of being the means of our salvation, serve only to aggravate our final condemnation.

You see how the case stands. All are required to come within God's church, and attend on his appointed ordinances ; and none are allowed to do this in a hypocritical and ungodly manner.

Your duty lies plain before you ; study no evasions ; God's commands are express ; your obligation to obey is indispensable. Attend on the ordinance in question, and every other, as you have opportunity ; keep in view the end of their institution, which is the promotion of faith and purity. Imagine not that ordinances operate by a kind of charm, to do you good without making you better ; you will only be accepted in hearing Christ teach, and in eating in his presence, when you also depart from iniquity. For his kingdom is not merely *meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

SERMON II.

Christian Fellowship.

1 CORINTHIANS i. 2.

Unto the Church of God, which is at Corinth ; to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

WE have already considered the *nature* of a Christian church ; the *purpose* of its institution ; the relation of *children* to it ; and the *qualifications* necessary to an attendance on its ordinances.

What now lies before us is,

V. To explain that *fellowship* or *communion*, which does, or ought to subsist among professing Christians, whether in the same or in divers churches.

To this subject we are led by the last clause in our text ; *Grace and peace to the church of God in Corinth, with all who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.*

We are here taught, that, as all Christians, in whatever place they may dwell or may worship, are disciples of the same Lord, and call on God in the name of the same Mediator ; so there is an impor-

tant relation, and ought to be a sacred fellowship among them.

For the illustration of this matter, I would observe,

1. There is a *virtual* fellowship or communion among all true saints, whether near or remote; whether known or unknown to each other. They are all engaged in the same design, united in the same interest, and partakers of many of the same things.

This is the sense in which the word is most frequently used in scripture; and this is analogous to the sense which it ordinarily bears in common life. Particularly,

Real saints have *fellowship in the gospel*. They have received one and the same rule of faith and practice. Though they may differ in their opinions concerning some particular things contained in the gospel, yet their sentiments, in the essential doctrines and precepts of it, are the same.

They have received one *common faith*; *like precious faith*. Though their faith may differ in its extent and degree, yet, in its object, nature and influence, it is one and the same. The object of it is divine truth; the nature of it is receiving the love of the truth; the influence of it is purifying the heart.

They are all formed to the same *holy temper*. They are renewed after the image of God; are joint partakers of a divine nature. There may be great variety in the time, manner and circumstances of their renovation, and in the strength and degree of the Christian temper; but holiness, in its general nature, is the same in all. It is a conformity to God's moral character.

They are all partakers of the same divine *Spirit*. There are diversities of gifts and operations; but it is the same Spirit that worketh all in all. Hence

the apostle speaks of *the fellowship of the Spirit, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.*

They are engaged in the same *good work*; in the same *great design*. They are working out their salvation, and promoting, in their respective places, the interest of Christ's kingdom. They are fellow labourers in the same service, the service of God and their own souls. They are fellow workers in the same holy calling. They are fellow soldiers in the same spiritual warfare; fighting against the same enemies, sin, satan, and the world; applying the same armour, the shield of faith, the helmet of hope, the breastplate of righteousness, and the sword of the Spirit; and they act under the same leader, Jesus the captain of their salvation.

They have one common *interest*. They have a joint interest in the blessed God; for there is one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in them all. They bear the same relation to Jesus Christ; for there is one Lord and Saviour, by whom are all things, and they by him. There is one common salvation, in which they all are sharers. They are all justified by the same atonement, washed in the same blood, sanctified by the same grace, and saved by the same intercession. They have an interest in the same promises, and a title to the same inheritance. They are called in the same hope, and are joint heirs of the same glory. They are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

In these respects, there is a fellowship among all sincere Christians. In many of these things, saints on earth have communion with those in Heaven.

One cannot but remark here, how diverse this fellowship is, from that which some boast of; *a mutual sympathy or fellow feeling between sincere Christians, by which one immediately perceives the grace, and knows the character of another.* The scripture never uses the word *fellowship* in this sense, nor does it speak of any such thing in other

terms. It is certain, that the apostles and first Christians were not acquainted with such a sympathetic intercourse of spirits. If they were, why did not the eleven disciples discern, that Judas was a hypocrite? Why did not the Christians of Jerusalem believe Paul to be a disciple? Why did not they feel his graces, when, after his conversion, he essayed to join himself to them? Why could not the apostles themselves be satisfied of his conversion, without the testimony of Barnabas? What occasion was there, that Christians should carry with them letters of commendation, as we find they did, when they travelled to places where they had not been known.

As the gospel knows no such correspondence of heart between Christians; and never once uses the word fellowship, or communion in any such sense, it is a perversion of scripture, as well as of reason, to pretend to such a thing now, and call it by a scripture name. I proceed to observe,

2. Besides the *virtual* communion, before described, among sincere Christians, there is an *actual* communion among those who are known to, and have intercourse with one another. This consists in mutual regards and good offices.

The good Christian extends his benevolence to all, to strangers, heathens and enemies; and from this principle shews kindness to all, as far as their occasions require, and his circumstances permit. But for them who appear to him in the character of saints, he has a love, not only of benevolence, but also of esteem and approbation. He wishes well to all, whether good or bad; but he values men chiefly according to their virtuous conversation. While he is disposed to do good to all, he reckons himself under some superior obligations to those who are of the household of faith. He delights in the saints as the excellent of the earth, and is the companion of

them who fear God. He loves the brethren; and such he esteems all Christians, whether they belong to the same society with him, or to another. He confines not his regard to those of his own sect, or his own particular community; but, like the apostles, extends it to all who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus Christ, *their* Lord as well as *his*, and the common Saviour of them who believe.

In order to the exercise of true Christian love, it is not necessary to know the sincerity of men's hearts. It is enough that, by their profession and conversation, they appear to us in the character of Christian brethren, and by their works give us reasonable ground to think they have faith. We may, in a proper sense, have this *actual* fellowship with one who is not a sincere Christian; and may not have it with one who is such. So long as Judas appeared in the character of a disciple, his brethren had fellowship with him; they esteemed him, placed confidence in him, and even thought him better than themselves; but with Paul, the disciples at Jerusalem had not this *actual* fellowship; they confided not in him, nor believed him to be a disciple, till he produced some proper evidence of a change in his sentiments and practice.

3. There is also a *special* communion, which does, or ought to take place among those Christians, who are united in the same particular church, or religious society.

As they have explicitly covenanted together for social worship and common edification, so they are under peculiar obligations to each other unitedly to pursue this important purpose.

This *special* communion principally consists in a joint attendance on the ordinances of Christ.

It is said of those who received the word preached by Peter, on the day of pentecost, *that they continued stedfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship,*

and in breaking of bread and in prayers. *They were together, and continued daily with one accord in the temple, praising God.* The apostle to the Hebrews exhorts the professors of religion, *that they consider one another to provoke to love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together.* St. Paul speaks of the Corinthian believers, *as coming together in the church, and into one place.* He represents *the whole church as coming together in one place,* for breaking of bread, for social prayer, and for attendance on the preaching of the word. These expressions teach us, that the members of a particular church ought to walk together in the ordinances, and unitedly to attend on the stated worship of God, as they are able, without unnecessary neglect. And, indeed, it is included in the very idea of a particular church, that they worship God together, at the same time, and in the same place. The apostle directs the Corinthians, *when they come together, to tarry for one another ;* for which surely there could be no reason, if they might disperse here and there, and some worship in one place, and some in another, and some no where.

The acceptableness of worship, indeed, depends not on the place where it is performed. But it much depends on a spirit of peace and union among the worshippers. The church is to come together into one place, that there may be no schism, but all her members may with one mind and one mouth glorify God. They must be builded together, that they may become an habitation of God through the Spirit ; must be fitly framed together, that they may grow into an holy temple in the Lord.

There may be frequent occasions for the members of the same church to meet for social worship in different places, and even in private houses. Paul, when he abode in Ephesus, preached and

taught both publicly, and from house to house. We are not to imagine a temple, or public house, so peculiarly sacred, that divine worship can no where else be useful to men, or pleasing to the Deity. The private meetings of christians, conducted with a real view to peace and edification, are much to be commended. But when any of the members of a church withdraw from the usual place of worship, and assemble elsewhere, either with an intention to cause division, or in a manner which tends to it, they violate the order of Christ's house, and interrupt the communion which ought to subsist in it. Though Paul taught from house to house, yet he approved not those teachers, who *crept* into houses to lead the simple captive, and disturb Christian fellowship. He warns Christians to mark and avoid those who cause divisions, for such serve not the kingdom of Christ, but their own private designs. One great end of social worship is peace and union ; and it ought always to be conducted in a manner which tends not to defeat, but promote this end. It is not the sacredness of one place rather than another, but the common edification, which obliges the whole church to come together in one place. The members no longer walk in fellowship, than they thus unitedly attend the sacred orders of Christ's house.

Among divine ordinances, the *Lord's supper* deserves particular attention ; for one main design of this was to be a mean of brotherly communion. Eating and drinking together, at the same table, is a *natural* act of fellowship. Doing this at the Lord's table is an act of *Christian* fellowship. *The cup which we bless, and the bread which we break, is the communion of Christ's blood, and of his body* : and by our joint participation of them, we acknowledge ourselves to be one family, the children of one parent, the disciples of one Lord. *We being many are one body, and one bread, or loaf ; for we are all par-*

takers of that one loaf. This ordinance is a love feast, and ought to be kept, *not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* No trifling causes should divert or detain us from it; and no evil passions accompany us in it.

And here I cannot but take notice of a practice too common among the professors of religion; *their withdrawing from the Lord's table, because a particular brother has injured, or offended them;* for which I find no foundation in the gospel. We are, indeed, to *withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly.* But how? By breaking up the communion? No, but by *putting away the wicked person from among us; and by purging out the old leaven, that we may be a new lump.* We may think our brother unworthy of the privilege which he assumes; but shall *his unworthiness deprive us of the privilege?* We are, in proper season, to take the measures prescribed in the gospel, for his reformation; but, in the mean time, we are neither to absent ourselves from the table, nor to forbid his attendance; for we can justly exclude him only by conviction in a regular process. If the case is so circumstanced, that sufficient evidence for his conviction cannot be produced, he must be left to the judge of all men. Whatever our opinion may be of his guilt, we are not to withdraw on account of his attendance. Judge nothing before the time.

You will say, *Charity is necessary in our attendance at Christ's table, but with such a brother how can we sit down in charity?* People often confound themselves in this matter, by their partial notions of charity. If by charity were intended an opinion of others as good Christians, you could not sit down in charity with those of whom you thought otherwise. But where do you find this description of charity? or where is this good opinion of all

your fellow communicants required, in order to your sitting at Christ's table? It is the effect, not the essence of charity, to hope all things. If you have a benevolent, meek, forgiving temper toward those whom you think not to be true Christians, you can sit down in charity with them; for this is the scriptural idea of charity. If you remember a brother hath ought against you, go and be reconciled to him. If you have ought against a brother, go and tell him his fault. If he repent forgive him; if he repent not, still indulge no rancor nor hatred in your heart. Thus sit down at the feast in charity, in kind affection to your brethren and to all men.

Perhaps some will say, "We withdraw from the table when a brother has injured us, because his presence awakens in us unsuitable passions."

But remember, the indulgence of malevolent passions is your sin; and you are not to absent yourselves from communion, but to dismiss *the passions*; and so keep the feast in sincerity and love. Malice and ill-will indulged in the heart are wrong, whoever is the object, whether a brother, or a heathen. And on this plea, you might as well withdraw, when the latter, as when the former had done you an injury.

Consider also, you are required to pray, and to hear the word, with the same charity which is required in the supper. *When you stand praying, you are to forgive if you have ought against any man.* And you are to *lay apart all guile, malice and envy*; and thus to *desire the sincere milk of the word; receiving it with meekness.* Your plea, therefore, might as well be urged for neglecting public worship, or even family prayer, be sure, if the offender happens to be present, as for absenting from the supper.

The truth is, you are never to excuse yourselves from acts of duty, on account of evil passions

working in you ; but immediately to war against them.

It will be asked, *How can I have communion with a church, while she tolerates ungodly and scandalous members ?*

But let me ask you, my friend, does she tolerate them ? If she does, whose business is it to take the first step towards rectifying the disorder ? It is yours, as much as any man's. It is yours principally. You pretend, that you see such persons in the church. Others perhaps see them not, or have not evidence against them. Have you reproved them ? Have you taken a brother or two to assist you ? Have you brought your complaint to the church ? If you have done none of these things, you are the most reprehensible of any member, for you see the sin, and expose it not. Go first, and do your own duty. You can have no pretence for withdrawing, till you know that the church actually tolerates vicious characters ; and this you cannot know, till you have taken the measures which Christ enjoins.

“ But though I may think a church to be in the main a true church, yet if I see errors in her, ought I not to testify against them by withdrawing from them ? ” By no means. Your withdrawing is no testimony against her particular errors ; it is only a general, indiscriminate charge. It signifies that you are displeased at something ; but points out nothing. You are to commune with her ; but not adopt her errors ; then your conduct will speak an intelligible language. Christ testified against the errors of the Jewish church, and laboured for her reformation ; but still he held communion with her as a church of God. Let his example be your rule.

This leads me to observe farther, that special fellowship among the members of a particular church must include mutual watchfulness, reproof and exhortation.

As Christians, in the present state, are but imperfect, one end of their covenanting and associating together is, that they may afford mutual assistance in the great concerns of religion, and be fellow helpers in the work of their common salvation. Accordingly they are required to consider and admonish, comfort and encourage one another, as there is occasion ; to be all subject one to another, and to be clothed with humility. By virtue of our special relation, as members of one church, we are to rebuke our brethren, and not suffer sin upon them. Those who offend, we are first to address in a more private manner ; them who are deaf to private exhortations we are to bring before the church ; such as contemn the counsels of the church are to be cut off from her communion ; but the penitent are to be restored in the spirit of meekness. Once more.

Our special fellowship requires mutual candor, condescension and forbearance.

We are to consider ourselves, and our brethren, not as sinless, but imperfect beings, attended with infirmities, subject to temptations, liable to offend, and to be offended. While we are cautious not to give offence by doing things grievous to them, we should make all reasonable allowances for them, when they do things grievous to us. We should neither stiffly oppose, nor zealously urge indifferent matters. We should not severely animadvert on smaller faults, nor magnify accidental failings into heinous crimes ; but give every one's conduct the most favourable turn it will bear. Such is the apostle's advice. *We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. Him who is weak in the faith receive ye ; but not to doubtful disputation. Let us not judge one another ; but judge this rather, that no*

man put a stumbling block in his brother's way. Be of the same mind one toward another. Condescend to men of low estate. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Follow the things which make for peace and edification. Let all your things be done with charity.

4. The last branch of Christian fellowship, which I shall mention, is that which ought to subsist among different churches; among all who, in every place, call on the name of our common Lord.

As all Christian churches are united under, and subject to one head, so they are members one of another, and therefore ought, like the members of the natural body, to preserve a reciprocal intercourse. The apostle says, *As the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles; whether we be bond or free.* Care, therefore, should be taken, *that there be no schism, or division in the body, but all the members should have the same care one for another.*

A particular church ought to consider herself, not as an unconnected society, but as a part of Christ's general kingdom: her care must not be confined to herself, but extended to her sister churches: She is to seek, not merely her own profit, but the profit of many.

Some diversity of sentiment and practice may take place in different churches, and yet all remain true churches of Christ; as there may be divers opinions among the members of the same church, and they still be real Christians. We are neither to reject a church, nor to exclude a particular Christian from our fellowship, for supposed errors, which appear not to be of such a nature and magnitude, as to subvert the foundation of Christianity. Our

apostle teaches us, "that we are to regard all as our fellow christians, and all churches as sister churches, who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours; who profess one body, one spirit, and one hope of their calling; and who hold the same head from which all the body is knit together." In a word, he cautions us, that "we reject not those whom God has received." If we know a particular church, in which errors are admitted, we are to afford our assistance for her amendment. But so long as we believe God owns her, by continuing to her his word and ordinances, and blessing them for her spiritual benefit; it is arrogance, it is impiety, for us to disown her. We have no warrant to withdraw our fellowship from a church, unless she has essentially departed from the gospel; or imposes on us terms of fellowship, which we cannot in conscience comply with.

If it be asked, in what actions different churches are to have fellowship? I answer;

They ought occasionally to commune with each other in the word, prayer, and breaking of bread; to admit each other's members to occasional communion with them; to recommend their own members to other churches, into whose vicinity they may remove; and to receive members of other churches on their recommendation. When Apollos passed from Ephesus into Achaia, the brethren in Ephesus wrote to the disciples in Achaia to receive him. When Phebe went from Cenchrea to Rome, Paul wrote to the Roman church, that they should receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints.

Churches are also to have fellowship by mutual counsel and advice, when difficulties arise.

Though no church, or number of churches have an absolute jurisdiction over other churches, yet they should always be ready to afford help and assistance, at the request of sister churches, as occasions

may require. We find in the history of the Acts, that the church of Antioch, on a difficulty which arose there relating to circumcision, sent Barnabas and Paul, and certain others with them to Jerusalem, to consult the apostles and elders of the church there, and to ask their advice upon the matter. When those messengers from Antioch came to Jerusalem, they were received by the apostles and elders, and by the church. And when the apostles had determined the matter in question, they, together with the church, sent messengers, and by them, a letter to the Antiochean and other churches in the vicinity, declaring their opinion and advice in the case referred to them.

This example, as well as the reason of the thing, shews the propriety and necessity of mutual assistance among churches by counsel and advice in order to the common edification and comfort.

I have now distinctly illustrated the several matters proposed to your consideration. Permit me, before I conclude, to point out to you the proper improvement of this subject.

We who have made an open profession of religion, and have joined ourselves to the church of God, with an explicit engagement to walk together in his commandments and ordinances, are now called upon to consider the obligations we are under, and the duties especially incumbent upon us.

1. Let us be well settled in the principles of that religion which we profess.

We are called into a church state, that, being edified in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, we may be no more children, carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men and the cunning craftiness wherewith they lie in wait to deceive. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His gospel is ever the same; not variable like the humors and opinions of men.

Therefore, be ye not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, as if religion was sometimes one thing, and sometimes another. It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace. We ought not indeed to be stiff and inflexible in our own sentiments and usages, merely because they are our own. We should give up former opinions, and adopt others, when evidence is offered sufficient to justify the change. But then a fickleness of temper, a versatility of sentiment, a disposition to fall in with every novel opinion, and to follow every impulse of fancy, is utterly unbecoming a Christian. Such unsteadiness indicates either the want of competent knowledge, or the want of any fixed principles in religion.

Amidst the various opinions which are propagated and maintained, an honest christian, I am sensible, may often be perplexed to determine what is truth. But then, I would observe, it is by no means necessary, that he should be able to answer every argument adduced in support of error. There are certain great and leading principles, in which every christian must be supposed to be settled; and by these he may try the doctrines proposed to him, and judge whether they are of God.

There are two grand points which the gospel always keeps in view. One is the indispensable necessity of holiness in heart and life, in order to eternal happiness. The other is, our entire dependence on the grace and mercy of God, through the Redeemer, for pardon, sanctification and glory. Every man, who professes to be a Christian, must be supposed to be settled in these grand points. The man, who imagines that he is not indebted to, nor dependent on a Saviour, or that there is no need of a conformity to his holy pattern and precepts, in order to final salvation, can, with no consistency, pretend to be a christian.

All such doctrines, as plainly contradict either of these principles; such, on the one hand, as exalt men above a dependence on Jesus Christ and the influences of the divine Spirit; and such, on the other hand, as confound the difference between virtue and vice, and obstruct the influence of the divine commands, must be rejected, whatever specious arguments may be urged in their favour.

2. Let us maintain a constant, devout attendance on the appointed ordinances of Christ.

If we carelessly neglect these, we contradict the design of a church, and our own character as members of it.

Christians are bound to attend on all ordinances, one as well as another. The gospel makes no distinction. The primitive Christians continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.

There are among us some, who profess the religion of Christ, and who, by their regular attendance at the sanctuary, as well as by their general conversation, express a regard for the religion which they profess; but yet absent themselves from the Lord's table. Such was not the practice of Christians in the apostolic times. The celebration of the supper was then a part of the stated worship of the Lord's day; and in this, as well as in other parts, all professors joined. They continued steadfast in fellowship with the apostles, as well by breaking bread, as by prayer and doctrine. The disciples at Troas, we are told, came together, on the first day of the week, not only to hear Paul preach, but also to break bread.

I urge none to come blindly, or against his conscience, to the holy table. Every one must judge for himself, and be persuaded in his own mind.

One man cannot see with another's eyes, nor act on another's faith. But then, it is a plain fact, Christ calls all to be his disciples, and commands all his disciples to shew forth his death by an attendance on his supper. And therefore, such as are hindered by scruples concerning their fitness, must not make themselves easy with them, but take pains for the removal of them. They must seek light, that, if they are in an error, they may rectify it; and if they are under sin, they may repent of it. They must humbly apply to God for his grace to lead them into truth, and to purify their souls; and whatever doubts they have about a particular ordinance, they must diligently attend on all those means which they think themselves warranted to use. "The meek God will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."

3. We are called to brotherly love, peace and unity.

The gospel urges love as the bond of perfectness, as a virtue of the first importance. Paul, in his epistles to the churches, never forgets to recommend to them, that they be joined together in the same mind—that they speak the same things—that they have the same love—that there be no divisions among them—that they avoid such as cause divisions and offences. To shew how essential unity is to the being of a church, he compares it to a household, which subsists by love, and in which all the members have one interest, and are guided by one head—To a building, all the parts of which are framed and compacted together—To a natural body, all whose limbs are animated by the same vital principle, and feel for each other.

Brotherly love is an extensive grace. It is not confined to those of our own society; but reaches to all Christians and Christian societies in every place.

The apostle wishes grace and peace to all, who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus. We are to consider all as our brethren, who appear to hold the essentials of the Christian faith and to maintain a practice agreeable to it; and to all such brotherly love must extend. If our love reaches no farther than to those of our own sect, or those who usually worship with us, it is only a party spirit; it has nothing of the nature of Christian love.

Against such a contracted idea of love the apostle, in our context, carefully guards us. "It has been declared to me," says he, "that there are contentions among you. Every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." They were puffed up for one teacher against another. One admired this preacher; another that; and another a third; and, by their party attachments, raised troublesome disputes and dangerous contentions in the church. But, says he, "Is Christ divided?" Were ye not all baptized in his name? Have ye not all professed his religion? Why then run ye into parties, as if Christ were divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Why say ye, "we are of Paul?" Do ye expect salvation through him? He was not crucified for you. He only preaches Christ crucified; and Peter and Apollos do the same. "Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" Do ye imagine that baptism was designed to form you into distinct sects? or that every one ought to follow the minister who baptized him, in opposition to others? And do ye think, that ye ought to love and esteem, as brethren, those only who are baptized by the same apostle, or in the same place and manner as ye were, as if ye were baptized into the name of the man who baptized you? No, ye were baptized in the name of Christ, and are become members of his body, and, therefore, ye are the brethren of all Christians, by

whomsoever baptized ; for ye are all baptized into one body.

You see, that baptism, a Christian profession, and a relation to a particular church, are not designed to unite one company of Christians here, and another there, in opposition to each other ; but rather to unite the whole Christian world. This, then, and this only, is true Christian love, which extends its good wishes to the whole household of faith ; regards, as Christ's disciples, all who, in every place, call on his name ; and pursues, not merely its own private ends, but the general interest of Christ's kingdom, and the common welfare of his subjects.

True Christian love to those of our own society cannot stop short of a general love of saints. The love of the brethren, as such, is a love of their holy and virtuous character ; and if, on this account, we love our nearest brethren, for the same reason we shall love all, who exhibit the same character. The good Christian desires the prevalence of religion every where : he would rejoice that all men were virtuous and happy. He will not, therefore, pursue the religious interest of his own community, family or person, in ways prejudicial to the general interest of religion. He will not consult merely his own edification, or that of those with whom he is immediately connected ; but will seek the profit of many, that they may be saved.

This love of the brethren leads to a more general love of the human race. Christians are required "to add to their brotherly kindness charity ;" "to increase and abound in their love one toward another, and toward all men."

One who loves the brethren, because they have the temper and obey the laws of Christ, must be supposed himself to have the same temper, and to obey the same laws. Christ exemplified, and has

enjoined a universal philanthropy. He did good to enemies as well as friends ; he prayed for his crucifiers, as well as for his disciples : and he has enjoined on us the same extensive benevolence.

Whatever pretensions we make to Christian fellowship, if our love is confined to any particular community, or even to Christian professors, and does not, in suitable expressions of meekness, goodness and moderation, extend itself to others ; it is not that love of the brethren which Christ enjoins ; for where is brotherly kindness, there will be charity. The brotherly love, which Christ has taught, will make us meek and gentle toward all men. It will tame and soften the passions, correct and sweeten the temper, and dispose us to shew kindness to all men, whether they be Christians or heathens, good men or sinners.

4. As members of the church of God, we are called to an exemplary holiness.

Christ gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify it, and finally present it glorious. We are called to be saints ; separated from the world, that we may be a peculiar people, zealous of good works ; placed under gospel light, that we may be the children of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining among them as lights in the world. The honor of religion and our own profession oblige us to walk circumspectly among men. Those, whom the apostles admitted to their fellowship, were exhorted to keep themselves from an untoward generation. The loose and unguarded conversation of Christian professors gives occasion to others to speak reproachfully of religion itself. They are, therefore, to walk in wisdom toward them who are without ; to provide things honest in the sight of all men, that the enemies of truth may be put to silence, having no evil thing to say of them.

5. Let us exercise a mutual watchfulness in our Christian relation.

We are called into this relation, that we may by love serve one another, and be fellow workers to the kingdom of God. Let us be ready to receive, as well as to give, counsel and reproof, as there is occasion; and in this imperfect state occasions will be frequent. Much allowance is indeed to be made for human weakness, for misapprehension, and for wrong report. We expect such allowance from our brethren, and they are intitled to it from us. Too great forwardness to remark, and too hasty a zeal to reprove every trivial fault, and every unguarded action in our brethren, will tend rather to vex, than reform them; rather to hurt our influence, than to mend their tempers. Reproof is a delicate matter. It is not to be omitted, when occasion calls for it; but it should be given with tenderness and prudence, that it may be received with meekness and gratitude.

6. Our subject reminds us of the duty which we owe to our youth.

If the children of professing Christians are within God's visible church, they are entitled to our particular notice and regard. Though it should be conceded, that baptism denominates them members of the catholic church only, and they become not members of any local church, till, by their own act, they join themselves to it, yet there is a duty owing to them from that church in which they were publicly given up to God, of which their parents are members, and under the immediate inspection of which they live and act. If they are members of the church at large, those Christians, among whom providence places them, and who are witnesses of their conduct, are especially bound to watch over them.

We ought then to admonish and reprove them, whenever we see them behave in a manner unsuitable to the relation, which they bear to Christ ; to rebuke their levity, impiety and profaneness, that we may restrain them from making themselves vile ; to put them in remembrance of the sacred obligations, which they are under ; and call their attention to that solemn day, when every work will be brought into judgment.

While they are under the immediate government of parents or others, it becomes us, in the most tender and friendly manner, to give those, who have the care of them, information of their misbehaviour, when it is gross and repeated, and appears to proceed from a perverse disposition. If Christians would thus assist each other in the government of their families, at the same time exhibiting an example worthy of their character, much service might be done to the rising generation, and to the general interest of religion.

When youth have arrived to competent age, it would be proper that the church, as a body, should deal with them for open immoralities, obstinately persisted in against more private admonitions ; unless they disavow their relation to the church, and her authority over them. In this case she may, in a formal manner, cut them off from among their people, and declare them no longer under her care.

7. Our subject deserves the serious attention of the youth.

My children ; God in his good providence, has ordered the place of your birth and education, under the light of the gospel, within his church, and in Christian families. The most of you have been solemnly dedicated to God in baptism, and have received the visible seal of his covenant. See then, that you walk worthy of the privileges to which you are born, and of the character which you bear,

as God's children, set apart to be his. Receive, with filial reverence and obedience, the instructions and counsels of your parents, who have bound themselves to God for your virtuous behaviour. Attend on the appointed means of religious knowledge, converse with the holy scriptures and other instructive books, seriously regard the stated services of the sanctuary, and endeavour in the use of these advantages, to become wise to salvation, and to furnish yourselves unto every good work. As you have been consecrated to God, live to him. *Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.* Let your hearts be impressed with a sense of your sinful and helpless condition; look to Jesus as the only Saviour of a lost and guilty world: go to God in his name, and humbly implore the renewing and sanctifying influences of his holy Spirit. Make an actual dedication of yourselves to God through Jesus Christ, deliberately resolving on a course of pure religion, and let all your conversation be as becomes the gospel. Keep up a daily correspondence with God in secret. Think and speak of him with reverence, detesting and avoiding every species of profanity. Cease to hear the instructions which cause to err from the words of knowledge. Entertain no licentious opinions, such as would encourage vice or pacify the conscience under guilt. Say to evil doers, depart from us, for we will keep the commandments of our God. Flee youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. And rest not till you have actually taken the covenant bonds on yourselves, by a public profession of religion, and have come up to all gospel ordinances. Do not this rashly and thoughtlessly, but humbly and seriously, in the fear of God, and in obedience to him. Think not that you have a right to live at large. You are

bound to confess Christ's name before men, and to submit to the government of his church. It was foretold by the prophet, that, when God should pour out his Spirit on the offspring of his people, one would say, I am the Lord's, and another would subscribe with his hand to the Lord. Thus the church would increase by the accession of the young; her sons would come from far, and her daughters be nursed at her side. You cannot be said to have fulfilled the obligations of your baptism, so long as you live in a careless neglect of any of the ordinances of Christ. There is reason to believe, that, in the institution of the supper, Christ had a primary regard to the young, who were always the objects of his particular attention. This ordinance was instituted immediately after the celebration of the passover, which was a figure of the suffering Saviour. In allusion to that festival, Christ is called our passover, sacrificed for us. And in allusion to the manner in which the passover was eaten, we are required to *keep the feast* of the holy supper, *not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* Now the special reason assigned for the passover was, that *when children in time to come should inquire, what mean ye by this service?* The parent might thence take occasion to instruct them *how the Lord saved his people from Egypt.* Accordingly the youth were to attend on the passover, in the appointed place, as soon as they were able to *bring an offering in their hand.* Now if the supper succeeds in the place of the passover, was not this one intention of it, that the young, on seeing this service, might be led to inquire what was meant by it, and thus open the way for instruction in the glorious redemption by Jesus Christ. Come then, my children, attend a festival appointed for *you.* Here behold what your affectionate Saviour has done and

suffered for such lost and helpless creatures as *you*. Behold, admire and love; smite your breasts and return with new sentiments of the evil of your sins, and new resolutions of future obedience. Remember that all ordinances, and this in particular, were instituted as means of promoting a holy life; and *let every one, who nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.*

8. The invitation given to the young shall now be addressed to others. Come, join yourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, which shall not be forgotten.

The Son of God has come down from Heaven, and has purchased a church with his own blood. Here he offers that salvation which guilty mortals need. He prescribes the terms on which it may become yours. He has appointed ordinances, in the use of which you may be made meet for the enjoyment of it in Heaven. He has particularly instituted the ordinance of the supper, to remind you of his dying love, and the rich blessings purchased by his blood. He has required your attendance, to awaken your remembrance of him, warm your love to him, and strengthen your faith in him.

Have you any sense of your guilt and unworthiness, and of his wonderful goodness and love? Any desire to become conformed to his image, attuned to his gospel, and entitled to his salvation? Any gratitude to your Divine Benefactor for all the great things which he has done and suffered for you? Any purpose of heart to honor and obey your glorious Redeemer and Lord? Any concern to promote peace and unity among his disciples, to excite and encourage them to love and good works, and to advance the general interest of his kingdom? Then come and confess his name, declare your regard to his religion, subscribe with your own hand to him, attend on the ordinances of his house, walk in fel-

lowship with his professed disciples, join your influence to promote his cause, and shew by your holy conversation, that you really believe, and heartily love the religion which you profess.

To conclude, let us all unite our endeavours to make Christ's church glorious. Let us as workers together with Christ, and with one another, contribute in our respective places, and according to our several abilities, to edify and enlarge it. Let us not content ourselves with appearing as members of the visible church here below ; but be concerned to become real members of the invisible church above, that when the time of our departure is come, we may go to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, the general assembly and church of the first born, whose names are enrolled in Heaven.

SERMON III.



Stedfastness in Religion, recommended in a Discourse delivered on the day, which closed the Fortieth Year of the author's ministry.



1 THESSALONIANS iii. 8.

For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

THE stedfastness of a people in religion, is the life and happiness of their minister.

This is the sentiment here expressed—a sentiment which every good Minister can realize. His relation to his people commences with a peculiar regard and friendship. Long acquaintance and uninterrupted harmony with them, continued labours for them, and repeated kindnesses from them, their candid acceptance of his Ministry, and his hope that it has been useful among them, will all contribute to strengthen the attachment. When age or infirmity shall lead him to contemplate the approaching dissolution of his connection, he will feel a new concern, lest they turn away from the truth, and an ardent desire, that they may be more established in the faith, as they have been taught. Under

the decays of bodily strength, and in the prospect of his final remove, he can say, "Now I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

Your own Minister, my brethren, is not wholly a stranger to such feelings, as have been described.

The present year completes a century, since a religious Society was formed in this place. And *this day* completes the fortieth year, since my relation to you commenced. My Ministry has been twice as long, as that of your first pastor; and almost five years longer, than that of my immediate predecessor. *The day* reminds us of the relation subsisting between us: *The length of time*, which this relation has continued, reminds us, that its dissolution is at hand.

Your present attendance in the house of God I have requested, that I might address you, on some important matters, under the impression, which the *day* will naturally make on *your* minds, as well as *my own*.

The substance of my exhortation will be that, which the text and the season suggest, "Stand fast in the Lord."

I shall illustrate the words in applying them to you.

1. Stand fast in the *faith* of the Gospel; and rebel, with indignation, every attempt to seduce you from it.

If you believe there is a God who governs the world, and men are accountable creatures, then you believe there is such a thing as religion. And if there is any such thing, it must be that which you find in the Gospel. Here every vice is forbidden, and every virtue inculcated. Here the most powerful arguments are proposed, and the most effectual assistances offered, to recommend and encourage a virtuous life. And here the most gracious provis-

ion is made to bring the guilty into a state of pardon, and revive their desponding hopes. Whoever, therefore, makes light of the Gospel, rejects, in substance, all religion: He leaves no ground on which his hope can securely stand, and no information on which his faith can rationally depend. If he discards the idea of religion, he renounces his rationality, and takes rank among the brutes. If he frames to himself a religion, different from that taught by revelation, thus far it must be irrational and absurd; neither consistent with the character of God, nor adapted to the condition of man.

The honest and upright man, who doubts the divinity of the Gospel, will carefully examine its evidences, and promptly yield to the conviction which they bring. Before he ventures to reject the Saviour proposed, he will take time to answer this question, "To whom shall I go?" What better way of pardon shall I find—what better system of virtue shall I contrive, than that which the Gospel reveals? The serious examination of this question will certainly lead him to a humble acquiescence in the christian scheme.

If the Gospel is divine and important, unbelief must involve us in awful guilt. The Saviour says, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." "Take heed, therefore, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God: But exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

This is a day, when *deism*, and the errors which lead to it, appear more openly than they have usually done. The errors most remarkably tending to infidelity are *universalism*, *fatalism* and *enthusiasm*.

Universalism, or the denial of future punishment, relaxes the morality of the Gospel, and gives the reins to every lust. *Fatalism*, or the doctrine that the volitions and actions of men, whether good or

bad, are all precisely fixed and determined by an eternal and uncontrollable necessity, takes away all sense of accountableness, and opens wide the door to vice and licentiousness. *Enthusiasm*, or a reliance on imaginary revelations, made either to ourselves, or to other people, supersedes and sets aside the revelation which God has given us in the gospel. Thus they all eventually lead to, and usually terminate in total infidelity.

The open, undisguised appearance of infidelity in the present day is a consequence of those political convulsions and revolutions, which have agitated the world, and especially this part of it. A spirit of liberty awakens inquiry, and emboldens an avowal of sentiments, which once were studiously concealed. When enquiry is roused, it makes many useful discoveries : but it will often run to excess. There is, in some minds, a certain vanity, which affects to discard common opinions, in order to display a superiority of genius. Free enquiry is, on the whole, favourable to truth ; but its first efforts often produce temporary errors and confusions.

The immigration of foreigners, which is a natural consequence of our national prosperity, and of the present convulsions in Europe, will be attended with real danger to the purity of religion. Many of these foreigners, being men of distinguished education and fortune, as well as of licentious principles and manners, will introduce and disseminate among us the vices and errors of their own country. And libertine sentiments are so congenial to the corruptions of the heart, so flattering to human pride, and so pleasing to the natural love of novelty, that they easily gain credit and prevail.

As this is a day of danger, be watchful, lest you hear the instructions, which cause to err from the words of knowledge. Let your minds be impressed with a sense of the vast importance of religion.

Examine and judge for yourselves, what religion is. And see that its real temper be wrought in your hearts.

When a new sentiment is offered to you, enquire, what is its natural influence—whether it encourages virtue, or only emboldens vice—whether it leads to repentance of sin and amendment of life, or only pacifies conscious guilt—whether it would make you better men, or rather set you loose from the obligations of morality? Never embrace an opinion, which would corrupt your manners, or defeat the pure and benevolent influence of the gospel. Remember that religion is a matter on which depends the happiness of man in his private, and in his social capacity—in the present, and in the future life; and let your regards to it be governed, not by the examples and opinions of men, but by the sober dictates of reason, and the plain instructions of revelation.

2. As you would stand fast in the Lord, you must maintain a Christian *profession*, and support the honour of it by a *correspondent* life.

It is no uncommon thing, that persons, when they are called upon to enter into the church of God, plead in excuse for their neglect, that the members of the church are as loose and ungodly as many others. And they ask, “Why should we join ourselves to such a society, when its members differ little, or nothing from the men of the world?”

This is, indeed, an insufficient excuse. The obligations of religion lie on all, to whom the Gospel comes. They arise not from a voluntary profession, but from the command of God. If one sees corruptions in a church, this is not a reason, why he should turn away from it, and leave the corruptions to prevail; but rather a reason why he should join himself to it and co-operate with his brethren to rectify what is amiss. It is, however, a known fact,

that the loose conversation of professors discredits religion and obstructs the growth of the church. Christians are therefore to be blameless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a perverse nation, shining as lights in the world, and holding forth the word of life.

Walk, my brethren, as men bound for another world—as men seeking a better country. If you are absorbed in the cares, addicted to the pleasures, and conformed to the manners of this world, will it be thought, that there is any sincerity in your profession? Will not your example corrupt the manners of many around you? The Apostle speaks—and he speaks with tears—concerning some, who so walk, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ.

When I speak to the professors of religion, I mean to comprehend all, who, in any way, declare their belief of the Gospel; yea, all who have been consecrated to God. You ought to regard your baptism as a seal of your covenant obligations, unless you mean to renounce it. And if you renounce this, what do you less than renounce the Saviour? Baptism is into Christ.

The Gospel has come to you. You either believe, or disbelieve it. If you believe it, then profess it, and live agreeably to it. If you mean to reject it, beware lest that come upon you, which is written in the prophets; “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish.”

3. To stand fast in the Lord, is to maintain the *power* of his religion.

There are some, who have but a superficial religion. They are not willing that the form of Godliness should be discontinued in the world, nor do they intend to renounce it themselves. But they choose to make their religion an easy, pliant thing, which may comport with their interests and humours, and will not impose too great restraints.

Hence they are carried about with divers and strange doctrines. They follow every new sect, hoping to find something, which will please their imagination, and pacify their conscience. They are ever learning, but never settled in the belief of the truth.

There are some, who flatter themselves, that it is no great matter, what a man believes, if he only acts agreeably to his belief—that great strictness in morals is not required, or may be dispensed with, where there is a regular attendance on forms, and a warmth of affection in devotional exercises. Thus they put the means in the place of the end.

There are some who excuse the corruptions of their hearts, and their acquired habits of vice, under the soft and gentle name of *natural* desires. And they imagine, God will never condemn them for following those propensities, which he has put in them as a part of their constitution. Thus, by making their own lusts and humours, the standard by which to judge of virtue and vice, they form to themselves a licentious religion, which tolerates their iniquities and calms their fears. They explain away the substance, and leave only the shadow; and under this they sit with a false delight.

Beware that you indulge no such delusive sentiments. If religion was designed to prepare you for heavenly happiness, it must form you to a temper capable of that happiness. As that consists in the enjoyment of God, religion must transform you into the image of God.

Observe the stated exercises of secret religion, such as self-examination, meditation and prayer. If these are thrown aside, you cannot experience the real power of godliness. This consists in pious regards to God, and fixed resolutions for his service, which can be maintained only by intercourse with him, and converse with yourselves.

4. A faithful attendance on the *ordinances* of the Gospel is implied in your standing fast in the Lord.

Thus the Apostle teaches us : " Having liberty," says he, " to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith—Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering—Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together."

The ordinances which God has instituted, are highly important, and cannot be neglected without great dishonour to him, and awful danger to yourselves.

Let me exhort parents to bring their children to baptism. Though of late there has been a great increase of baptisms, still there are among us some households unbaptized.

I speak now only to those, who acknowledge the right of infants to baptism ; for this is not a time to bring forward matters of controversy. If you believe that baptism is an institution of God ; and that, under the gospel, as under former dispensations of the covenant of grace, children are to be dedicated to him—if you recollect, that under the patriarchal, as well as Jewish dispensation, the seal of God's covenant was to be applied to them—if you call to mind, that, in the first creation of man, God ordained that children should be a seed to himself, and made this ordinance a part of his covenant with Adam, as the prophet Malachi observes ; you will feel yourselves bound to present your children to God, and to procure for them the appointed token of their covenant relation to him.

The prosperity of the church greatly depends on the religious education of children, and the attendant blessing of God. And your consecration of them to him, in his instituted way, will be a mean

of awakening your attention to their education, and of obtaining his blessing for them.

It is with pleasure, that I have beheld, in months past, the great increase of communicants at the Lord's table. But still there are many who turn away from it. Of the youths few take a seat there. I hope there are, among you, my children, those who really reverence the ordinance of Christ's supper. The numbers, which I often see sitting around, as serious spectators of the solemnity, afford a pleasing expectation, that more will draw near, and Christ's table will be full. If you are detained from this ordinance by religious fears, your very fears prove your right to it. For a fear of offending God by an unworthy attendance, will not stop here. It will restrain you from offending him by other unworthy conduct. And a fear thus operating indicates a heart prepared to draw near to God.

But if you look on the ordinance with indifference; consider; it is an institution of Christ designed for the commemoration of his death; and therefore indifference to it must involve great ingratitude, impiety and guilt.

We wish to see Christ's church increasing, and the young subscribing with their hands to him. But we wish, that all who name the name of Christ may depart from iniquity, and walk worthy of him, who has called them to his kingdom and glory.

Suffer me also, my brethren, to call your attention to the stated worship of the Lord's day.

That social worship is a divine appointment, adapted to the benefit of civil society, as well as to the promotion of vital godliness, you will not deny. And yet it cannot be dissembled, that, in the present day, multitudes treat it with great indifference. Let not this indifference be seen among you. If you, who are professors of religion, and heads of families, neglect, and allow your children to neg-

lect the worship of the sanctuary, it is natural to apprehend, that indifference to this divine appointment will more and more prevail; and, perhaps, when a vacancy shall take place among you—this event is not remote—you will have grown so regardless of God's worship, that his house will be left you desolate. It would be painful to realize, that the next generation will come forward and grow up without baptism—without public instruction—without regard for the sabbath, or for the bible.

Consider the matter as it immediately respects yourselves. Is an aversion to God's worship consistent with the temper which belongs to heaven? Would not an attendance upon it assist you in your personal religion, and in the education of your children? Would not your good example be highly beneficial to those who are coming after you? Say one to another, "Come and let us go up to the house of the Lord?" Let your feet stand within its walls. Let it appear as a city that is compact together, whither the tribes go up to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

5. Your standing fast in the Lord will much depend on the maintenance of *family religion*. If this is generally neglected, all religion will soon disappear. Joshua thought so, when he said to the people of Israel, "If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose ye, this day, whom ye will serve. But, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Attend, then, to the religious education of your children, and afford them your assistance in the things which concern their present usefulness and future happiness.

Train them up to industry in some honest calling. Restrain their irregular propensities. Encourage every virtuous disposition. Furnish them with the

necessary means of mental improvement. Walk before them in a perfect way. Suffer them not to become the companions of fools ; but teach them to associate with the wise. Maintain social worship in your houses, and require their orderly attendance. This will facilitate your domestic government, and obtain the divine blessing on your households.

6. The Apostle having expressed his desire, that the Thessalonian believers should stand fast in the Lord, adds this request, “ The Lord make you to increase and abound in *love one toward another, and toward all men*, to the end he may *establish* your hearts unblameable in holiness.”

That you may stand fast in Christ, you must cultivate a spirit of candour and charity, in opposition to bigotry—a spirit of peace and humility, in opposition to spiritual pride, from whence comes contention.

Regard religion as important ; but be most zealous for the substance of it ; not for mere circumstances and appendages. Be steady in your christian profession ; but never condemn those who differ from you, unless the difference affects the foundation of christianity.

Candour and condescension are essential to a gospel temper and conduct, and necessary to the peace and edification of Christian churches.

Hitherto, my brethren, you have maintained a commendable union. I do not find that any controversy has ever existed in this church, which has required the interposition of an ecclesiastical council. “ Let brotherly love continue.” Dangers have attended you ; but, by the good hand of providence, you have been safely conducted through them. Dangers again may arise ; but be at peace among yourselves, and the God of peace will be with you. “ Mark them, who cause divisions and

offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have received, and avoid them; for they who are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and with good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

There is an hypocrisy, which, to serve a party design, affects a zeal for the purity of the church. This, as long as it can work secretly, under the disguise of piety, will produce great mischief. Excepting this, there is nothing more dangerous to the peace of the church, than religious bigotry; by which I mean, laying such unreasonable weight on certain opinions and forms, as to exclude from our charity and fellowship all who dissent from us.

Those sects, which set up separate communions, to the exclusion of other Christians, and are industrious to make proselytes from other churches, that they may increase a party of their own, are building on a foundation very different from that which Christ has marked out. Never patronize and encourage any sect founded on so narrow a basis—any sect which rears up itself by materials surreptitiously collected from other buildings.

To undermine one christian society in order to build up another, is the essence of bigotry, as distinguished from charity. On this principle few christian churches can exist; for you will find, in the same vicinity, few Christians who do not, in some things, differ from one another. And if every disagreement must cause a separation, scarcely two can walk together. And we find in fact, that societies, erected on this narrow basis, soon totter and fall into ruins.

In this imperfect state there must be charity and condescension, else there can be no union and stability in christian churches.

I remind you of these things, though ye know them, and are established in the present truths. I

think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing, that shortly I must put off this tabernacle. And I desire, that, after my decease, ye may be able to have these things always in remembrance.

The time here allotted us is short. Soon our days on earth will be numbered. Let us fill them up with usefulness, that we may finish them with joy.

When I look back, I am surprized to see how soon forty years have passed away. The time which remains to me, and to some of you, will scarcely be perceived. Let us, who are walking together in the downward path of life, contemplate our end and apply our hearts to wisdom.

There are many present in this assembly, who have no recollection of the commencement of my ministry. Their existence began at a later date. But you my friends, will soon find yourselves in the list of the aged. You already begin to take a share in the business of society. You, perhaps, will have a part to act in the settlement of another minister. May your hearts be filled with those pious sentiments and social affections, which will qualify you for the part assigned you in this world, and for the happiness proposed to you in the next.

May this christian society, which has stood for an hundred years, still stand fast in the Lord. The pious zeal of your fathers laid a foundation for the privileges, which you here enjoy. See that you, with equal zeal, transmit them to succeeding generations. May they, who shall live an hundred years hence, recognize your works of piety, as you do theirs, who lived an hundred years ago.

To awaken in us the zeal recommended, and to enforce the advice offered to us, we will take a view of the origin and progress of this society, and of the dealings of providence toward it.

The town of *Springfield*, (of which this town remained apart until 1774) was settled from Roxbury, in the year 1636, just sixteen years after the arrival of our fathers at Plymouth. In the preceding year, plantations were begun in Windsor, Hartford and Wethersfield, by adventurers from Dorchester, Newton, (now called Cambridge) and Watertown. Gov. Winthrop, in his journal, says, "In October 1635, about 60 men, women and children, went by land towards Connecticut, with their cows, heifers and swine, and after a tedious and difficult journey, arrived safe there.—But the people from Dorchester who removed their cattle before winter, lost the greatest part of them. Some, however, which came late, and could not be put over the river, lived well through the winter without any hay. The people were put to great straits for want of provisions. They ate malt, grains, and acorns; and they lost near 2000l worth of cattle."*

The reason alledged for these emigrations was, that "all the towns within the bay began to be much straitened by their nearness to one another, and by the great increase of their cattle."

But though the want of room might be the first motive, a spirit of enterprize strongly co-operated with it: For the emigrations were so large, that the old towns were thereby exceedingly weakened and diminished. Governor Winthrop says, "In 1636, Mr. Hooker, pastor of the church of Newtown and the best of his congregation went to Connecticut and drove thither 160 heads of cattle." And from Dorchester Mr. Warham the pastor removed with almost his whole church, so that soon after we find the people in that town deliberating on the formation of a *new* church, "a great part of the old one being gone to Connecticut."

* At this time cattle of all kinds were extremely dear. "A good cow was valued at 25 or £30; a pair of oxen at £40; sheep at 5s/a head.

The first planters in Springfield were no more than eight *men*. The number of women and children I have not been able to learn. Their first intention was to have settled on the west side of the river, as did the adventurers in the towns below. Accordingly they began to build in the great meadow, at a place from that circumstance denominated, and still called *House Meadow*; but on the friendly advice of the natives, that the place was subject to inundations, they changed their purpose, and removed to the other side.

Though they were few in number, yet, animated with a spirit of piety, they early provided for the settlement of the Gospel Ministry. And within one year after the plantation began, Mr. Moxon, their first minister was with them.

The people on Connecticut river generally lived in peace with their Indian neighbours. The town of Wethersfield, however, in the second year after the settlement began, met with a severe blow. "Sequin, a head man of the river Indians, gave lands on the river to the English, that he might sit down by them and be protected. But when he came to Wethersfield and set up his wigwam, the people drove him away by force. Resenting the wrong, but wanting strength to revenge it, he secretly drew in the Pequots, who came up the river, and killed six men at their work, and three women, and captivated two girls, and destroyed a horse and twenty cows." As this mischief was in consequence of a provocation offered on the part of the English, they, by advice from the governor and magistrates in Boston, instead of prosecuting a war, made a new agreement with the Indians of the river.

The people in Springfield suffered no molestation from *their* Indians, until the year 1675. This was a time of great calamity.

The famous warrior king Philip, who had ever been an enemy to the English, being driven from

his head quarters at Bristol, then called *Mount Hope*, came with his Indians to the westward; and, having destroyed Brookfield, advanced to the river, and excited among the Indians here a general disaffection to the English. The people in this and the northern towns on the river, began to apprehend danger, and to put themselves in a state of defence. The people in Springfield, however, relying on the professions of the Indians, felt too secure. Hostilities committed in the towns above, in August and September, awakened some concern; but still they did not fully realize their danger, until, by a message from Windsor, they were informed, that 300 of Philip's men had joined with the Springfield Indians, and were then in the Indian fort on Long Hill, and that their intention was to destroy the town. This plot was disclosed by one of the Windsor Indians. On this alarming intelligence, the people fled to their fortified houses, and thus saved themselves from a general massacre.

In the morning of the 5th of October, O. S. two men, with an intention to examine the truth of the information from Windsor, set out for the Indian fort; but were fired upon by the way; one was killed, the other mortally wounded. The conflagration of the town immediately ensued, in which were consumed about 30 houses, and 20 barns. Only two or three houses escaped: These were fortified. Assistance was sent from other towns, but arrived too late. Besides the two men above mentioned, there were several wounded, and one mortally. One woman was slain.*

One of the men killed in the morning in the way toward the fort, was Mr. Thomas Miller, from whom descended the family of that name in this parish.

At this time there were some houses in Longmeadow, and a number on this side of the river,

* See Mr. Breck's Century Sermon.

none of which were destroyed. The enemy's first object was the destruction of the principal settlement. Before they could extend their operations, succours arrived.

But in the spring following, some mischief was done on this side of the river. In Chicopee-street, so called, about a mile north of the meeting-house, the Indians killed a young man named Pelatiah Morgan; and at the same time, captivated a lad, who was in company with him. The lad afterward returned.

In the same year, by the best information I can obtain, Mr. Abel Leonard, who lived near the south bank of Agawam, was shot in his canoe, as he was passing that river. One of his descendants, of the fifth generation, now dwells on the same lot.

There is an imperfect tradition of others captivated and slain, of whom I can collect no satisfactory account.

Within the memory of our aged people, some of the houses here were fortified and garrisoned; and within about 50 years past, watches were occasionally appointed to patrol our streets, for fear of the enemy.

Happy are we, who sleep in our houses, and go forth to our labours in safety, and have none to make us afraid.

At what time the settlements on the west side of the river began, I cannot learn with exactness; but it was probably as early as the year 1660. In the space of 39 years, the houses in that part of the town, which is now the first parish in Springfield, had increased from perhaps about 8 to but little more than 30: and yet in 1664, which was 11 years before, there were, in the whole town, 73 *male inhabitants*. There must therefore have been a considerable number at that time in other parts of the town.

In 1662, there was granted to John Riley, a *house-lot*, on the west side of the river, conditioned, that

he soon erected a house upon it. And two years after, there was granted to Thomas Cooper, on the south side of Agawam, a *house-lot*, located with relation to a cellar, which he had already dug.

Within a few years after this, I find grants of *house-lots* in divers places; some as far west as Paucatuck-brook.

In 1683 there appears to have been a number of inhabitants here; for, in this year, on the 18th of March, a boat containing sundry persons, who, on the Lord's day, were returning from public worship, was upset in the great river, and three persons were drowned; viz. Reice and John Bedurtha, and, Lydia the wife of Joseph Bedurtha. Another woman, by the name of Rodgers, supposed at first to have been dead, was restored.*

In the year 1696, which was 60 years after the settlement of the town began, the inhabitants on the west side of the river, making about 30 families, were incorporated into a distinct parish. In June 1698 a church was gathered, and the Rev. John Woodbridge was ordained its pastor. He died in June 1718. He was well remembered by many people, who were living when I came to this place. From them and others I have learned, that he sustained an amiable character, as a gentleman, a christian and a minister.†

What was the growth of the parish, and the number of baptisms, admissions and deaths during his ministry, I cannot find; for his records, if he kept any, were lost soon after his death.

* The first names of planters, on this side of the river, which I have been able to find, are Riley and Cooper. Soon after these are Foster, Jones, Petty, Scot, Barber, Rogers, Miller, Parsons, Morgan, Fowler, Leonard, Bedurtha, Ely, Bagg, Day, Merrick. These names, most or all, were here before the parish was incorporated. Some of them are now extinct—some are numerous and respectable.

† He left four sons, who were men of worthy characters. Two of them were ministers. One settled in South-Hadley; the other in a parish of New-Haven.

The first deacons in this church, Mess. John Barber, and Ebenezer Parsons, were chosen in 1700. The former died in 1712, aged 70; the latter in 1752, aged 84 years. Eight others have sustained and exercised the deacon's office in this church; of whom four have deceased. Their ages were 92, 80, 75, and 88 years.* Four are still living, of whom one is now 87, and one 85 years old.†

In June, 1702, this meeting-house was erected. It arose in the very beginning of the present century. May the next century, which is just at hand, as early see a new house rising among you. "Build unto God a sanctuary, that he may dwell among you." And "be ye all builded together for an habitation to God through the Spirit."

In June, 1720, the Rev. Samuel Hopkins was ordained the second pastor of this church. He died in October, 1755, in the 62d year of his age, and 36th of his Ministry. His character is well known, and his memory still dear to the aged. He was highly esteemed by all his acquaintance.‡

Within this parish, which then included the whole tract, now called West-Springfield, there were baptized, during his ministry, 660 persons, and 210 admitted to the Lord's table. Of deaths, I cannot find that he kept any record. At the time of his death, there were about 200 families within the limits of the original parish. To this number it had increased in 60 years. The annual increase was 3 families nearly.

In reviewing our narrative, one thought will naturally strike your minds; and let it be deeply im-

* Mess. Joseph Ely, John Ely, Samuel Day and Joseph Merrick.

† Mess. Nathaniel Atchinson, and Jonathan White.

‡ His consort, Mrs. Esther Hopkins, daughter of Rev. Timothy Edwards, of Windsor, died June 1766, aged 72 years—He left two sons, both now living, one of whom is minister of Hadley; and one daughter who married to the Hon. J. Worthington, Esq. LL. D. and died Nov. 1766, aged 36 years.

pressed ; that your fathers, from the first settlement of these towns, and even of the country, were stedfast in the religion of Christ—that in their deepest poverty they were zealous to maintain the instituted worship of God—and that the care and blessing of providence did remarkably attend them. “Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved, so stand fast in the Lord.”

After the decease of Mr. Hopkins, the parish was vacant about 10 months. In March, 1756, I began to preach with you ; In July following was invited, and on the 25th of August was separated to the work of the ministry in this place.

All the ministers, who took a part in the solemnity of my ordination, are among the dead : and only two* survive of those who constituted the ordaining council, which was uncommonly numerous.

In 1757, the southern part of the original parish was erected into a distinct parish, containing about 75 families. In September, 1762, a church was formed, consisting of Christians of different denominations, who, with great appearance of candour, waved their distinguishing sentiments, and covenanted to attend on the same ministry, and commune at the same table. On the week following, the Rev. Sylvanus Griswold was ordained their pastor.

A little before the death of Mr. Hopkins, a number of inhabitants in the north part of the original parish, uniting with a number on the east side of the great river, were incorporated into one parish ; and, in 1752, called and settled the Rev. John Mackinstry.

That part which lies on the west side of the river, by a late act of division, is become a distinct society, and is the third parish in this town. It has a

* Rev. Mess. Mackinstry, and Hopkins of Hadley.

meeting-house ; but is destitute of a minister. We hope it will not long remain so.

When the second, or south parish was incorporated, there remained in this about 95 families, and 550 souls. Ten years ago the number of families was 154, and of souls 897. Within the same limits, the families are now 171, and the souls about 990. Nine families have lately been annexed to this from the south parish. The present number of families is 180, and of souls about 1050. The average increase of the parish for 40 years has been 2 families a year. The progress in the last 10 years has been nearly the same, as in preceding years. In this period the emigrations have much exceeded the immigrations.

In the first 20 years of my ministry, the number of deaths was 208 ; the mean number of souls, I suppose was about 670 ; the proportion, something less than 1 to 3. In the space of 30 years, the number of deaths was 346 ; the mean number of souls about 724 ; the proportion a little short of 1 to 2. In the whole period of 40 years, the number of deaths is 473 ; the mean number of souls 772 ; the proportion nearly 8 to 13, or something less than 2 to 3. In a period of 66 years, the number of deaths will probably be equal to the number of souls living in the middle of that period ; i. e. about 900.*

Of the 470 persons, who have died in 40 years, 140 had arrived to the 50th ; 111 to the 60th ; 86 to the 70th ; 43 to the 80th ; 5 to the 90th ; and 4 to the 95th year of their age. " If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all ; let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many."

The baptisms of children, whose parents were members of this church, have, in the time of my

* In the space of 40 years, 99 persons have been taken from among us by casualty. In the late war, 16 belonging to the parish died in the army, 11 by sickness, and 5 by the sword of the enemy.

ministry, been 837. Of these 48 have been baptized since the beginning of July 1795, which is little more than a year.

Admissions to the Lord's table, including transfers of relation to this from other churches, there have been 290. Besides these, about 80 have joined themselves to the church, expressing a doubt of their meetness for the Lord's table. This church regards all professors, as complete members, and under her watch ; but she exercises indulgence to tender consciences. Of the 290 communicants, 113 have been admitted in the last 10 years ; and 35 in little more than a year. The increase of the church has been much greater in the last 10 years of my ministry, than in any preceding period of the same length. The increase, since the June of the last year, has been distinguished. The Lord make you to increase more and more in numbers and in good works.

May the remaining part of my ministry be rendered more useful, than the past ; and through your prayers may I obtain grace to fulfil the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of Christ, and thus finish my course with joy.

Our relation has hitherto subsisted in comfortable peace and friendship. May it so continue to the end.

I remember, with gratitude, many kindnesses which I have received ; and you have my ardent wishes and daily prayers for your tranquility and happiness.

Among the testimonies of your regard and benevolence, there is a recent one for which you will accept my particular thanks. The benefaction to which I allude was so liberal and seasonable, and so happily adapted to my exigences, that it could not but be gratefully felt. It was made with a cheer-

fulness and ardour, which add much to its intrinsic worth; and with so great unanimity, that I confess myself indebted to you all.

May your benevolence awaken in me a greater diligence in your service. May your union among yourselves be preserved. May peace and wisdom guide all your steps. May you never want a minister who will heartily feel, ardently pray, and cheerfully labour for you in the Lord. May the word and spirit of God never be removed from you, nor from your seed, nor from your seed's seed, even down to the latest succession of our mortal race.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them who are sanctified. And I intreat you for the Lord Jesus sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that you strive together in your prayers and labours for the common interest of Christ's church, and for the particular interest of this society. May my remaining services be accepted of the saints, and useful to you all. May I come to you with joy, and with you be refreshed.

May the God of peace be with you all. *Amen.*

SERMON IV.



*God's Challenge to Infidels, applied in a Discourse
delivered on a Publick Fast.*



ISAIAH xli. 21.

*Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong
reasons, saith the King of Jacob.*

TO preserve the knowledge of true religion, when the world was generally overspread with ignorance and idolatry, God selected a particular people, the descendants of Abraham, to whom he made known himself in a peculiar manner, and committed a distinct revelation of his will. This revelation came to them supported by miracles and confirmed by the fulfilment of prophecies. But in the time of the prophet Isaiah there were many, as in former times there had been some, who, rejecting the true God, and the revelation which he had given them, adopted the idolatrous worship of the heathens around them. To these infidels he addresses himself in the text: And his address is delivered in the most solemn manner—in the name of **JEHOVAH**, the **KING** of Jacob. He calls upon them, first, to state their cause; and, then, to support it by con-

vincing arguments. "Produce your cause—bring forth your strong reasons."

The cause of those ancient infidels was *idolatry*. They did not reject all ideas of religion. That there must be such a thing, and that it was a matter of real importance, they freely acknowledged. But whether the religion taught by the Jewish revelation, or the idolatry practised among the heathens, deserved the preference, was the great question. The cause of modern infidels, at least many of them, is absolute irreligion. The question is not between Christianity and another religion assuming to be divine; but between Christianity and no religion at all.

In either cause, it is incumbent on the unbeliever, discarding and opposing the scripture revelation, to exhibit some competent reasons.

The Christian, who receives the gospel as divine, ought to have some good reasons for his faith; for a wise man will not give himself up to the guidance, nor place his hope on the promises of a religion, for which he can see no foundation. But if the Christian should have a reason for his faith; the infidel should have, at least, as strong a reason for his unbelief. If it is weakness to depend on the promises of a religion which may be false; it is madness to challenge the threatenings of a religion which may be true. If in the former case, a man should be able to bring forth his reasons; surely in the latter case he should be able to bring forth *strong* reasons, and should declare them, that he may be justified.

As this is a day when infidelity appears with unusual boldness, and advances with threatening progress, to the hazard of our national freedom and happiness, as well as to the danger of our future salvation, I shall consider this challenge of the prophet in accommodation to those who reject the gospel

of Christ, and who labour to disseminate the corruptions of infidelity. I shall shew,

I. That they who oppose the gospel, ought to bring forth strong reasons to justify their conduct.

II. What reasons they must be able to produce, before they can be justified.

III. What kind of reasons they in fact do produce, and how insufficient these reasons are to vindicate their cause.

I. I shall shew, that they who oppose the scripture revelation ought to have some strong reasons to justify their conduct.

It is agreed that a christian ought to believe and act rationally—that whoever receives the gospel as a revelation from God should have some good reason to believe, that it really is such : For in a matter of this high importance, to believe implicitly—to act blindly—to follow tradition or custom without examining whither it leads, is weak and childish. But to reject and oppose revelation blindly and without evidence of its being false, is equally childish, and far more dangerous.

Here is a book which professes to be divine—a work which calls itself a revelation from God, and which demands our attention and regard. If it really is, what it calls itself, then it must be infinitely important : For the things which it contains, relate to our happiness, not only in the present life, but through eternity. And if a man should have good evidence of its truth, before he ventures to receive it ; surely he should have strong evidence of its falsehood, before he presumes to reject it.

I. The christian system has long existed in the world, and is regarded, by great numbers of mankind, and by multitudes of wise, honest and virtuous men, as of divine authority. It therefore ought not to be carelessly thrown aside, or rashly opposed ; but, at least, to be treated with condour and decency, and examined with fairness and impartiality.

Its general reception in our own country, is not, of itself, a sufficient reason why we should *believe* it to be true ; but it is a sufficient reason, why we should examine whether it is not true. To believe a religion merely because others believe it, is indeed a weakness ; but to reject, without enquiry, a religion which is generally revered, discovers an intolerable pride and vanity of heart, and an inexcusable contempt of mankind.

2. The religion of the gospel is undeniably useful and beneficial in the present life. It tends to make men better and happier, to improve human nature, and to meliorate the condition of the world. And a man must have some strong reasons to justify him in opposing such a religion.

The gospel contains a pure, uncorrupt, perfect system of morals. It requires all those virtues which contribute to the happiness, and condemns all those vices which tend to the misery of man, in his personal, relative and social capacity. It enjoins industry, frugality, temperance, sobriety and self-government on the individual ; and justice, peace, truth, fidelity and benevolence on the citizen and the neighbor. It is manifest, that if the religion of the gospel governed the world, there would be as much happiness among men, as is consistent with a mortal condition ; and, on the contrary, if practical opposition to this religion should universally prevail, all peace, security, confidence and happiness would be banished from the earth.

The great use and design of civil government is to enforce on men the same manners, which the gospel, in fact, recommends. This is, therefore, a mighty aid to government ; and, if it only had its proper influence, and produced its designed effect, government would become very simple and easy—It would have nothing more to do, than just to regulate the prudentials of society—It would supersede

the necessity of punishments—It would mightily contract the business of legislators and diminish the labour of judges. And even the present influence of the gospel, where it is acknowledged and maintained, greatly facilitates and strengthens civil government, and befriends and meliorates the condition of human society. Let it once be exploded; and the state of mankind will soon be changed much for the worse. If there is no inherent principle to govern them, they must be held under restraint, and kept in order by the power of external punishment. There will consequently be no such thing as civil liberty; for what liberty remains to those who are ruled like brutes, or driven like slaves, by pain and terror? In proportion as virtuous principle is weakened, coercion must be increased; and as the former is strengthened, the latter may be diminished.

Let a nation assume the purest republicanism, and work into their constitution the most refined principles of liberty; and then explode the doctrines which religion teaches and the virtues which it inculcates; and their fine-wrought threads will be wiped away like a cobweb, and chains will supply the place.

Surely then the infidel, who rejects and opposes the gospel, must have some mighty reasons to justify his conduct—reasons strong enough to overbalance the peace, safety, liberty and happiness of men in the present state. But what can these reasons be? What mischief can the gospel do, to be put in balance against all the benefits, which men actually experience from it? If there were any doubt concerning its divine authority, yet a friend to human happiness would wish its credit and influence, in regard of the real advantage which it brings to the world.

3. The man who believes and obeys the gospel, acts on the safe side; all the risk is on his part who rejects it.

This observation is brought forward, not as a conclusive evidence, that the gospel is true ; but as a strong argument, why none should oppose it, until they can prove it is not true.

The gospel instructs us, that we are moral and accountable beings—that there is a future state of retribution—that eternal felicity or wretchedness awaits men—that the way there marked leads to happiness, and the contrary course terminates in misery.

If all this is true, nothing can be more important than the gospel. The infidel supposes, all this to be false. The importance of religion, if it were true, he cannot deny. But his security is, that the whole system of the gospel is fictitious—that there is no future retribution—and consequently nothing to be feared from a course of vice.

Now if the authority of the gospel were ever so doubtful, yet the christian has this great advantage, that he has taken the safe side. If the gospel should prove false, he ultimately suffers nothing by his faith : if it should prove true, the infidel is undone by his unbelief. At any rate, the christian is as safe as the infidel ; for if there is no future state, there can be no distinction. On the contrary supposition, the sincere christian only is safe : the infidel is miserable. Nothing, therefore, can justify a man in rejecting and opposing the gospel, but absolute demonstration of its falsehood. And where is the man who can bring against it such a strong reason as this ? The christian is justified, if he believes and acts only on probability. The infidel cannot be justified in acting on any evidence inferior to clear and decisive certainty. If the former is weak in his faith, the latter is mad in his unbelief. If the christian ought to have a reason why he believes the gospel, the unbeliever should have a stronger reason, why he rejects it ; for the former risks nothing ; the latter hazards every thing.

4. Strong reasons may be, and have been produced to prove that the gospel is divine : The infidel, before he can justify himself in opposing it, must produce stronger reasons to disprove its divinity.

The *goodness* of the christian scheme is no inconsiderable argument in its favour. It teaches us the character and government of God ; represents him as merciful to forgive sinners ; points out a wonderful way in which he exercises his mercy towards them ; states the terms of our acceptance, and opens to our view glorious prospects beyond this short life. It instructs us in the duties which we owe to God, to ourselves, and to one another. It furnishes us with the best consolations in adversity and with the most animating assistances to every good work. In a word, it gives us all things which pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of a Saviour, who has called us to glory and virtue. Its uniform design and tendency is to promote human happiness—to make men useful to one another, and comfortable to themselves in this world, and to prepare them for, and thus assure them of superior felicity in a future world. An institution so friendly and benevolent—so perfectly adapted to the nature and condition of man—so conducive to his peace and comfort, hope and happiness, must have originated from a wise and benevolent Being.

The unity of its design, the harmony of its parts, the purity of its precepts, and the tendency of its doctrines, all conspire to establish its credibility.

The miracles wrought in favour of the gospel prove its divinity. For it is certain that a Being of truth and goodness would not miraculously interpose to support the cause of error, fraud and delusion.

That there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, who called himself the Son of God, and a

teacher sent from him—that this person lived in a very holy manner, took much pains in instructing mankind, and performed many great and astonishing works, such as were far beyond the power of man—that he voluntarily submitted to a very cruel kind of death, and in a short time, according to his own prediction, rose again from the dead and appeared to many who had before known him, and who now perfectly recognized him—that this person had a number of disciples and attendants, who were educated under his care, and whom he afterwards sent forth to instruct mankind in his doctrines, and to work miracles in his name—that by their preaching and miracles the religion of their master made a rapid progress, and obtained an extensive spread and credit in the world—that these things were real facts, we have all the evidence, which reason can demand. A number of men—no less than eight—who were contemporary with Jesus, and some of them his disciples, have written narratives of his life, doctrines, works, death and resurrection ; or have written public letters, in which these things are acknowledged and illustrated. Their writings were matters of immediate and general notoriety, were received as genuine and authentic in the time when they appeared, and as such have been handed along, from age to age, down to the present day. In every age there are historians and others, who vouch the credit and reception of these writings, in the age in which they respectively lived. There is no intimation, that the authors of these writings were ever convicted of fraud ; nor is there any contemporary or succeeding historian, who pretends to disprove the facts, which they have asserted, or to show that the christian scheme is a fiction invented to impose on mankind. On the contrary, the leading and most important facts related in the gospel writings, are acknowledged by

other ancient historians. We have, therefore, all the evidence, which history, in such a case, could be supposed to give us, that there was such a person as Jesus Christ—that he taught the doctrines and performed the works ascribed to him in the New Testament—and that he had disciples, who, after him, preached his religion and wrought miracles in his name, with mighty success. And if such miracles were really performed, the religion designed to be established by them is divine.

Add to this ; There are many prophecies, delivered by Jesus and his apostles, pointing to events, great in their nature, and some of them, in human view, improbable, which were to take place in times then future, and even far remote. These prophecies have, from age to age, been verified by most remarkable completions. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans—the captivity and dispersion of the Jews, and their preservation as a distinct people in their scattered and disorganized condition—the apostacy of a great part of the christian church—the introduction of idolatry into it—its severe and terrible persecutions—the support of pure christianity in times of the greatest ignorance and corruption—the rise of an impious and tyrannical power in the church—the cruelty, growth and long continuance of this power—the miseries which it should produce—its decline and final extinction—and the subsequent revival and spread of the pure religion of Jesus, are events plainly foretold ; most of them have actually been accomplished ; and others appear to be hastening toward a completion. Such a remarkable correspondence between the predictions of the gospel and the history of the church, is a strong reason why we should acknowledge the former to be given by the inspiration, and the latter to be conducted by the providence of God.

No false religion has ever produced this evidence. Hence the prophet thus challenges the worshippers

of heathen gods ; “ Produce your cause—bring forth your strong reasons. Let them bring forth and shew us what shall happen. Let them shew the former things what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them ; or declare us things to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods : Yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed and behold it together. Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought ; an abomination is he that chooseth you.”

If the religion taught in the scriptures has been received by great multitudes of mankind—by many of the wisest and best of men, who have carefully examined it—if it is a religion highly useful to societies and to individuals—if it is attended with no danger, but all the danger lies on the other side—and if it is supported by evidences as strong and convincing as the nature of the case will admit ; then the infidel who ventures to reject and oppose it, must produce some strong reasons, before he can be justified.

II. What reasons these must be, we shall now shew. As there are different degrees of infidelity, we shall view this case in different lights.

1. If the infidel denies all religion, it concerns him to demonstrate, that there is no divine government or agency in the universe—that men are not moral and accountable creatures—and that there is no future state of retribution. If these are his sentiments, then let him give a rational account of the existence of the world and all the creatures which he beholds, and of the beauty, order and harmony which nature presents to his eyes. If he says, This is not the work of a self-existent and intelligent Creator ; but the mere effect of chance ; let him shew, that chance usually works in this regular and consistent manner. It is absurd to say, that chance works rationally in the production and government of the

world, if it is irregular in every thing else. Let him then support his theory by obvious examples. Let him shew, that the casual strokes of a pencil will produce a finished landscape—that a case of types thrown down fortuitously will all stand erect, and arrange themselves into a system of philosophy—that ink sprinkled at random on paper will bring forth an epic poem. Let him shew that similar effects will follow a thousand times successively without failing in a single instance. Or,

2. If he acknowledges that men are moral and accountable creatures, but despises the peculiar doctrines of the gospel relating to the redemption of mankind, then it is incumbent on him to prove that we are in a state of moral perfection—that we have not offended God—that there is no corruption in our nature or wickedness in our practice—that consequently we stand in no need of that renovation and pardon which the gospel proposes; and that the atonement of a Saviour, and the influence of divine grace are vain and superfluous. For if we are moral beings, and have fallen into depravity and guilt, then we are dependant on the grace of God for a title to, and preparation for the happiness of a future life; and we need information, whether on any terms; and, if on any, on what terms God will exercise his grace towards us. If it is once admitted, that we are moral and sinful creatures, the instructions, discoveries and promises of the gospel are credible and important.

If the rectitude, virtue and innocence of the human race are asserted, in opposition to the gospel, then let it be shewn, whence arise wars and fightings among nations; and robberies, murders, thefts, rapes and violences among citizens; or let it be fairly proved that these are not evils, and that they tend not to the misery, but rather to the happiness of mankind. Or,

3. If he rejects the gospel-scheme as faulty or defective—not adapted to the nature, or adequate to the exigencies of man, or not supported by competent evidence ; let him produce one that is better—more agreeable to the divine character—more suitable to human wants—and attended with more decisive proofs of its divinity.

The gospel has come to men with the words of eternal life : They who forsake it, and call others to follow them, should first consider whither they will go, and where they will stop. To set men afloat, without directing them to a shore—to undermine their present standing without leading them to safer ground, is unkind and inhuman.

If any pretend that there is a better religion than the gospel teaches, let them produce it and submit it to a comparison. Let them come forward with their more perfect scheme—with something that will render men more virtuous and happy—society more peaceable and secure—government more easy and efficacious—futurity more bright and glorious. Until they can do this, and this none ever have done, let them, at least, be content that the gospel should do all the good it can. Or,

4. If they pretend the gospel is merely a human contrivance ; let them not oppose it by loose declamation, or unconvincing ridicule ; but bring forth some strong and cogent reasons to disprove its divinity.

Let them make it appear, to the conviction of a rational mind, that there never was such a person as the one described in the New Testament, under the name of Jesus Christ ; or, if there was one called by that name, that he never taught the doctrines, or performed the works ascribed to him ; that there were no such strange circumstances attending his death, and no such clear testimonies of his speedy resurrection as have been pretended—that there

never were such men as we call the apostles and disciples of Jesus ; men who went about teaching and working miracles in his name, and who suffered the loss of all things in support of his cause ; but that the whole story which we have in the New Testament, is a gross forgery—an artful figment and device. Let them not think that, in so important a case, their bare assertions will be sufficient to confront all the positive evidence in favour of the gospel. Let them bring forth strong reasons. Let them shew us, when this forgery of the gospel was contrived, and by what means it so strangely succeeded. Let them shew, when it was detected and exposed ; who were the men that made the discovery, and what was the evidence which convinced them of the fraud. Let them produce a number of historians, living in the time and place of the transaction, and actually concerned in it, who have given an account of the detection. Let them make it appear that these historians were honest, undesigning men, who sacrificed all their worldly interests and prospects in support of their narrative. Let them bring proof, that the history of this important discovery was published immediately, when the affair was fresh in the minds of all men ; has been renewed in every age since ; is handed down to the present time, and has never been confuted by any, or doubted by those who have examined it. Until infidels can do this, they have nothing to put in balance against the external evidence, which accompanies the gospel.

Nothing of this kind has ever appeared, and we are sure that nothing like it exists. If it did exist, the enemies of the gospel would long ago have produced it in support of their cause. And if there is no historical evidence which can be produced to invalidate that which often has been exhibited in defence of the gospel, the latter must stand firm and unmoved. We proceed as was proposed,

III. To make some observations upon the manner in which infidels oppose the gospel, and upon the weakness of the reasons which they alledge for the rejection of it.

They will not meet revelation on fair ground ; but rather play round its outworks. They will not enter into the merits of its cause, or rest the issue of it on that kind and degree of evidence, which is judged competent in all other causes ; but rejecting the idea of a revelation as absurd, and all evidence in its favour as insufficient, they employ misrepresentation, wit and satire to render the scriptures ridiculous. They will not take them in a collected view, as exhibiting a scheme of doctrinal and practical religion ; but selecting particular passages, expressions or circumstances, they give these a ludicrous turn, and thus endeavor to discredit the whole.

The manner in which the enemies of revelation have made their attacks upon it, indicates their consciousness of its superior strength. If reason could have stood against it, this alone would have been brought to the charge, and such contemptible auxiliaries as ridicule and lampoon would have been dismissed from the service.

As a specimen of the manner in which infidels oppose revelation, we will state, and answer some of their principal objections.

1. Some complain that there are *obscurities* in scripture.—And what if there are ?—Is it strange that a book, written so many ages ago, should contain some things hard to be understood ? Prophecies are, in their nature, obscure until they are elucidated by the events. There are, in scripture, some allusions to customs anciently existing, but now obsolete—hence certain passages may be dark to a modern reader. But, then, there is no duty or doctrine of scripture, which is left doubtful ; for

nothing important is made to depend on a single passage. If one text cannot be understood, there are still enough which may ; and the doctrine or duty hidden in the dark passage, is fully discovered in a hundred plain ones. Thus the wise Author of this sacred book has effectually guarded against any real danger from those accidental obscurities, which might take place in a course of ages. If in reading the statute book of the state, you should find a certain law, or the preamble to a particular act, so obscure, that you were in doubt of its true meaning, would you thence conclude, that the whole book was a forgery, and that it never passed the authority of the state ? This would be as reasonable, as to reject the bible, because you now and then meet with a dark text.

2. The infidel alleges, that the miracles and wonders related in scripture are incredible, and that no evidence can render them otherwise.—But why are they incredible ? If there is a God, certainly his power is equal to all the works ascribed to it. It is as easy to reanimate a dead man, as to create a living man—as easy to restore a withered limb, as to make a new one—as easy to quiet a storm, as to raise one—as easy to increase a few small loaves of bread into a competency for thousands of people, as to multiply your seed into a plentiful harvest—as easy to check the progress of the sun and moon, as to put them in motion. In reference to the divine power, there is nothing difficult, and nothing incredible in any of the miracles of scripture. The only question is, whether there is any reason, why the Deity should thus deviate from the ordinary course of his operations. If there is such a reason, then the miracles are credible. If it is credible, that a God of infinite goodness should bestow on his rational creatures a revelation of some important truths, which otherwise they could not learn, then it is cred-

ible, that he would give them some kind of evidence to satisfy them of the divine authority of this revelation. And what evidence could be more solemn and decisive in such a case, than miracles wrought by those who were charged with the publication of it? The importance and benevolence of the occasion render the miracles reasonable, and the power and wisdom of God render them practicable. It is therefore highly credible that miracles may be wrought, and historical testimony makes it morally certain, that they have been wrought.

3. The opposers of the gospel ask; if such extraordinary works have been done, why have they not been related by profane historians, so called? Why must we depend, for our information, on *christian* writers, who must be supposed to be interested and prejudiced persons?—An idle question this—as if a relater of facts, in order to his being believed, must himself disbelieve the facts, or the necessary consequences of the facts, which he relates.

Here are a number of historians, who relate these wonderful works. They believed these works were really done in the manner which they have narrated. They consequently believed that the religion thereby attested was divine. But must these historians be discarded, because they believed their own narration of facts, or because they felt the evidence arising from these facts? Is this an established rule in examining the credibility of other histories, to reject all those as false, which the writers believed to be true?

But the truth is, there are profane historians, who mention many of the extraordinary things related in scripture; and if their testimony is of any advantage, this advantage we have.

A particular objection has been raised against the Old Testament from the silence of profane historians concerning the changes in the heavenly bodies,

in the time of Joshua, and afterward in the reign of Hezekiah, as they are related in the books of Joshua and the Kings. These new appearances in the heavens, it is said, had they been real, must have been so conspicuous as to be generally observed, and so singular as to be abundantly recorded.

But it should be remembered, that there are no profane histories extant, which were written so early as the time of Joshua; and however observable the phenomenon of the sun's standing still might be, no authentic, cotemporary record of it, but the scriptural one, could come down to us. The retrocession of the sun in the time of Hezekiah is related not only in the second book of Kings, but also in the book of Isaiah, who professes to have been a witness of it. It was noticed in Babylon, so that the king sent messengers to Hezekiah to obtain a more particular account of it. Besides; as Bishop Patrick in his commentary remarks, Herodotus, one of the oldest profane historians, whose works are now extant, and one who travelled into Syria and Egypt and other parts to collect materials for his history, mentions a tradition in Egypt concerning some extraordinary motions of the sun which had formerly been observed in that country; but which produced no lasting alteration in the earth, or the river, or in any thing else. This tradition may be supposed to refer to the appearances related in scripture.

4. Deistical writers have charged the scripture with containing many plain inconsistencies and contradictions, and thence have inferred the doubtful authority of the whole.

I know of no literal inconsistencies in scripture, of any consequence, but what may be, and have been rationally explained and reconciled. Those which are pretended lie chiefly in the historical and chronological parts of scripture, so that, if they

were real, no doctrine or precept is affected by them. If in a book written so many ages ago, and so often transcribed, some small inaccuracies have happened, it is not strange. The small slips and mistakes of transcribers have never been thought to invalidate the authenticity of other books : Why should they of this ?

It is pretended that the evangelists disagree in the accounts which they give of Christ's resurrection ; and this is an important article.

But christian writers have made it appear, to the satisfaction of candid minds, that these disagreements are only relations of different circumstances of the event, which were omitted by one evangelist, and noticed by another. The differences, if they were real, do not at all affect the substance of the narrative. And if it were conceded, that the historians, writing from their own recollection, and from the information of spectators, related some immaterial circumstances differently, the credibility of the history would not be thereby invalidated. The English historians, in their accounts of the execution of Charles I, place the time of his death at different hours of the day. But does any man for this difference, throw by the whole book, or thence conclude, that there never was such a king in England as Charles I ; or if there was, that he died like other kings, and not on a scaffold ? Yet such a conclusion would be as just, as a conclusion against the christian history from such circumstantial varieties. It is not conceded, that there are any inconsistencies in the narratives of the evangelists ; but, I say, admitting there were such, it is unreasonable thence to infer, that the substance of the narrative is false.

5. To weaken the credit of the gospel, and subvert the faith of christians, it has been said, that *the book called the New Testament never existed,*

until more than three hundred years after the time, when Christ is said to have lived."

But this is a gross misrepresentation. Doctor Mosheim, a learned ecclesiastical historian, speaks of it as a fact *well known*, that "before the middle of the second century," i. e. in less than fifty years after the apostolic age, "the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were read in *every* christian society throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners." "Hence it appears," says he, "that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions on the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves, or by their disciples and successors, who were spread abroad through all nations." He adds, from Eusebius an early historian, "We are assured that the four gospels were collected during the life of St. John, and that the three first received his approbation." And he supposes that the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time."

Many of these books were directed to particular churches, and carried to them by messengers sent for the purpose. Those churches, when they gave out copies, would carefully preserve the originals. Paul, to prevent imposition, subjoined to his letters a form of benediction in his own hand-writing, "which was the token in every letter." Equal care was doubtless taken to prove the genuineness of the other sacred writings. He orders some of his epistles to be read in the churches, and we may hence conclude, that the same use was made of all the rest. Peter in his second epistle, written to christians in general, speaks of all the epistles of Paul as well known to them. Paul himself alludes to, and quotes a passage from Luke's gospel. Justin, who wrote but about forty years after the times of the apostles, not only quotes passages from all the four

gospels, but says, "A portion of them was read every sunday in the public assemblies of christians." And we meet with quotations from almost all the books of the New Testament, in all the early christian writers. It is certain therefore that these books existed, and were held in sacred estimation, as early as we have any accounts relative to the subject.

The authority of the greater part of these books was known so universally, that it never was questioned.

Concerning the epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second and third of John, that of Jude, and the revelation, some doubts arose; but, on examination, they were removed, and the books were admitted into the canon. But the existence of this temporary hesitancy is a presumptive evidence in favour of these and all the other books in the canon, as it shews that the early christians acted and judged in this important matter, not with a rash credulity, but with a deliberate caution.

6. Some have said, that these books, whatever they might once be, cannot now be depended on, for probably, in this long tract of time, they have been essentially corrupted.

But do we, on the same supposition, discard all ancient books? Do we give credit to none but modern authors? We may doubtless place more confidence in the purity of these, than of any other ancient writings; for surely, if God has given us a revelation, he will preserve it from essential corruption. And, indeed, we can scarcely imagine such a corruption to have been possible. For these books were publicly read in the churches, and copies of them were soon multiplied. Errors in transcribing would often happen; but on a collation of copies, might be corrected. Among the early christians, there were sectaries, whose distinguishing

tenets were warmly controverted ; but none of them were ever accused of corrupting the sacred text to carry a favorite point. Had any thing of this kind been attempted by one party, the opposing party would, at once, have observed and exposed the fraud. Such a fraud could not have succeeded ; for no man could possess himself of all the existing copies ; and to have corrupted one or two only would have answered no purpose. It should farther be considered, that the scriptures are not written in a systematical form, as a philosopher or logician would have written them, but in that free, easy and popular manner, which best conveys instruction to common capacities. Hence the great doctrines and precepts of religion, instead of being confined to particular places, are scattered every where, through the whole book, and wrought into almost every page. Therefore a designing corrupter, in order to accomplish any purpose, must transcribe the substance, and alter the contexture of the whole book. A few local alterations would avail nothing ; for the doctrine expunged in one place, would still appear in a hundred others ; and an error inserted here or there, would be condemned every where else. And a *general* corruption of the book would at once betray itself, and thus defeat its own design. The idea therefore of an essential change made, either by accident or design, in this holy book, is too illiberal for any candid deist to suggest, and too absurd for any considerate christian to admit.

The instances adduced are sufficient to shew, what kind of reasons infidels bring forth to discredit the cause of revelation, and support their own. Whether these are *strong* reasons, let common sense decide.

And now let our hearts rejoice in the revelation which God has given us, and in the convincing evidence which attends it.

Let us adore the goodness of God, that our education has been so favorable to our religious interests ; and beware that we abuse not his goodness to the increase of our present guilt and future punishment.

If any have been thrown into doubts concerning the authority of the gospel, let them examine it with an open and honest mind. Your education in favour of christianity is not, in itself, a sufficient ground of faith : But see that you renounce not your early faith without strong reasons. For it is, at least, as necessary that the infidel should have a reason for his unbelief, as that a christian should have a reason for his hope.

Let not your faith be shocked by those writings which treat the scriptures with ridicule. The subject is in its nature serious—It demands to be treated with gravity—It spurns drollery and humour. An author, who attempts to banter christians out of their faith, instead of enlightening them into the truth—who endeavors to ridicule them out of all religion, instead of shewing them a more excellent way than they have found, is not worthy of attention. He writes with a wicked design. And they who circulate and spread his writings, are partakers of his evil deeds.

You see the importance of a christian profession. The gospel has always had its enemies ; and in the present day, they are more numerous and arrogant than usual. If these are bold in their opposition to it, let its friends be as bold in their defence of it. You who believe it to be divine, come forward ; openly declare your faith : shew that you are not ashamed of your religion ; contribute your influence to its support in this evil day. In such a time neutrality is opposition to truth ; and he who declines to confess Christ's name takes part with his enemies : He who is not for us, is against us.

Ye who are professors of Christ's gospel, hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering : Consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, but exhorting one another ; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Among christians there are different sects, which too often, with an indiscreet zeal, weaken the common cause by their party oppositions. It were better, that they would wave their smaller differences, and unite in promoting that great interest in which they all are equally concerned.

Ye who name the name of Christ, depart from iniquity, and be careful to maintain good works. Take heed that your good be not evil spoken of. Provide things honest in the sight of all men, and by well doing put to silence the malice of the wicked, and the ignorance of the foolish. A practical defence of the gospel is the best. If you would convince mankind, that your religion is better than any other, or better than none at all ; see that you live better than the professors of any other, at least, better than they who pretend to have none.

If you value the gospel as a revelation from God, do nothing to weaken, but all you can to strengthen its influence. By no means encourage the young, or unprincipled to read books of licentious tendency—books written with a design, not to inform the mind, but corrupt the manners—not to lead men into the knowledge of important truths, but to shake their faith in the truths which they have been taught.

You will say, Free inquiry is to be commended. It really is so : But licentiousness is to be avoided. And if christianity may be true, and is undeniably good, then they who have no leisure or ability for a full enquiry into its evidences by reading on both sides, ought not to be cast into doubt and perplexity

by reading only on the side of infidelity. Keep in mind what has been observed, that a gospel faith and practice are, at any rate, safe. The contrary may be fatal. None therefore should be encouraged to read books written in opposition to it, but such as can and will read those written in its defence.

If the question was only between christianity and another religion, pretending to be divine, there would be a reason for reading on both sides ; for an honest man would wish to know, which of the two had the best claim to his faith. But the question, as it now stands, is between christianity and no religion. And since it is safe to act on the belief, and may be fatal to act on the disbelief of this religion, there is not the same reason, as in many other cases, for reading on both sides. If you shock the faith of the christian, you put him in hazard, without the possibility of doing him any good—You may thus make him a worse man ; there is no chance that you will make him better—You thus may destroy his soul ; but it is certain you will not save it. If you attend to the obvious difference between the question concerning the truth of the gospel, and most other questions controverted among men, you will easily see the absurdity of reading, and encouraging others to read licentious books, on pretence that men are bound to examine both sides of a question. A man never ought to read on the licentious, unless he reads also on the religious side ; for this partiality may be fatal to him. He may read on the side of religion, without reading any thing against it ; for this is safe—he runs no risk.

If still you plead for impartiality in this case, then be impartial—at least do justice to religion. If you read any thing in opposition to it, read the answer. If you put into your neighbour's hand a book written to subvert religion, furnish him also with a rational vindication of it : Else you are guilty of the

very partiality which you profess to condemn ; and you indulge it on the more dangerous side.

In the present day, new evidences are rising in favour of the gospel. The destruction of the papal power is plainly foretold in scripture ; and the time of its end is certainly drawing near,—how near it is, we pretend not to say—It is also foretold that some of those nations which had been the principal supporters of that power, would turn their arms against it and hasten its downfall. Are not these predictions tending, in this day, to their accomplishment. France, which, for a long time, has been one of the chief defenders of the papacy, has now directed her force against the pontiff, and has reduced him to a humiliation, from which probably he never will be fully recovered. And, what is peculiarly remarkable, the great prevalence of infidelity, at this time, when the evidences of truth are displayed with new and increasing light, is most expressly foretold. When the vials of God's wrath are poured upon the sun, and upon the throne of the beast, there is great distress among the nations, and men gnaw their tongues for anguish : And what is the consequence ? They blaspheme the name of God, and repent not of their deeds.

If infidelity should continue to make progress in our favoured country, we may be assured, that the vials of God's wrath will discharge their dreadful contents here, as well as elsewhere. Let us then be valiant for the truth, and stand up for God against evil doers. It is time to work for the Lord, when men make void his law. Let us repent and give glory to God, that we may avert his anger from our land ; or, at least, may save our own souls.

PROFESSOR ROBISON'S "Proofs of a Conspiracy against Religion and Government," being put into my hands, I perused it with a degree of astonishment; but, on the whole, was constrained to give it credence. The moral, religious and political state of a great part of Europe had, for many years, been such, as rendered it credible, that a conspiracy of this kind might exist. The insidious arts and incessant industry, with which infidels had long labored to undermine the gospel, appeared consonant to the measures said to be adopted by these conspirators. The Professor was a man of such high and extensive celebrity in the literary world, that, possessed of common discretion, he would not have risked his reputation on the credit of a forgery, which could, at once, be easily detected. He referred to documents, the truth or falsity of which could soon be ascertained by those who would take pains to examine them. In the horrid scene of wickedness, which he described, men of public character and literary talents were deeply implicated. These men, then living, were called by name. It was in their power, and for their interest, to repel the charge against them, if it were a calumny. The book had passed through two or three editions, and no answer, so far as I had heard had been made to it. The appearance of it excited a considerable irritation among a particular class of men. Virulent attacks were made on the private character of the Author. But these attacks were not supported by evidence, nor had they the least tendency to invalidate his proofs, the credit of which depended on the documents; not on his personal character. I therefore was induced to give credit to the narrative. And finding that many of the nefarious sentiments imputed by Robison to the societies of the Illuminists in Europe, were actually circulating in America, in books and periodical papers, I judged it my duty to guard my own people against them, and to warn them of the dangers, which threatened them and the country. This was attempted in the Discourse, which follows.

SERMON V.



The Dangers of the Times from Infidelity and Immorality.



REVELATION, xii. 12.

Wo to the inhabitants of the earth, and of the sea: for the Devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

THAT there are evil spirits acting invisibly on the passions and imaginations of mankind, and thus producing vice and misery among them, is a doctrine plainly taught in scripture, and agreeable to the sentiments of almost all nations in all ages of the world.

Among these spirits there is a principal agent and leader called the devil and satan, and sometimes the serpent or dragon.

In the machinery of the grand prophetic drama contained in this book, these spirits make a frequent appearance; but they always are subject to the controul of Jesus, the great head of the Christian church.

In the passage before us, and throughout the scriptures, the devil is represented as maintaining a

constant opposition to true religion; both to the power of it in the heart, and to the progress of it in the world.

Soon after the first human pair were placed on trial, this enemy, by his serpentine acts, endeavored to seduce them from their allegiance to God, and bring them under his own government, And too well he succeeded in his design. They hearkened to his temptation, transgressed God's law, and fell under a sentence of death.

God was pleased to respite the offenders, assign them a new trial and encourage their hopes by the promise of a Saviour, who should destroy the works of the devil. To defeat this gracious dispensation the adversary, from the beginning, has employed all his subtilty.

For many ages, his attempts were chiefly directed to the introduction and support of *idolatry*. And the idolatry propagated by his influence has been of such a nature as to turn men from the worship of the only true God; or, at least, to divert their faith and hope from the promised Mediator. The imaginary divinities, whom the heathens worshipped, were generally considered, not as independent beings, but rather as intermediate agents, by whose ministry God conferred favors on men, and by whose influence they obtained blessings from him. Idolatry was, indeed, more gross among many of the vulgar, who paid their devotions directly to the idol or imaginary deity; but among the more speculative and philosophical, it was refined and subtilized into a medium of approaching the invisible power.

Concerning the state of religion before the flood, we have only a short and general account; and this not much to the honour of human nature. In a few generations after the flood, we find that idolatry had almost overspread the world. In the family of

Abraham true religion was restored, and, for a time, maintained in a tolerable degree of purity. But his posterity were much corrupted by their long residence in Egypt, where science and learning were perverted to magic and superstition; and soon after their emigration from that country, they discovered an extreme fondness for the forms and objects of devotion, which they had seen there.

After their settlement in Canaan, they frequently apostatized from the divine institutions of religion, and, with a strange infatuation, ran after the gods of the nations around them.

The miraculous displays of the power and goodness of Jehovah, and the solemn ministrations of his prophets among them, effected no more than a partial and temporary reformation; and often not so much as this; until they had suffered a long captivity in Babylon. This, though it did not extirpate all their errors and iniquities, yet cured them of their attachment to idolatry.

When the gospel was published in the world, it met with violent opposition from the avarice and pride of Jewish rulers and priests, from the licentiousness and self-conceit of Gentile philosophers, and from the ignorance and superstition of the vulgar among both Gentiles and Jews.

When the idolatry of the pagans was overthrown, and the religion of Jesus was established by civil authority in the Roman empire, various new corruptions sprang up, which deformed the beauty and consumed the vitals of this divinely excellent religion.

After some time, idolatry was revived by the incursions and conquests of the northern barbarians. When these heathen invaders embraced and professed the gospel, it was soon attacked in a new form. In the place of the ancient idolatry, the papal superstition was introduced, which, in reality, was idolatry modified under a new and specious name.

The reformation gave a violent shock to popery, which has ever since been sickening and decaying. But the adversary has never seemed to be discouraged. He opposes the gospel still; but has again varied his method of attack. The increase of learning, while it has gradually dissipated the clouds of popery, has introduced a licentious philosophy, out of which have grown deism, materialism, atheism, and every species of infidelity. These are instruments, which long have been, and still are employed to vitiate the morals, and subvert the faith of those who profess the gospel.

Thus, from the beginning, religion has, in various ways, been opposed and resisted.

This opposition the scripture ascribes to the *devil*, the great adversary of Christ and men. The native corruption of men's hearts opposes the truth as it is in Jesus. "He that doth evil, hateth the light." But the tempter, by exciting and inflaming this corruption, increases the mischief. Hence the scripture ascribes to him, as an instigator and prompter, those errors, vices and abominations, which are immediately the works and actions of men. He is said "to enter into and fill men's hearts, blind their minds, and corrupt them from the simplicity that is in Christ." And on account of his great influence among the ungodly and unbelieving, he is called "the prince and the god of this world."

Our text teaches us, that the power of satan is under divine limitations.

It was early foretold, that the promised seed of the woman should "bruise the serpent's head." They on whom God places his love are described as "treading the dragon under their feet." When the Saviour appeared, "satan fell before him like lightning from heaven." And his disciples announced with joy, that "the devils were subject to them

through his name.” “By his word he commanded unclean spirits, who were constrained to obey him.” “By his death he destroyed him who had the power of death”—“On the cross he triumphed over principalities and powers”—“By his resurrection and ascension he led captivity captive.” Our text signifies, that when the devil goes forth in great wrath, his time is limited and his power restrained.

And there are seasons when he is under unusual restraints. What is said of the wrath of man, may be said of the wrath of satan; “This shall praise God,” as far as it can be made subservient to that end, “and the *remainder* will be restrained.”

God has glorious designs to accomplish in this world. For their accomplishment he often permits wicked men and evil spirits to act out their malignant passions; for what they mean for evil, he can turn to good. But so far as their inclinations cannot be overruled to the wise purposes of his government, he restrains them. We are not to imagine, that God, for his own glory and praise, creates or excites the wrath of men or of satan; for there is sometimes more of this wrath, than can be made to praise him. There is a part, at least, which must be restrained. But he often turns the wrath of both to the furtherance of the great designs of his Providence: Thus he displays his wisdom, goodness and power.

Hence it follows, that wicked men and wicked spirits may be under stricter limitations at some times, than at others, according as the glory of God and the safety of the church require. The church in Pergamos is said to “*dwell* where satan’s *seat* is.” And in the days, when she suffered persecution, satan was said to “*dwell* there.” There were times when, and places where, satan was laid under closer restrictions, than what he *then* felt in Pergamos.

The text leads us farther to observe, that when satan apprehends himself soon to be laid under special restraints, he exerts himself with greater activity and rage.

The history of the prophecy before us will illustrate this observation.

Saint John saw in heaven, or in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, crowned with stars, and having the moon under her feet: a striking emblem of the holiness, beauty and glory of the christian church. The increase of the church is expressed by the woman's travailing in birth, ready to be delivered. At this time there stood before her a great red dragon, waiting to devour her offspring, as soon as it was born. This dragon is afterward called the serpent, the devil and satan, who, by the agency of the pagan Roman empire, carried on a violent persecution against the church. Hence the dragon is said to have "seven heads and seven crowns," in allusion to the seven hills on which Rome was built, and to the seven forms of government, which successively took place in the empire:—and he is said to have "ten horns," typifying the ten kingdoms into which the empire was afterward divided. Thus the scenery is explained to John by an angel. John says, There was war in heaven between Michael and his angels on the one part, and the dragon and his angels on the other, in which the latter were defeated and cast down to the earth. This signifies the long and severe conflict between christianity and paganism, and the final victory and triumph of the former. On this victory there was sung in heaven an anthem of praise, importing the great happiness which from this event resulted to the church. The happiness, however, was neither complete, nor permanent. Her enemies were indeed defeated; but they were not destroyed. For it is added, "The devil came down having great wrath." The rage

of mortification and disappointment prompted him to excite new troubles. "For he knew he had but a short time." This partial overthrow of idolatry led him to expect its *total* overthrow. Hence he became more active to create new mischiefs, and more studious to devise new arts for the subversion of the Christian cause.

This prophecy is, by the best interpreters, supposed to have been accomplished in the change, which took place in the Roman empire, about 300 years after Christ, when Constantine was raised to the imperial throne. Before this event, the church, for the greater part of her time, had been in a state of persecution and distress. There were some peaceful intervals; but these were usually short. While the heathen philosophers exercised all their wit to discredit, the heathen emperors employed all their power to suppress, the religion of the gospel. In every persecution, besides vast numbers condemned to prison, exile, slavery and the mines, multitudes suffered torture and death. But of all the persecutions, the last, before the reign of Constantine, was the most violent and severe. Every method, which malice and cruelty could devise, was taken to extirpate Christianity from the empire. Bibles and other religious books, wherever they could be found, were seized and committed to the flames. Christians were condemned to death without the formality of a trial, and given up to general massacre without distinction of sex or age. Houses of worship were set on fire, and whole assemblies consumed in them. The numbers that perished by the hand of violence, by the fatigues of slavery, and by the miseries of banishment, are beyond calculation, or even conception. The devil, as if he knew his time was short, went forth with unusual fury.

The time of deliverance drew near. The Romans, wearied with a succession of intolerable ty-

rants, turned their eyes to Constantine, from whose character they entertained hopes of a juster and milder government. They invited him to the throne. He accepted the imperial purple, and, reigning in righteousness, he became a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the storm, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. He patronised the Christian religion, abolished idolatry, destroyed the images and banished the priests of the pagan temples, and protected and encouraged the ministers of Christ. Thus satan, whose throne had been exalted to the skies, fell to the earth, like lightning from heaven.

But his fall, though it weakened his power, increased his wrath. He devised new means of working mischief. He soon began to scatter the poisonous seeds of heresy, excite angry disputes and contentions, and foment ruinous schisms and divisions. Afterward he brought on the church the floods of northern barbarians, which, he imagined, would sweep Christianity from the earth, and prepare it for the restoration and growth of the ancient idolatry. He, in some measure, succeeded for a time: But ultimately these incursions contributed to the spread of the gospel; for the victorious pagans, in great numbers, embraced the gospel, and thus some rays of light were reflected back to the dark corners from whence they issued.

The voice from heaven proclaims, "Wo to the inhabitants of the earth, for the devil is come down, having great wrath."

The time when satan most vigorously employs his corrupting and seducing arts, is usually a time of great perplexity and distress.

The time, which nearly preceded the downfall of satan, predicted in the text, was a woeful period. Persecution raged with augmented violence. There was no safety to any who were known to join the

assemblies, or were even suspected to favour the cause of the Christians. Such multitudes were destroyed, and with such cruel tortures, that the malice of their enemies was glutted with blood, and the hands of the executioners were wearied with slaughter. And though the fall of satan gave a respite to the church, yet the rage of his disappointment soon excited new vexations and distresses. The empire was embroiled in a civil war by the competitors for the throne. The different parties into which the church was split, as they alternately prevailed, exercised toward each other much of the same spirit, though not all the same cruelty, as they had experienced from the common enemy. And when these party animosities subsided, the irruption of the barbarous nations spread through the christian world such desolations and miseries, as seldom had been known before.

In the view of the calamities, which preceded the expected fall, and which followed the disappointed malice of the great dragon, the prophet exclaims "Wo to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea; for the devil is come down having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."

The present time exhibits a scene so similar to the description in the text, that I cannot forbear to improve this passage for the warning of my fellow christians in this dangerous period.

Saint John foretells, that satan will be bound and imprisoned for a thousand years, and no more go forth to deceive the nations, until that time is expired. The calculations of the learned, and the aspects of providence may lead us to apprehend that this important period is hastening on. If, in the age of Constantine, the devil knew that he had but a short time, he must now know, that his time is much shorter. If the diminution of his dominion,

when he fell to the earth, awakened his wrath ; how great will be his rage, when he sees that he is soon to lose his dominion and to be cast into the bottomless pit ? If the restraint of his power and the limitation of his season for mischief increase his efforts, he will not be indolent at such a time as this, when his power is tending to its exit. And, indeed, if we look on the state of the world, we see evidence enough, that he is gone forth having great wrath ; and by the vigour of his efforts and the variety of his arts, one would imagine, that he apprehended his time was short.

I beg your candour and patience, while I give you a brief view of our dangers, and point out the duties, which the aspect of the times urges upon us.

In these American States, there has, for many years, and more especially since our late revolution, been a visible tendency to infidelity, and an observable growth of impiety and immorality. Family religion is falling into disuse ; the ancient strict observance of the sabbath is mightily relaxed ; social worship in the church, as well as in the family, is sinking into neglect, not to say, contempt ; a public profession of religion is by few made a matter of conscience ; and, in most places, the number of open professors is by much the smaller part of the community. Many, who choose to treat the gospel with civility, decline to take upon them the character of its friends. A sense of decency and propriety may restrain them from insulting it ; but they have not that regard to its interest which should excite them to defend it. In this state of general indifference, the barriers against infidelity are fallen down, and the way is open for its swift and easy progress. And probably there never was a time, when more pains were taken, or taken with greater success, to extend its baneful influence, than at the present day.

The increased advantages of education have diffused a taste for reading; and the interesting events of the times have awakened a spirit of enquiry. Thus a door is opened for literary and moral improvements; or for a corruption of sentiments and manners, according to the means which are applied. And many, distinguished by learning and genius, who ought to have consecrated their superior talents to the former object, have prostituted them to the latter. And the natural depravity of the human heart has favoured their success. Books of the most licentious tendency have been multiplied without bounds, and circulated without modesty. Social libraries which in themselves are useful institutions, have, in too many instances, admitted books of this kind; and thus become the vehicles of corruption and infidelity. Hence the young and unprincipled have imbibed a poison without an antidote.

No pains have been spared to banish the fear of future punishment, and to take off from men's minds that awful restraint from vice. The doctrine of happiness for all men, without distinction of characters, has been industriously propagated; but on grounds so heterogeneous and incompatible, that one scheme subverts another; and yet there are those who admire them all; not because either of them is convincing to reason, but because all are pleasing to their lusts, and flattering to their hopes.

Direct attacks are made on the bible, not in a way of candid reason and fair discussion; but in a way of indecent ridicule and malignant satire. Thus many uninstructed minds are prejudiced against revelation before they have examined it, and fortified against the means of conviction before they are applied.

The singular prosperity of this country, for some years past, has contributed not a little to a corrup-

tion of sentiments and manners. Certain peculiar circumstances, perhaps unavoidable, have encouraged schemes of speculation. And the arts of speculation very soon degenerated into tricks of fraud to acquire property without earning it, and to swindle money from the unsuspecting without giving an equivalent. The prospect of growing rich in a day, and of making a fortune at a stroke, has led many to despise the sober paths of regular industry and honorable commerce.

The great accession of foreigners has had a most unfriendly effect on the religion of the country. Many of these are men of fortune, learning and address, but of licentious principles and dissolute morals. Their distinction gives them ability, and their licentiousness gives them a disposition, to spread among our citizens the corruptions which they brought from their native soil. And some of them are doubtless emissaries sent hither for this nefarious purpose.

The long and wide-spread war in Europe, the changes which have there taken place, the effects which these changes have had on religion and morals, and the probability that we may soon be deeply involved in the common calamity, all conspire to increase our danger.

France is filled with atheists. At least the governing and influential men in the nation are openly of this character. And their morals are consentaneous to their principles. As they are extending their conquests, they will doubtless disseminate their abominable principles, which other nations, unless the hatred of a conquering foe should be their guard, are but too well prepared to receive. Infidelity, for some years, has been gaining ground in most parts of Europe. It had overspread France before her late revolution. Among the people of high distinction, there were few, who, in companies

where restraint was removed, did not laugh at religion. The revolution has made a change in the visible appearance rather than in the real state of religion in that nation. Revolutions in other nations may perhaps be followed with similar consequences. The war seems likely to continue ; and from its past, we have reason to fear, what may be its future effects.

An awful conspiracy against religion has lately been detected, and proved by documents, which appear authentic and uncontrovertible. Of this an account has been published by Mr. JOHN ROBISON, Professor of Natural Philosophy, and Secretary to the Royal Society of Edinburgh. By original papers and correspondencies, which, by various means, have fallen into his hands, he makes it evident, that there has existed a combination among certain societies, which are become numerous and widely dispersed, "to root out all the religious establishments, and to overturn all the existing governments of Europe." These societies have assumed the name of THE ILLUMINATED. He asserts, that they grew out of the lodges of *Free Masons*. He says, The masonic lodges, which, it seems, began in England some time in the seventeenth century, were originally innocent in their design ; and those which retain their first simplicity, are so still ; being meetings for social amusement and friendly conviviality. He is himself one of the order, and in his early years was an active and distinguished member. He considers the order rather as frivolous, than mischievous. Its affected secrecy and mysticism he marks as the greatest fault in the institution ; but still a fault, because secret societies, however frivolous in the beginning, may become mischievous in the end. These masonic lodges, passing from England to the continent of Europe, soon assumed a new form ; and in the hands of the

French, who give a tinsel glitter to every thing, they were refined and sublimated from the English simplicity to a number of degrees unknown before; each superior degree possessing secrets not to be communicated to any of the subordinate grades. These refinements passed from France to other countries on the continent, and have returned to England, the probable birth-place of simple masonry. The restraints laid on social conversation by the despotism of the government and the bigotry of the church in most countries, induced many to join these lodges, that they might there enjoy that liberty of speech which was denied them in other companies. And in their hours of convivial freedom and friendly security, they would naturally introduce those topics, which it was dangerous to touch elsewhere. Hence the tyranny of government and the superstition of the hierarchy became favorite subjects, which they pursued, until, in their abhorrence of those real evils, they began to form nefarious schemes for the total abolition of Christianity and every kind of religion, and the utter subversion of civil government in all its forms. Thus have arisen the societies of the *Illuminated*, which first appeared in Germany, and from thence have spread into all the countries of Europe.

Their leading principles are such as these: that there is no Supreme independent being, no moral government of the universe, no future existence, nothing to be hoped or feared after this life, and consequently no such thing as religion—that the miseries of mankind spring from superstition and tyranny—or what priests and rulers call *religion* and *government*—that human reason, left to itself, will produce the greatest happiness which men can enjoy—that all morality consists in benevolence, or a regard to the general happiness; and every thing which tends to increase the happiness or abate the

misery of man, whether it be fraud, murder, suicide, or any thing else, is, for that reason, just and good—that men are to judge of the goodness of actions by their tendency to a good end ; for the end consecrates the means—that as *their* order is calculated for the good of mankind, they are to hesitate at no measures for its increasing influence and extension—that the obligations of the social, conjugal, parental and filial relations, are to be discarded, when they are supposed to interfere with this end—that it is necessary to abolish all the existing governments, and therefore necessary to abolish the Christian religion, because this contributes to the support of government—that as the gospel teaches a perfect morality, men who feel the obligations of morality, will, of course, revere and appreciate the gospel ; and therefore to effect the abolition of the gospel, it will be necessary gradually to eradicate from men's minds the sentiments of moral obligation, which, they say, have been infused only by false education, and are retained only by prejudice.

They endeavor to introduce into their societies men of learning and genius, especially men of captivating address in conversation, and of enchanting talents in writing. The new members are not admitted, at once, to all the secrets of the order, but brought on from one grade to another, as they are found to be prepared. They are put under a discipline, which may gradually divest them of the tender feelings of nature, and form them to a hardness for bold, cruel and ferocious deeds. In order to spread their anarchical and atheistical sentiments, they, by every secret artifice in their power, introduce their own members into all places of influence, as courts, academies, universities, theological schools, post-offices, printing-offices, book-stores ; and take

under their direction the manufacture, review, and sale of books ; by which means their own writings are surreptitiously circulated among the people, and the writings in opposition to them are suppressed or restrained.

To facilitate and ensure the success of their design, they have established, in various parts of Germany, and other places, *reading societies*, or library companies, which are under the direction of their own dissolute members, and supplied with books from their own polluted fountain. These books, written with the arts of fascination, and recommended by the embellishments of wit, communicate their poisonous principles under disguise, and insinuate them into the minds of the simple, unperceived.

These societies, the author says, have had great influence in raising and continuing the troubles of France. The revolution itself he does not condemn. The oppressions of the old government were such, that, he allows, a change in principle and administration was greatly to be desired. And the revolution, had it stopped in season, might have been happy. But these societies, of which there were numbers in France, as well as in Germany, intending to prostrate all government, have, by concert, kept alive the spirit of revolution and anarchy, until the nation is enslaved to a military despotism. Reforms may be necessary elsewhere, but the principles of these societies, continuing to operate, will either prevent reforms, or turn them into confusion.

Of these societies, the author says, there are great numbers scattered over the continent of Europe ; some in England and Scotland ; several in America. His statement is made, as the societies stood in the year 1786. In what parts of America they are formed, he gives no intimation. We choose to believe, not in the United States. But if we, any

where, see library companies industrious to collect and circulate deistical and other licentious books—if we, any where see men openly and boldly opposing the religion of the gospel, hear them calumniating the ministerial order and denying its right to a legal support; and find these standing foremost among the candidates for public offices—if we, any where see attempts made to change our happy constitution, either by weakening its proper energy, or by diminishing its native liberality—by detaching the people from their own constituted authorities, or by benumbing republican vigilance into the torpor of blind obedience—by exciting disaffection to our late revolution, or by sowing the seeds of a new one; there we may conclude, that, if not the members, yet, at least, the principles of these societies are deeply at work.

I would not detain you long on this disagreeable narrative. But you will naturally enquire, how the discovery was made? One of the principal societies, overacting its part, excited suspicions, in consequence of which an examination was instituted, and such a scene opened, that the society was suppressed. Many papers of the society were found, which led to farther discoveries. Some correspondencies were intercepted or betrayed. Some members, either through compunction or disgust, deserted the societies, and made communications, which gave a clue to a fuller developement of this mystery of iniquity.

But notwithstanding the discovery, the author fears, the principles of these societies are so widely spread, and so deeply rooted, that it will be no easy task to eradicate them.

The horror and detestation, which this discovery has excited in the minds of the uncorrupted masons, and the disgrace and suspicion brought on them by this abuse and perversion of their order, have in-

duced many of the lodges in Germany to dissolve themselves, and abandon their ancient profession.

This plan of infidelity is an artifice of satan, equal in subtilty, but, I presume, not so long in duration, as popery itself.

When idoltry was abolished by the powers of government, the devil introduced, under the mask of christianity, a new and refined species of idolatry, which has continued for more than a thousand years. As light has been increasing, the papal idolatry has declined: And at this period, when popery seemed near its exit, the devil has adopted, in its stead, this new artifice to undermine the credit, and defeat the influence of the gospel. The same light which has chased away the clouds of papal superstition, he is perverting into the means of spreading infidelity under the specious names of liberty, reason and philosophy.

But though infidelity is increasing, and perhaps will still increase for a time; yet, if I judge aright, the serious and inquisitive mind will hence derive new evidence of the truth of the gospel.

The scripture has foretold this very circumstance, as what will accompany the great events of the present period.

It announces the downfall of the papal power; and this, if not fully accomplished, is probably near its accomplishment.

It has predicted, that the destruction of this power will be effected by some of those very kingdoms, which were once its principal supporters. France has been one of its chief defenders; and France is now the great agent in its overthrow.

It expressly declares, that at the time when the angels shall pour out their vials on the sun, and on the throne of the beast, men will not repent of their deeds, or give glory to the God of heaven; but will blaspheme his name. The expressions clearly im-

port an unusual prevalence of licentious morals and atheistical principles. And was there ever a time to which these characters apply more strongly, than the present? The societies, of which we have spoken, not only indulge, but avow blasphemy and impenitence, atheism and immorality, and propagate them systematically. And there are many who follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth is evil spoken of.

It is foretold, that when the devil sees his time to be short, he will go forth with great wrath. So he has done in former times, when his kingdom was tottering; so he does now, when the word of prophecy imports, that he hath but a short time.

When the devil came down to the earth in wrath, a warning voice from heaven proclaimed, "Wo to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea." This wo, which has been realized before, has again returned, and been deeply and extensively felt. To the nations which dwell on the continent of Europe, and to the people who inhabit the islands in the sea, this is a period of unusual calamity. The war has involved in its horrors a great part of the old continent; it has raged with brutal ferocity; it has wasted immense treasures; it has consumed millions of the human race; it has overturned states, and changed times and seasons. France has spread conquest and terror among her neighbors; and, in the mean while, she herself has been a principal sufferer. The West-Indian islands, from invasion, conquest, insurrection, civil war, famine and conflagration, have experienced horrors unknown before. The flames of war begin to flash towards this continent; and when, or where they will be extinguished, heaven only knows.

Under the sixth vial, John says, I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For

they are the spirits of devils working miracles," or doing wonders, "which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God almighty."

The *dragon*, *beast*, and *false prophet* are in this book the grand enemies of the christian church. These spirits, like frogs, which issue from their mouths, are called *unclean*, and said to go forth unto the kings of the earth, to *gather them to war*. They must therefore denote some atheistical and turbulent emissaries from the enemies of the gospel, sent forth to corrupt the principles, and disturb the peace of mankind.

Whether we are now under this particular vial, I pretend not to determine. Be this as it may; there are multitudes of this noxious breed of frogs, (more pestiferous than those which plagued old Egypt) now scattered over the earth, croaking and spawning in every lake and fen, vexing the air with their noise, and poisoning the waters with their slime. These spirits of devils are gone into all the world, corrupting the religious principles, and breaking the political peace of the nations, and directly instigating, or indirectly constraining the kings and powers of the earth to gather themselves to the battle. But let us remember, "It is the battle of the great day of God Almighty," who, while he permits it as the means of punishing the wickedness of a degenerate world, will overrule it as the occasion of enlarging the bounds and exalting the glory of the Christian church.

If this is not the time intended in the prophecy, there is reason to fear, a time is coming, when the prophetic description will be more fully realized.

"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."—This testimony to the truth of the gospel Jesus is now giving. Let us receive his testimony, and hold fast his word, till he comes.

If satan is most active in works of mischief, when he sees that his time is short, let us, with equal assiduity, employ our short time in counterworking his hellish devices.

Since there is an infernal combination against the gospel of Christ—against its heavenly doctrines and holy precepts, let us, who call ourselves its friends, unite our influence in its support.

In such a time as this, all who are, in heart, friends to the gospel, ought to stand forth, and openly declare their full belief of it, and determined obedience to it. A spirit of indifference to it is, at any time, inexcuseable; but at a time when its enemies are active to subvert it, indifference becomes peculiarly criminal. “Of those who are ashamed of Christ and his gospel in an evil and adulterous generation, he will also be ashamed when he shall come in the glory of his Father.”

As Christ has instituted social worship to be the means of knowledge and faith, let all with constancy and zeal attend on this ordinance, keeping in view the end for which it was appointed. Think it not sufficient that you appear in God’s house, now and then, on some special occasion, or in a pleasant afternoon; but let your attendance on this, as on your secular duties, be regular and constant. A neglect of divine worship leads to indifference; and this to infidelity. Hence the apostle, when he exhorts Christians to “hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering,” immediately subjoins a caution, that they “forsake not the assembling of themselves together.” When people forsake the worship which the gospel enjoins, it is but one step more to forsake the gospel itself.

If we would maintain the faith, let us practise the morality of the gospel. They who put away a good conscience, will easily make shipwreck of the faith. The societies of the *Illuminated*, sensible of the close

connexion between a virtuous life and a religious faith, make it a primary object to corrupt men's moral sentiments, that they may thus prepare them to renounce the gospel.

To say that a virtuous man can have no temporary doubts concerning the divinity of the gospel, might be going too far. But thus much I may safely say; a man who loves virtue in his heart, and wishes to promote it among his fellow citizens, cannot be an *enemy* to the gospel; for this teaches the purest and sublimest virtue. And whatever doubts he may feel concerning its heavenly origin, he will admire its precepts and instructions, and wish that they may be embraced and obeyed.—Will this man oppose the gospel?—will he treat it with ridicule? will he vex honest minds with captious objections against it? will he labour to unsettle his virtuous neighbours from a faith which has so happy an influence on them? will he weaken his own motives to virtue by reading, or subvert the faith of others by spreading books of immoral or deistical tendency?—He never will. The man who does this is an enemy to virtue and to human happiness. He is corrupt and has done abominable works. If he preserves a decent conduct among men, he is conscious of inward guilt, the keen stings of which he is labouring to blunt.

Let us live agreeably to the gospel; then we shall feel no temptation to reject it. In this case, we have nothing to fear from it: it never will hurt us. Only let our conversation be, as it becometh the gospel, and we shall have no objections against it of our own; and shall exhibit a powerful answer to all objections made by others. For if we cannot by arguments prove its heavenly inspiration, we shall, at least, by our lives demonstrate its divine excellence.

In such a time as this, great attention should be paid to the education of youth, that their minds

may be early imbued with religious principles and virtuous sentiments, and thus guarded against the instructions which cause to err. The combined infidels in Europe corrupt the minds of the young and uninformed, by circulating licentious books. We should put into the hands of such those books which contain safe and wholesome instructions.

Libraries, in the present day, are multiplied to the great improvement of knowledge; and generally, I suppose, the books are well chosen: but, I believe, not always so. If we admit into our social libraries books of deistical or immoral tendency, to be read in our families—to be thrown out among our youth—and to be handed round among our neighbors, we are acting in perfect concert with those dangerous *Illuminators*, and are aiding them in their nefarious work.

I have observed, that it is their great aim, for effectuating their plan, to introduce the members of their fraternity into all places of power and influence. Certainly we ought to adopt the opposite system. We are so happy as to enjoy an elective government. And in all elections to office, whether in towns, or in states, or in the nation at large, we ought to give a decided preference to men of strict virtue and exemplary morality—to the known friends of the gospel and the regular observers of its plain institutions. Let a man's abilities or political sentiments be what they may, if he is an enemy to the gospel—if he treats it with marked disrespect—if he contemptuously neglects its institutions—if he wishes and seeks the dissolution of all religious societies—if he is studious to embarrass all measures for their support and continuance; this man is not to be promoted in civil society; for his civil promotion increases his opportunities and abilities to injure the cause of Christ and of mankind.

There can be no freedom and happiness in society without the influence of religion—There is no re-

ligion more excellent in its nature, or more friendly to society than the Christian ; and the man who is an enemy to this, cannot be safely trusted to guard the liberty and pursue the interest of his fellow citizens. If we admit that he may have honest intentions, yet he has at least mistaken the means.

It concerns us all to have the religion of Christ formed in our hearts. Thus shall we best be secured against the fiery darts of the wicked one, when he comes down having great wrath. This is our surest defence against temptations—our firmest support in afflictions—our sweetest consolation in the prospect of death and eternity. We may try a hundred artifices to fortify ourselves against the terrors of futurity—we may labour to persuade ourselves, that death will terminate our existence ; or that all men will be happy after death ; or, if there is a future punishment, that it will be moderate and short ; or that a life of pleasure, if it is not very mischievous, will never offend the Deity ; or that the goodness of God will find some unknown way to save men from, or deliver them out of the misery of the world to come.

But after all we can say and do, none of these artifices will satisfy us. They all want solidity—want proof. They leave the mind restless, anxious, fearful. The gospel, and this alone comes home to human wants—comes home to our impotent, guilty condition. The man who fully believes it and heartily consents to it, is relieved, contented, satisfied. He sees no other refuge to which he can resort—he wishes for no other ; here are the words of eternal life.

My testimony, feeble as it is, I wish to leave in favour of that gospel, which I have preached to my fellow mortals, for more than 40 years. In the near contemplation of another world, I see no hope, I feel no support, but what is derived from this divine

source : I can find no way of pardon, but that which is here marked out. I can obtain no assurance of immortality, but what rests on the basis of the divine promises here declared : I know not where to look for succour amidst the temptations of the world, or for assistance under the weakness of nature, but to that grace, which is here revealed. While I lament in myself a thousand infirmities—a thousand deviations from legal perfection—a thousand humbling proofs of vast unworthiness, I must esteem, love and admire the plan here opened for human relief. To this I resort ; on this I rely. Here is my support in the view of death—here is my consolation in the prospect of Judgment. And the Lord grant, that we may all find mercy in that day.

SERMON VI.



God's Mercies recollected in his Temple. A valedictory Discourse on leaving an ancient House of Worship.



PSALM *xlviii.* 9.

We have thought of thy loving kindness, O GOD, in the midst of thy Temple.

AS we are surrounded with God's presence, loaded with his benefits, and dependent on his care, we are to direct our thoughts, desires and praises to him. In the ordinary walks of life, we are to set him before us. When we approach the place of his worship, we should consider that he is there; and, banishing all earthly affections and cares, should entertain sentiments and meditations suitable to the sacredness of the place, and the solemnity of the interview. And when we retire, we should be able to adopt the words of the Psalmist in our text, "We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy Temple."

A thought, which readily occurs to a serious mind in the Temple of God, is, that *God himself is there.*

Else to what purpose should we be there? What benefit could we expect from worshipping an absent Deity? If he is present in this temple, he is also present in every place, where he has recorded his name. The Christian world is of wide extent. In all parts of it there are Churches. This visible world is but a small part of his dominion. He has devout subjects in heaven. Their number is so great, that they are confined to no local temple: Heaven is all temple. What admiring thoughts must we have of that Being, whose presence is in all the assemblies of the saints below, and in the general assembly above.

The extent of creation exceeds imagination; and where creatures exist, God is present; for they have their being in him. But if we could comprehend creation, still we have no adequate conceptions of the Creator's presence. Creation has its bounds; but his presence is boundless. What are all worlds in relation to him? They are a dust in the balance. What are we? Less than nothing and vanity.

In the midst of God's temple, let us admire his *grace* and *condescension*. "When I consider thy heavens," says David, "the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" With this sentiment Solomon was deeply impressed, when he stood before the altar in the presence of the congregation, and dedicated to God the temple then newly erected. "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or in earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with them who walk before thee, keep thou the mercy which thou hast promised.—But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house, which I have builded? Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of

thy servant, which he maketh before thee this day, that thine eyes may be toward this house night and day, even toward this house, of which thou hast said, My name shall be there, and hearken to the supplication of thy people, when they shall pray toward this place; and when thou hearest forgive."

The heathens, who viewed the God, whom they worshipped, as a local deity, of limited presence and power, might think it no mighty condescension in him to reside in a temple built by human hands. But we, who have learned, that the true God is an immense, all-perfect, all glorious Spirit, may well stand amazed, when we consider this Being as affording his gracious presence in an earthly temple, to hear the praises and answer the prayers of the worthless mortals, who present themselves before him. Thither the pious Christian will come with humility; there he will sit with reverence; he will collect his thoughts, and fix his attention: He will say with the patriarch, "How dreadful is this place! Surely God is here! This is no other than the house of God; it is the gate of heaven."

In the midst of God's temple, we should think, *how we enjoy the privilege of such near access to him.* His glory is above the heavens. He humbles himself to behold the things which are there. The angels veil their faces before him. How shall we, who were made lower than angels—we who have fallen below the dignity of man—we who have forfeited every favour, come to ask any favour from him?—He has opened for us a new and living way through the mediation of Jesus his beloved Son; and through this mediation we may come to his throne with all the boldness of innocence, and with all the assurance of personal righteousness. Not the highest and purest angel can approach him with greater confidence of acceptance, than may penitent and humble man in this new way which is consecrated. In

the temple we should think, how we are admitted here—what we have to do here—what hopes are set before us—what blessings are offered to us and how our prayers obtain audience. We should rejoice in God, through Jesus Christ, who has died, risen and ascended, has entered into heaven as our forerunner, and ever lives to make intercession for us.

In God's temple we may naturally *raise our thoughts to heaven*; for this is the place, in which we begin the exercises, and anticipate the pleasures of heaven. Here we see God through the glass of his word: There we shall see him face to face. Here we confess our sins and supplicate his pardoning mercy: There our devotion will be all admiration, thanksgiving and joy. In the temple we study to banish all vain thoughts, impure affections and earthly anxieties; but still they sometimes intrude: When we enter into heaven, we shall leave all these behind us, and they never will offend us more. In our social devotions, we dare not indulge malevolent and unfriendly passions: In heaven such passions will never rise; there we shall all unite in perfect benevolence and harmony; we shall feel in ourselves, and see in others that charity, which never fails through weariness, is never interrupted by jealousies, is never allayed by envy, and never cooled by the remembrance of injuries past. All pure and sinless souls will mingle in the same grateful praise, mutual love, and spiritual pleasure. In the temple we grow in our regard and friendship for one another: In heaven our acquaintance will be vastly enlarged, and our connexion mightily strengthened. Here our joy is increased: it will there be full.

Every thing which we perceive to be agreeable in the worship of God's temple, is adapted to raise our minds to heaven. And even the imperfections, which we here feel or see, remind us of the perfection which will be found there. Here we need recess

from devotion to refresh the body and relieve the mind ; but we shall there find no occasion for intermission and rest. Here we visit the temple for an hour or two and withdraw : When we enter into heaven, we shall go no more out. In the house of God we sometimes see a competition for seats and a preference of associates : In heaven there will be no contests for superiority, no disgust at fellow worshippers, no pride in ourselves, or contempt of others ; all will be satisfied with their places, and pleased with their companions. Angels will rejoice to see saints from our world taking seats with them in the circle around the throne of God.

In the temple we must thankfully remember God's kindness in giving us the *means* of preparing for the heavenly world, and in allowing us frequent *opportunities* to attend upon him.

Heaven is a holy place ; without holiness none can enter into it. Christ sanctifies his Church by the word. This word is dispensed in the temple. Though the written word is in the hands of all, who wish to enjoy it, yet the public preaching of it is of great importance. Were it not dispensed in God's house, it would be little read, and soon forgotten. In the temple it is opened to the understanding, and applied to the conscience more effectually, than in private reading. It is in the hearing of the word, that God gives his spirit. They who despise prophesying, quench the spirit.

It becomes us to enquire, what use we have made of God's kindness. Have we faithfully attended on his instituted worship, joined in the devotion of his house, and obeyed the instructions of his word ? Have we felt the influence of divine truth, made improvement in knowledge and holiness, and gained a comfortable evidence of our preparation for heaven ? Happy is our state. Let us bless God for his good word, and the power of his grace which has accom-

panied it. Is our case the reverse? Have we neglected to hear the word, or heard it negligently? Have we suppressed the convictions excited by the demonstrations of the truth, and energies of the Spirit? Great is our guilt—great is our danger. Let us condemn ourselves, repent of our ingratitude, and give glory to God by a humble application to his mercy, and a faithful improvement of our privilege.

There are *particular kindnesses*, which it becomes us to recognize in the temple of God.

Personal sickness and family distress may have detained us from God's house. In the seasons of affliction and confinement we have seen the value of a privilege, which, perhaps, we too lightly esteemed before. We have, by God's correcting hand, been awakened to contemplate death and eternity, and to form new resolutions, or renew past resolutions for a devout attendance on God, and a diligent preparation for the world to come. When we are delivered from our affliction, we should remember God's loving kindness and our serious resolutions, and call on our fellow worshippers in the temple to unite with us in the voice of prayer and praise. Thus did the pious Psalmist. "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from my fears. I will go into thy house with burnt offerings, I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people; in the courts of the Lord's house: in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem."

Such meditations as these may properly meet us in the temple. They are naturally suggested by the sacredness of the place, and the solemnity of the errand on which we come. And being here deeply impressed on our hearts, they will influence our tem-

per and conduct, when we return to the business of the world.

There are some other meditations, which will spontaneously arise in our minds, at a time, when we are leaving the temple of God, to return to it no more.

Such is the peculiar circumstance, which attends our meeting together in God's house this afternoon.

There is something solemn and affecting in the thought, that this is the last time, in which we shall assemble within these ancient and venerable walls for the stated worship of God.

We naturally feel an attachment to objects to which we have long been accustomed, and in the use of which we have experienced peculiar delight. The mansion in which we have lived from our youth; the oak under whose boughs we have enjoyed a pleasant shade; the green over which we have often walked, hand in hand, with our friends; the field in which, from year to year, we have laboured, and by whose fruits we have been sustained, acquires a value, in our estimation, far beyond its intrinsic worth. It is with a painful reluctance, that an aged man quits a decayed and tottering house for one in itself much more comfortable and elegant: It is with deep felt regret, that he leaves an apartment, where for years he has sweetly slept, or a seat by his fire side, where he has been wont to sit in social converse with his family and friends. Those marks of decay in buildings and furniture, which excite disgust in the young, are by familiarity become pleasing to him. The sight of them assists his meditations, and recalls to his mind past agreeable scenes.

Many here present have similar feelings in the thought of abandoning this temple, sacred in its design, venerable by its antiquity, familiar by long use, and precious by the benefits, which have resulted

from it. Their judgment favours the contemplated removal to another sanctuary ; but their feelings reluctant. While they rejoice in the preparation made for assembling in another place, it still seems good to be here.

The change which we are about to make, will suggest to us some useful meditations.

We may think of God's loving kindness in assigning us our heritage in a *society*, which was founded by *the friends of God and religion*.

The antiquity of this house calls our minds back to the time of its erection, which was an hundred years ago. This community was then small. Six years before, when it was first incorporated, it consisted of but thirty families. These were but newly settled. Savages dwelt among them, and a wilderness surrounded them. In this situation they made early provision for the worship of God. In two years after their incorporation, they settled a minister, and in four years after his ordination, they erected this Temple. And, though, in this age of comparative opulence and refinement, it may appear as a wretched, unsightly pile, yet if we carry our thoughts back one hundred years, and contemplate the habits and manners, the poverty and paucity of the then existing inhabitants, it will assume a grandeur, which few modern temples can boast.

How happy it is for us, that the fathers of this society were men of religion, virtue and wisdom. They have laid the foundation, that we might build thereon. If they had made no provision for the establishment and permanence of God's worship, probably there would have been here no regular Christian society ; but their successors on this ground, would have been without the true God, without a teaching priest, without Gospel ordinances, and without peace, order and union. For our present enjoyment of the means of knowledge and piety, and

for that virtue and harmony which subsist among us, we are much indebted to the zeal and public spirit of our fathers.

We are often too sparing of expense in matters which relate to the public, and to posterity ; and we excuse our parsimony by pleading, that the present support and future settlement of our children will leave but little in our hands for other purposes. What if our fathers, on the same pretence, had neglected to provide for the establishment and support of God's instituted worship ? Should we have been more opulent, more wise, more virtuous and happy than we are now ? Would not our case have been the reverse ? The privileges and blessings, which they have conveyed to us, are an hundred fold more valuable to us, than any worldly substance which could have been transmitted in their stead. Yea, our real wealth is by these means much increased. " There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth ; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."

As a society begins, so it usually continues for many generations. If it embrace and maintain the great interests of religion, virtue and learning, the happy consequences will be felt by distant posterity. But if through indifference, party spirit and worldly affection, these objects are neglected and thrown aside, the baneful effects will last for ages. The promise and threatening annexed to the second commandment—a commandment, which relates peculiarly to the worship of God—are often seen to be verified. " God visits the iniquities of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of them who hate him ; and he shews mercy to thousands of them who love him and keep his commandments."

Our experience of the benefits resulting from the piety of our predecessors, should prompt our en-

deavors to transmit similar benefits to those who will succeed us. Like our fathers, let us not only provide for the continuance of God's worship, but recommend a faithful attendance upon it by our pious example.

On this occasion we may profitably think of the *great changes*, which have taken place in this society, since a house of worship was first erected in it.

Considerable alterations are seen in ten or twenty years: but in the space of one hundred years, the changes are vast and astonishing.

Where are now the *persons*, who built this house? Where are they, who sang together, and shouted for joy, when its foundations were laid? Where are they who first assembled in it to hear God's word and call on his name? Where are they, who first constituted a church in this place, and sat down together at *that* table to commemorate their Redeemer's death? Ah, they are gone—gone to the eternal world. We have among us some very aged people; but the oldest of them was born after this house was founded. They who were then active members of the society have long since been removed; their bodies are mouldered to dust—they have been succeeded by their children, and these by *their* children. Yea they are not only gone from the world, but almost forgotten in the world; their names are seldom mentioned, or even known among the living. The sculpture of their monuments is overgrown with moss, or their graves without a monument are lost to the memory of man. Some of their names are extinct; their descendants are not found here. Many of our present inhabitants are emigrants, or the posterity of emigrants from other towns. And many of the children of the early inhabitants have removed to other towns, and some to such a distance, that their families are rarely the subjects of information or inquiry.

Look among the *houses* in this society. There is none, except this ancient house of God, which was built an hundred years ago. The first mansions, like the mortals who occupied them, are dissolved, and sunk in ruins. Scarcely any traces of them can be found; or nothing more than here and there a few scattered stones, a hillock not perfectly levelled, or a cavity not entirely filled by the plough. These marks of human labor tell us that mortals once lived there; and indicate too, that these mortals live there no more.

Look over the *lands*. Of these a very great part have passed to other names, and other families. You will find but few dwelling lots now occupied by the descendants of those, who occupied them a century ago. So changeable are worldly possessions. Our inward thought is, that our houses will continue forever, and our dwelling places to all generations; and we call our lands after our own names. Our posterity approve our sayings, and enter on our possessions. But, when we are laid in the grave, our lands and dwellings may soon be transferred to others, and strangers have dominion over all that we have left. It is happy for many, while they live, that they cannot foresee what will be the disposal of their property after they are dead.

In this period of time, *great numbers* have passed from this place to the invisible world. In the space of forty-six years, which is the length of time that I have been with you, the number of deaths has been five hundred and eighty-seven. In the fifty four preceding years, calculating on the probable number of inhabitants in that period, we may suppose that the number of deaths a little exceeded two hundred. There have then, in the century past, been about eight hundred deaths within the present territory of this parish. The persons, who have died, though they are gone from this world,

and are seldom thought of by the living, are now, at this hour, in a state infinitely important to themselves. How many, who formerly sat within these walls, have sincerely sought and happily obtained a preparation for heaven, and may be this moment praising God for the privilege afforded them, and the grace bestowed on them, while they dwelt on earth. And alas ! may we not fear ;—it is a gloomy thought—we admit it with reluctance—but may we not fear, there are some bewailing in hopeless misery their neglect and abuse of former privileges ? Some have died in youth. And who knows, but some of these are lamenting in the world of wo, that they hated instruction and despised reproof ; obeyed not the voice of their teachers, nor inclined their ear to those who instructed them ; but were in almost all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly ? My children, consider and be wise.

During the period in review there have been *prosperous*, as well as melancholy changes.

Our numbers have greatly increased.

Within the territory of the *original* parish, which comprehends this whole town, there are now four distinct parishes, two thousand eight hundred souls, and probably as many as four hundred and sixty families. To this degree of population has the original society increased within a century. In *this*, which is now the *first* parish, there are about one hundred and eighty families, and rather more than eleven hundred souls, which are almost double the number, of which the whole parish consisted forty six years ago.

In this period the advantages of education have been improved, husbandry and arts have been carried to higher perfection ; commerce has flourished and wealth has been accumulated. There are individual farmers, whose surplus produce probably ex-

ceeds the surplus of the whole community at the time when this house was erected.

It would be happy, if we could say, piety and virtue have grown with our growing numbers and riches. Religion, however, is not lost: It is still retained and still respected. The visible professors, I believe, bear, at least, as great a proportion to the inhabitants as formerly. Though there have been no very distinguishing periods of religious attention, yet I often meet with those, who appear to be seriously affected with a sense of divine things, and to have set their faces for heaven.

For these hundred years past the instituted means of religion have been enjoyed with little interruption. There have been three ministers ordained; and the vacancies fall short of three years.

There has been great harmony in the society. No contention has ever happened between minister and people, or among the people themselves, so great as to fix an alienation, or produce any troublesome consequences, or even to call for the intervention of a council from other churches.

There are different religious sentiments; but they are accompanied with so much rational discernment and christian candour, that they never have occasioned the permanent separation of any considerable number from the communion of the church, or from their relation to the parish. It is to your honor, that, during the very expensive work, which you have had in hand, scarcely a person has attempted to screen himself from his share of the burden. They who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine of Christ, have usually found little countenance among you. There have been, as is naturally to be expected, some collisions of interest and opinion in your social transactions, but these have never broken the social union.

The peaceable accommodating spirit, which has

so long subsisted among you, and which has displayed itself so much to your comfort in your late important transactions, is a promising indication, that brotherly love will continue, and that the God of peace will be with you.

As we are now about to leave this house, it is natural to look forward and contemplate the scenes that are before us.

My brethren; this is the last time, that we are here to meet for God's worship. Ah; there will soon be a last time of our meeting in any other place on earth. May we all meet in heaven.

We see this house in a state of decay. Our house of clay like this ancient house of worship, is tending to dissolution. We leave this temple to occupy another more sound, spacious and beautiful; but *that* we shall not occupy long. The time is coming, when we shall leave it to return to it no more. May we then have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The founders of this ancient temple are gone, and their places on earth are no more known. The same, in a century—in less than half a century hence, will be said of you, who have founded the new temple. You are as mortal and transient, as were they, who lived before you were born; and the time will come, when you will be as certainly dead, as little remembered, and as rarely mentioned, as are now the men who lived an hundred years ago.

When we enter a spacious and elegant church, we are pleased with the beauty and grandeur of its appearance. But that is doomed to the same fate with this—decay and dissolution. Perhaps in a hundred years, that may be too small for the number, or too inelegant for the taste of those who shall then dwell here; or possibly a disbelief and neglect of religion may bring on a general indifference to all houses of worship. Who knows, but atheism may

grow so insolent as to boast of the expulsion of the scriptures, and of absence from the sanctuaries of God, and to wish these sacred retreats of devotion doomed to the flames, or converted to theatres of amusement? But we hope better things. We hope, that they, who, in that distant period, shall dwell here, will be friends of religion. We hope that by the virtue of this generation, the means of knowledge and piety will be transmitted to them, and a regard to God and his worship preserved among them. If they should censure your taste and skill in architecture, yet we hope, they will applaud your piety. Whatever changes there may be in modes of dress, arts of building and refinements of taste, religion—true religion will never change; piety to God, the social virtues, the relative duties, faith in the Redeemer, repentance of sin, the ordinances of worship, and the way to heaven will ever remain the same. The good old way still is, and will continue to be the way; and they who walk in it, will find rest to their souls. Let us learn the nature, cultivate the temper, and perform the works of religion. Let us maintain it in our families, teach it to our children, profess it in the sanctuary, and practise it in our daily conversation; thus, while we secure our own salvation, we shall provide for the happiness of distant generations.

When we look back on the past century, we are surprised to see, what numbers from this small spot of ground have gone to the regions of the dead. Those who die in a single year are so few, compared with the living, that they are scarcely missed, except in the families to which they belonged. Their removal gives no sensible check to the business, or the wickedness of the world. But when we collect these scattered mortals together, and view them at the end of a century, we are astonished at their number. We find enough to populate a town. Let us

look forward for a century to come, and probably we may see almost as many thousands, as, in the century past, we have seen hundreds. There are, in this town, more than ten times, and, within the present limits of the parish, nearly ten times as many people, as there were a century ago. And if the ratio of increase should be the same, we may suppose, that in a century to come, there will be seven or eight thousands of deaths. But whether the number be greater or less, every person in this house will undoubtedly be in the number. This we readily allow. We think, however, that the time of our departure is distant. But one century is gone, since this house first stood here; and another will go as fast. Could the fathers return, they would tell us the time is short. Ask the aged; they will say the same.

Within less than an hour, we shall take our last leave of this house. Were we driven hence by enemies—Did we see our only sanctuary wrapt in flames—as was the case of the Jews—how distressing would be our case? Or had this house been suddenly destroyed by tempest or fire; or had it sunk in ruins by age, when we were so oppressed with burdens, or so divided in opinions, that we could not erect another; but must have been as sheep scattered on the mountains, without a fold for their retreat, or a shepherd for their guide, how calamitous would have been our condition? Happily this is not our state. The decay of this house was gradual, and its end was foreseen. And before it became untenable, you have, in the good providence of God, been united in placing, and succeeded in completing another, to which, when you retire from this, you may immediately resort. “Think of God’s loving kindness in the midst of his temple.”

We are soon to quit our earthly tabernacle. It is a serious question, Whither shall we go then? It is

a glorious thought that there are mansions in our heavenly Father's house, and that Jesus has ascended there to prepare a place for his disciples. But is he preparing one for us? Have we by faith and holiness secured a title to, and made preparation for those blessed abodes?

Death, which dissolves this body, would be a dismal event, if we knew no other state of existence. It will be a terrible event to those, who have nothing to expect but a miserable existence: but a glorious event to those, who, when they are absent from the body, will immediately find themselves at home with their Lord.

At the close of the present solemnity, we shall part from one another: But we expect to assemble together again. How affecting would be the scene, if we were parting, never to meet any more? There is a parting time at hand. Death will scatter us away, and send us to the place from which we shall not return. The day is coming, when we shall no more see each other's faces in an earthly temple, or in this mortal world. Have we the pleasing hope, that we shall reassemble in heaven, and there again unite our voices in the worship of God?

By social worship, frequent intercourse and reciprocal kindness, we have acquired an affection for one another. When we come to God's house, the faces of our brethren gladden our hearts. It grieves us to think of some, who, confined by age and infirmity, cannot participate in the common privilege: It grieves us more to think, that any despise it. How will it be in another world?—Shall we all go to the general assembly and church of the first-born—to the blessed company of angels and saints—to the happy society of patriarchs, prophets and apostles—of sincere christians in all ages, and of those godly souls, who lived in this place, and wor-

shipped in this house before us? Let us be fellow helpers to the kingdom of God.

Probably I shall no more speak to you in this house; nor shall I long speak to you in any place. May mutual affection and fidelity render our relation useful and happy, while it lasts.

In the course of the week we expect to enter into the temple newly erected, that we may dedicate it to God. While we make exterior preparations for the decency of the service, let us not forget those internal preparations, which are necessary to our acceptance. Let us examine our hearts, repent of our sins, and dedicate ourselves to God. Let us call into exercise every pious sentiment, and every brotherly affection. Let our hearts, united in benevolence and love, there mingle in prayer and praise. We shall approach the gate of heaven; let us go, as if we were going to heaven, and carry with us the temper of heaven.

The expectation of friends and brethren from abroad suggests the propriety of order, decency, courtesy and hospitality. We would not dishonour ourselves in the sight of mortals. But mortals will make the smallest part of the concourse. We shall stand in the presence of the great God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels. If angels visit particular churches, as we are told they do, will not their attention be arrested by an occasion of so sacred importance, as that now before us? There are intimations in scripture, that departed saints interest themselves in the general prosperity of the church. And may we not suppose, that they have a knowledge of, and predilection for those particular churches, of which they once were members, and in which they were trained up for glory? May we not imagine, that those godly souls, who, while they dwelt in flesh, frequented this temple, now observe our order, and rejoice in our union? And

who knows, but they will hover around, when we assemble to dedicate a new temple to God? There is joy in Heaven, when a sinner repents, when churches increase, when religion spreads, and when it promises a continuance for ages to come.

Will the Lord bless us and keep us, make his face to shine upon us and be gracious to us, lift up his countenance upon us and give us peace.

SERMON VII.



*Christ's Presence the Glory of his Temple. A
dedicatory Discourse on entering a new House of
Worship.*



MY BRETHREN AND FRIENDS,

WE are this day assembled to consecrate to God a *new temple* erected for his glory, and under his auspices brought to perfection. May the promise made to the Jews, in the second chapter of Haggai, and the ninth verse, on the completion of the second temple in Jerusalem, be now verified in the second temple of this society.

“The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts, and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.”

“The former house” here referred to, was that erected by king Solomon. That was exceedingly magnificent. There God vouchsafed to the people his presence, instructed them by his law, heard their prayers, accepted their offerings and communicated his grace.

That temple, after it had stood about four hundred years, was destroyed by the king of Babylon, who subdued the country of Judea, and carried the inhabitants captive to his own land. Here they were detained for seventy years, by which time, all who had seen that temple, except a few, who came to Babylon in their youth, were gone off from the stage of life. The Jews in the reign of Cyrus, were released from their captivity, and permitted to return to the land of their fathers. Here they soon entered on the work of building to God a new temple in the place of that which had been destroyed; and in a course of years, through various discouragements, the work was completed. But this second temple fell so much below the former in beauty and grandeur, that, while they, who had never seen the former, shouted for joy, the old men, who could compare the two houses, wept with a loud voice; for this, in comparison with the other, was as nothing in their eyes.

To console them in their grief, and to enliven their hopes, God promises them, "I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory—And the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former; for in this place will I give peace." The purport of the promise is this; "I will send the Messiah, the Saviour of mankind; and in this house he shall personally proclaim the Gospel of peace and salvation." This promise was verified in the event; for the great Redeemer came, while this second temple was standing; and this he often honoured with his presence.—This temple was indeed, a little before Christ's appearance, beautified and enlarged by Herod; but not so entirely rebuilt, but that it was considered as the same, and still called the *second temple*.

The glory of this temple was to consist, not in exterior magnificence and splendor, but in the presence and preaching of Jesus the Son of God.

Let us, in our meditations, make a short visit to that temple, and behold its glory. There we see the divine Redeemer exhibiting himself in all the charms of grace and love—we see the assembled multitudes sitting before him with solemn aspect and fixed attention—we see him demonstrating his heavenly mission by works of power and goodness, bending his ear to the cries of the afflicted, and stretching out his hand for their relief—We hear him proclaiming himself the Saviour of guilty men, announcing his death as a sacrifice for their sins, and his speedy return from the dead to resume his former glory—We hear him uttering the promises, and stating the terms of eternal life—inviting guilty and weary souls to come and partake of the pardon and grace which he dispenses, and testifying his delight in those, who humbly accept the blessings which he offers.

How glorious was that temple, in which such gracious words were spoken by the mouth of such a heavenly preacher! Surely it was good to be there.

It was not merely the personal presence; it was rather the precious doctrine of Jesus, which rendered the temple glorious. The glory of this latter house exceeded that of the former, because in this was preached the gospel of peace. Had Jesus sat there silent and inattentive, where would have been the glory?

The same gospel, which *He* preached is come to us; and it contains all the doctrines and precepts, all the promises and invitations, which he spake with his own lips. He now, though invisible to our eyes, walks among the churches, to observe their worship, communicate his will, hear their prayers and impart his grace. Where saints assemble in his

name, there he is in the midst of them. Say not then, the saints in Judea, were privileged above you. Here are houses erected for the honour of the Redeemer, and for the edification and comfort of believers. Here you may behold his glory and receive his blessing. The presence of Christ in the place of worship, will render it glorious.

It is a just and natural enquiry, how we may enjoy Christ's presence in his temple.

1. His *gospel* must be faithfully *preached* there.

This the apostle calls a glorious gospel. It displays the glory of God's character and government; opens to the view of mortals the wonders of the invisible world; points out an astonishing method for the salvation of perishing sinners; exhibits to the eye of faith a dying, rising, interceding Saviour; brings pardon to the most guilty, salvation to the most unworthy, and help to the most impotent of the human race. It is a scheme, which angels look into, that they may learn the manifold wisdom of God, and which they celebrate in songs of gratitude to God, and good-will to men.

The temple in which this gospel is preached in its purity and extent, is filled with a glory, which never was seen in Solomon's temple. That, indeed, was in many respects, made glorious. But its glory vanishes when it is placed in comparison with this, which excels. There the divine *law* was published, which is to guilty men a ministration of death and condemnation. Here is proclaimed the gospel, which is a ministration of grace and life.

Christ has instituted a standing ministry of his gospel, to be continued as long as the world shall endure: and with the ministry of the word he has promised his own gracious presence. It is for the enjoyment of this privilege, that temples are erected in Christian lands. Every people associated for religious worship, are bound to erect a sanctuary, in

which worship may be statedly solemnized, and to employ an able and godly minister, who may preside in the solemnity. An essential and principal part of the minister's work is to dispense that gospel, which began to be spoken by the Lord, and is conveyed to us in the writings of them who heard him. Christ's charge to his apostles was, "teach men to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." The same charge lies on every minister. He is to declare the whole counsel of God, and keep back nothing, that is profitable. He is to teach the purity of the divine law, the demerit of transgression; the corruption and impotence of human nature; the sovereign power of divine grace, the character of the Redeemer, and the way of salvation through him. He is also to preach the nature and obligations of virtue and good works. But if, while he preaches these, he overlooks the great plan of redemption, he is not a gospel minister; and there is no more glory in the house of God, than in the school of an ancient philosopher. That the house may be glorious, Christ must appear there in his true gospel. With his faithful ministers he has promised, that he will be present to the end of the world.

2. That the house of Christ may be honored with his presence, there must be a general and devout *attendance* of associated worshippers.

Christ is present with those who gather together in his name. He walks among his Churches on his own day—the day which he has appointed for social worship. He comes to the place where he has recorded his name. Hither we must resort, if we expect to meet him. Paul speaks of the whole church in Corinth, as coming together in one place. When he preached in Ephesus, all who dwelt in Asia came thither to hear the word of the Lord. When he preached in Antioch almost the whole city came together to hear him. Christians are cautioned, not to forsake their religious assemblies.

There is a beauty, a dignity, a grandeur in a large and numerous collection of worshipping saints. The view of it elevates, expands and solemnizes the mind. It gives us some idea of the adoration paid in heaven to the supreme majesty by the multitudes assembled before him. It almost transports us to the temple above. It is one end of social worship, that by mutual example we may assist and animate one another. The more general the attendance, the better this end is obtained. When we come into God's house, and there behold our brethren and companions filling the seats, and waiting with composed aspect and solemn silence to hear the divine message, we feel as if we were approaching the gate of heaven. The solemnity of the place, and the collected countenance of the worshippers transfuse through our souls correspondent feelings. We find it good to be there. But if we enter a sanctuary, look around, and can see only here and there a solitary worshipper, our hearts are disappointed—our devotion is chilled—we hardly realize, that we are in the house of God. The Lord thus instructs his servants; “say to them, who have been bidden to my supper, come, for all things are ready: go out into the high ways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” O my brethren, remember, Christ loves to see a full house. There he is best pleased to afford his presence; and there his presence spreads the brightest glory.

3. That we may expect the glory of Christ's presence in his house, we must honour him by an explicit *profession* of his religion and an *attendance* on *that ordinance*, in which he, in a peculiar manner, exhibits himself to us. If we believe not the gospel to be true, when its evidences are laid before us; or if we contemptuously refuse to profess it, when we are convinced of its truth; or if we oppose it in heart and practice, when we have professed it, we

can have no claim to its blessings. Its threatenings stand against us.

There are some, whose situation prevents them, or whose fears restrain them from attending on particular ordinances. These may possess the essential tempers, though they enjoy not all the pleasures of religion. We are not to exclude them from all charity, though they exclude themselves from much comfort. But from a *society*, in which there is no church, no association of christian professors, no administration of gospel ordinances, Christ's presence is withdrawn. Whatever may be the character and condition of some solitary individuals, the *society*, as such, is forsaken of Christ. If the light is gone out, and the candlestick removed, Christ walks there no more. What is now to be seen, but strife, confusion, division, contempt of religion, mutual opposition, and every evil work. If you have ever seen a collection of people, among whom a church once formed, has, through absolute indifference gradually declined, until it sunk into non-existence, you have seen this description realized. Christ has instituted means by which we are to obtain and enjoy his presence; when we renounce these, we say to him, depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. He is with us, while we are with him. If we forsake him, he forsakes us.

Christ, just before his death, instituted a particular ordinance, to be ever afterward observed by his disciples in memory of his death for them, and of his love to them, and in testimony of their faith in him, and their affection for one another. And in this ordinance he is to all religious purposes, as truly present with us, as he was with the first disciples at the time of the institution. As they received the ordinance from his hands, and heard the consecration of it from his lips, the use of it could not be to remind them of his *corporeal* presence: This they

saw with their eyes, as sensibly as they saw the ordinance itself. But the use of it was to lead their minds to a *spiritual* view of him, as a dying Saviour, through whom they might hope for eternal life. If we approach it in the lively exercise of faith, we shall enjoy his presence, to all spiritual intents, as really and as profitably as did the first disciples, who sat down at his table with him.

That Christ's house may be glorious, there must be an increasing *succession* of godly professors. This will manifest the continued presence of Christ's spirit to give efficacy to the stated ministration of his gospel.

What joy must it give to the real friends of the Redeemer, to see the *young* frequenting his sanctuary, taking part in the worship there performed, devoutly attentive to the preaching of the word, distinguishing themselves in songs of praise, coming forward with early professions of faith, and gathering around the sacred table? At such a scene, how pleased is the Saviour? how pleased are all good men? they look forward with delightful hopes, that religion will live when they are dead; that it will be transmitted to their unborn descendants; that Jesus will be honoured on earth, when they are praising him in heaven; and that they shall see the church above increasing by continual emigrations from the church, which they loved and honoured, when they dwelt below.

But alas! how diverse—how gloomy the prospect, when the church, of which we are members, languishes in its zeal, and declines in its numbers—When on spreading the table of the Lord, almost the whole assembly, the young generally, and many heads of families, arise and depart, as if here was not their refreshment; and few—few remain to take their seats at the table; and these chiefly the aged, who are soon to pass away? What a shade covers

the walls of the house—what a cloud gathers over the table; what a sadness mingles with our devotion? The glory seems to be departing. We tremble for the generation to come.

4. That Christ's house may appear glorious, there must be, not only a devout attendance on the word and ordinances there dispensed, but a visible *holiness* in the worshippers.

The great end of the instituted preaching of the gospel is, that the careless may be awakened to consideration and enquiry, unbelievers convinced of the truth, sinners turned unto God, and believers edified in knowledge and holiness. The word becomes mighty through God. The excellency of the power is of him. It is not merely an external attendance on ordinances, but rather their holy effect, which renders the church glorious; for it is this that displays the presence of Christ; and it is in this, that the real beauty of the church consists. "Christ gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, and might present it a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." When we see the gospel successful among a people in the numerous conversions of sinners, and in the exemplary holiness of professors, we conclude, that Christ is among them of a truth.

5. The glory of God's house greatly depends on the *peace* and *union* of the people, who stately worship in it. When God promises that the glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former, he assigns this as an eminent trait of the superior glory of the latter house, "I will there give peace."

The christian church is builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is peace. Christ is our peace, and he came to unite all believers in one body, so making peace. The design of his gospel is to gather into

one all things, which are in the earth. His precepts enjoin brotherly kindness, and universal charity. His doctrines are benevolent in their nature, and uniting in their tendency, and, where their influence prevails, they subdue the rough, unsocial and haughty passions, and soften and smooth the temper into friendship, humility and goodness. Social worship contributes to christian union. Our religion requires us to lay aside all guile, hypocrisy, envying and evil speaking, and to put on meekness and charity, that we may worship God to our edification and his acceptance. By stately assembling in the same house and uniting in the same acts of devotion, we strengthen the bands of fraternal affection. The house of God, when it is the seat of peace, benevolence and charity, is beautiful and lovely. No exterior decorations can give it such a glory; "How good, how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell" and worship "together in unity?" Charity, flowing in the house of God, spreads its refreshing influence through all the society, like the ointment poured on Aaron's head, which ran down the skirts of his garments; or like the showers descending on the hills, which flow in rivulets to the vales. Where love dwells, there is the presence of God, for he is love; and he who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him.

Contentions, divisions and separations among christian professors, dishonour the name of Christ, grieve his spirit, contradict his gospel, deform his house, give their profession the lie, and turn their glory into shame.

6. That the temple may be glorious, it must be an house of *prayer*—not merely a place where unmeaning words are spoken without an object, but a place where the humble desires of the heart are offered to God. How solemn—how glorious is the house, in which prayer and praise, like incense warm from the altar, ascends to the skies from a thousand

hearts, all united in the same pious desires, and the same devout affections. In such a house Jesus is present, he accepts the incense offered, and with it offers the sweeter incense of his own intercession. God smells a sweet savour; he bows the heavens and comes down to communicate the blessings of his goodness. Such prayers will not be lost in air; they will return laden with benefits, greater than we can ask or think. How amiable are God's tabernacles—how pleasant are his courts! "This one thing let us desire of the Lord; this let us seek after, that we may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple."

We have seen, my brethren, what makes Christ's house glorious. It is his presence there. We have seen how we may enjoy his presence. This we are to obtain by means of a gospel ministry; by an attendance on the dispensation of the word; by promoting the increase of the church; by improving divine institutions to the advancement of real holiness; by walking in mutual peace and love, and by striving together in our prayers. And is it not the desire of you all, that the presence of Christ may thus be enjoyed in this house? May the glory of this house be greater than has been the glory of the former. May this second temple excel the first, as much in the communications of the graces of the Spirit, as it does in its external beauty and magnificence.

My beloved brethren, I rejoice to see this day; a day in which I meet you in a house cheerfully erected for the worship of God, and join with you in dedicating it to his service. And, I trust, my joy is the joy of you all.

Many anxious hours have I spent, in years past, in contemplating your critical situation, and in commending your case to God. For many years you

have felt your need, and manifested your desire of a more decent and comfortable house for divine worship ; and many attempts have you made to obtain the object of your wishes. But a disagreement in opinion—a disagreement naturally to be expected under your peculiar circumstances, with respect to the ground on which the house should be located, has embarrassed your good designs. In the meantime, I have been happy to observe, that your disunion in relation to this object, has never interrupted your union in other respects. After so many unsuccessful attempts, I had almost despaired of ever beholding what I now behold, a house for God erected in a place, in which you all calmly acquiesce. I have sometimes painfully anticipated your approaching dissolution—an event which seemed probable, whenever there should be a vacancy of the ministry. I have often solicited heaven, that some gracious influence from above, or some merciful disposal of circumstances, might draw you to a union in this great and important work. I dare not say, heaven has hearkened to my voice. But such a disposal of circumstances, doubtless attended with divine influence, we have seen. The work long desired, is happily completed.

When I consider, what a patron of the cause, and what a benefactor to us, stepped forward—what a donation he made—how opportunely it was presented—how judiciously it was applied—how promptly you commenced, and how cheerfully you prosecuted the work proposed—how honourably the few, who seemed to hesitate, accorded with the general sentiment—how bountifully God has poured out his blessing, while his house has been building—how speedily and happily you have accomplished it without any disastrous occurrence, or distressing burden ; I feel an admiration and gratitude, not easy to be uttered.

While we praise the name of God for the goodness he has shewed us, every feeling heart will remember with grateful respect the human benefactor, the benevolent brother, who has so liberally distinguished himself on this occasion, and to whom we are, under providence, so highly indebted for our present delightful prospect.* May he long enjoy the satisfaction of beholding the happy fruits of his munificence : may he hereafter reap in rich abundance the fruits promised to those, who have sowed bountifully.

My dearly beloved brethren, the time is at hand, when the relation between you and me will be dissolved. Accept my thanks for the candour with which my labours among you have been received. I regret that they have not been more worthy of your approbation, and better adapted to the promotion of your spiritual interest. May God pardon my many failings. The day is fast approaching, when we must appear before Christ, and render our accounts ; *I*, how I have discharged my ministry ; *you*, how you have improved and profited by it. I think of that day with deep concern—with concern for myself, and for you. I daily pray for you. Brethren, pray for me—pray for yourselves—pray for one another. Let us strive together in our prayers, that the word of God may, in this place, be faithfully preached, diligently heard, and gloriously succeeded, and that we may all rejoice together in the day of the Lord Jesus.

My brethren, suffer a word of exhortation. Let not this house, which you have builded, stand destitute of a stated minister. Whenever you shall have

* Mr. John Ashley, a respectable member of the church and society, generously proposed to establish, at his own expence, a fund of 4333 dollars for the maintenance of the gospel ministry in the parish, on condition that a house of worship should be erected on ground which he marked, and completed within a given time. The proposal was gratefully accepted, and the fund immediately established.

occasion to seek for another minister, proceed deliberately, take advice, choose a man of respectable abilities, literary accomplishments, evangelical principles, blameless character, reputed piety and candid spirit. Be not captivated with a tinsel glitter; but regard solid talents.

Support your minister with a cheerful liberality, that he may give himself wholly to his work. A people never grow rich and free by oppressing, and starving the gospel. This is called "robbing God." He has in his providence placed you under peculiar advantages. Consider and lay it to heart, lest he send a curse upon you, and even curse your blessing. I say not these things, because *I* desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to *your* account.

Attend on the stated worship of God with diligence, seriousness and constancy. Let the united zeal which you have shewn in erecting this house, still appear in your pious use of it. If it is to stand desolate and unoccupied, it stands here in vain. If divine worship is neglected, the house loses its glory, and you lose your labour. I entreat you, I exhort you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, forsake not the assembling of yourselves together. While I speak, let me speak to a full, attentive, and devout assembly. You will hear me but a short time: I hope that, in my successor, you will find a more edifying and engaging speaker.

Contribute, in your respective places, to the increase of the church.

My *aged* brethren; you in particular, who were acting members in this society, when my relation to it commenced—but where are they?—in vain my eyes explore this house to find them. Most of them are gone—gone to another world. Some are shut up—confined by age—they cannot come forth. The few who are left seem almost lost in this numerous assembly. Others, however, have succeeded those

who have departed. There is still the usual proportion of aged people among us. In this list there are some—I can scarcely believe it—but the young will find some in the list, not so old as myself. My aged brethren, we are soon to follow our departed friends: let us bless God, who allows us to see his goodness toward this people, and has opened to them, in our day, such pleasing and hopeful prospects. There are duties, which we owe to posterity. Let us by our example recommend religion to them, and by our prayers seek divine blessings for them. While life and strength remain, let us by a faithful attendance at this sanctuary, invite the attendance of our younger brethren, and convince them, that we find it good to be here, and to behold the beauty of the Lord. Here may we enjoy some sensible anticipation of heaven, and feel a growing relish and preparation for the everlasting pleasures, which are there. When the time of our departure is come, may we rise to join the general assembly above; and, from time to time, as long as the succession of our mortal race shall continue, may our heavenly joys be enlivened in beholding accessions to the assembly above from this which we leave below.

Ye, who are the *professed* members of the church in this place, “provide things honest in the sight of all men, that many may be won by your good conversation.” “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify God.” “If there be any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the spirit, any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind, and keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

Ye, who believe the truth, and feel the importance of the gospel, and yet have hitherto omitted to confess the name, and approach the table of your Re-

deemer, come forward without delay, profess your faith in, and obedience to him, join yourselves to his church, and honor him in the sight of all mankind.

Ye *youths* ;—on you will depend the *continuance* of Christ's church in this place. Your fathers will soon retire. The religion, which they have maintained, they will leave in your hands ; and in your hands it will be preserved, or lost. It was chiefly for *your* sakes that they erected this house. *They* will not need it long. The other might have accommodated them for the few days of their abode on earth. You have a solemn trust now committed to you ; and an important part you have to act, in regard, first, to your own salvation, and then, to the general interest of religion, society and succeeding generations. Make the gospel your study, religion your choice, heaven your pursuit, and your souls your care. Attend divine worship in this house, join in the prayers and praises here offered to God, receive with reverence the sacred truths, which may here be dispensed. Confess the name of your Redeemer, take your seats at his table, walk in his commandments and ordinances. In his name I now call you to come in, that his house may be filled. Your devout attendance will contribute much to the beauty and glory of the house. It will invite his presence : he loves to see children in his temple ; he loves to hear them speaking his praise. Out of their mouths he ordains strength.

Let me exhort you all to continue in brotherly love. Study the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith ye may edify one another. Let there be no divisions among you. If you see any who would cause divisions and offences—who would make separations and parties in this church or society—who would detach you from your present relation and connection, remember the command of the apostle, “ mark such and avoid them, for they serve

not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own unworthy ends." They may use good words and fair speeches; but their aim is to deceive the hearts of the simple. Be ye perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment; and look not every man at his own things, but every man also at the things of others.

Let it appear, that you regard, not the form only, but the power of religion. Walk worthy of him, who has called you to his kingdom and glory.

Continue instant in prayer, that God would afford you his presence in this house, that he would shed forth his spirit abundantly on you and your children, that he would fulfil in you and them all the pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power, and that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of God.

This house we now consecrate to God, as a house of prayer and praise—a house of spiritual instruction and discipline—a house of heavenly devotion and brotherly communion. It is the gate of heaven. Let it bear a resemblance to heaven, into which nothing enters that defiles, or works abomination. Let no corrupt affections, or earthly cares accompany us hither. God is in this place, and holiness becomes his house.

When we dedicate this house to him, to him let us dedicate ourselves also. When we bring an offering, we must first give ourselves to the Lord.

The ancient temples in Jerusalem were dedicated with the sacrifices of slain beasts. Let this temple be dedicated with better—with living sacrifices—with the offering of our bodies and souls and all our powers to God. This is our reasonable service. Without this, the ceremonial dedication of a sumptuous building will be an unacceptable offering.

By our attendance in this house may we all be prepared to enter into that holy city, where is no material temple, but the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple thereof—into that city which hath no need of the sun to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the nations of them who are saved shall walk in its light, and shall bring their glory and honour into it. The gates of the city stand open for us to enter. They are not shut at all by day, and there is no night there. But let us remember, that into this holy city nothing can enter which is defiled; but they only who are written in the Lamb's book of life. And these are they, who are redeemed from among men—in whose mouth is found no guile—who keep themselves unspotted from the world, and who follow the Lamb whither soever he goes.

SERMON VIII.



The Atrocity of Suicide.



The two following Discourses, were delivered at Suffield, on the Lord's day, February 24, 1805, on occasion of a melancholly instance of Suicide, which had recently occurred in that town.



ACTS xvi. 26.

Do thyself no harm:

THIS was Paul's exclamation to the jailer in Philippi, who at that moment, was about to destroy himself by thrusting a sword into his body. The occasion of his taking such a desperate resolution is related in this chapter.

While Paul and Silas were preaching in Philippi, they met with a young woman, who was a sorceress, and who, being assisted by a diabolical power, brought to her masters, the priests of the heathen temple, much gain by soothsaying, or by telling people certain strange things. This girl followed the apostles, confessing them to be the servants of God, and the teachers of the way of salvation. Paul, being grieved at the unhappy condition of the damsel, who, while she was convinced of the truth, was under the power of an evil spirit, commanded the spirit in the name of Jesus to come out of her. And

he came out in the same hour. Her masters, perceiving that the hope of their gain was gone, caught Paul and Silas, carried them before the magistrates, and accused them of exciting tumults, and making dangerous innovations in the city.

By their influence among the people, they raised such a clamour against the apostles, that the magistrates, being overawed, gave sentence, that they should be beaten, and then closely imprisoned; accordingly, after they had received their stripes, they were committed to the jailer, who, being charged on his peril to keep them with safety, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. In the night God miraculously interposed to set these prisoners at liberty. He shook open the prison doors, and loosed from their bands all who were there in confinement. The jailer, awakened by the violent commotion, saw the doors open; and concluding that the prisoners had escaped, and that, according to the Roman laws, he must suffer the punishment which should have been inflicted on them, he drew his sword and would have killed himself. Paul, perceiving the jailer's desperate resolution, cried out, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here."

The particular occasion of this caution, you see, was the jailer's attempt to kill himself. It may therefore be considered, first, as a direct prohibition of *self murder*. But though the occasion was special, yet the caution is expressed in such general terms, as may fairly be applied to many other cases. We will therefore, secondly, improve the words, as a warning not to injure ourselves in any way.

I. The words, considered in reference to the particular occasion on which they were spoken, are an express prohibition of *self murder*.

The two awful instances of this kind of death, which have occurred, both lately, and one recently,

in this place, and in the same family, naturally direct my thoughts, and call your attention to the subject now proposed.

But I feel myself under some embarrassment. How shall I do justice to a subject of this nature, without wounding the sensibility, and harrowing up the anguish of the afflicted? Gladly would I console their hearts, assuage their griefs, and relieve their pains. But must I, for this purpose, disguise the nature, and extenuate the heinousness of the act, which has caused their affliction?—this is what they do not desire. They wish, that, for the general good, the action may be stated truly, and exhibited justly. And if they should hear some sentiments expressed in a manner, which gives new pungency to their painful feelings, they will excuse the honest plainness of the speaker in regard to the common benefit; for it is their benevolent desire, that their affliction may be improved as the means of preventing the like affliction in others. The preacher will aim to find out acceptable words; but they shall be upright words, even words of truth. And may they be as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies.

Relying on the goodness and candor of the afflicted part of my audience, I resume my subject; and observe, that the words of my text contain an express prohibition of *self murder*.

There may be cases, in which the defence of our country, or the vindication of our religion requires us to put life in hazard, or even to submit to certain death. As the best end will never justify the application of sinful means, so we can have no right to sacrifice our country, or our religion, for the preservation of life. Thus to save life is to lose it. St. John says, “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Where the life and happiness of a number are depending on our exertions, we ought to in-

terpose for their safety, though it may be with peril to ourselves. On this principle of general benevolence, "Paul sought, not his own profit, but the profit of *many* that they might be *saved*." "He rejoiced to be offered on the sacrifice and service of their faith." In such a case "he reckoned not his own life dear to himself." He commended some, who, in regard to the general interest of the church, "for his life laid down their necks;" or rescued his life, at the hazard of their own.

But though on principles of piety or patriotism, a man may expose his own life to the violence of others, he can have no right to execute violence on himself. If he is bound to suffer death, rather than sacrifice the essential interests of other men; he is bound to live, while he can, that he may promote their interests; and to do good, while he lives, according to the ability which God gives him.

The strong love of life and dread of death, which are common to men, and indeed to all living creatures, we should think, must be a sufficient security against suicide, had there not been instances of those, who have violently broken over this natural and powerful barrier, and by their own rash hands have audaciously terminated their lives, and precipitated themselves into the eternal world.

In most instances, we are inclined to believe, that this violence is the unhappy, but guiltless effect of insanity. But there are cases, in which it cannot be imputed to this cause. The persons committing it, however irrational in this act, appear, in all other respects, to have their reason in its usual exercise. The business is conducted with too much deliberation and contrivance to be ascribed to mere delirium.

Some ancient philosophers taught, and some modern infidels have adopted the sentiment, that when the pain of existence exceeds its pleasure, every one has a right to withdraw himself from it; and that it

is a weakness in man to complain of his burden, when it is always in his power to throw it off. Among the Greeks and Romans *self murder* was often committed, not merely from philosophy, or impatience of life, but often from false notions of honor, liberty and magnanimity. Among the Britons and the Americans it frequently proceeds from gloominess and dejection of mind. With such causes the sentiments of infidelity usually concur: hence we find, that since the notions of *fatalism*, *universalism* and *annihilation* have been avowed, and the doctrine of a future retribution discarded, instances of suicide have been multiplied beyond all former examples.

Self murder is an act so full of horror and so contrary to the feelings of nature, that, in our calm hours, we think ourselves in little danger of it. In our contemplations on death, this kind of death seldom comes into mind. We wish to put far from us the evil day; and we have no apprehension, that we shall hasten it with our own guilty hands. But since many have perpetrated this unnatural act, and since we know not what temptations may assail us, it is our wisdom to guard against harm from ourselves, as well as from others.

The divine law has not so explicitly and particularly forbidden this, as it has most other crimes. And the reason is obvious. Before one can bring himself to perpetrate this act, he must have prostrated all consideration of law and penalty. If the law of nature within him will not restrain him, no external law will have much influence.—When God, as a lawgiver, prohibits any crime, he affixes to the commission of it such a penalty, as may reasonably be supposed sufficient to deter men from it. But in the case of self murder, there is no room for penalty in this world, because the criminal *dies* by his crime, and is dead before cognizance can be taken of it.

Cognizance can be taken only in the other world. But whatever may be the cause, which induces a man to this dreadful act, it first extinguishes the belief, or at least suspends the apprehension of future punishment. So that penal laws, human or divine, against this sin, will rarely have an effect on men's minds, after they have once formed the desperate resolution. The effect must usually be in an earlier stage of the evil.

With a view to prevent this crime, some communities have fixed upon it a mark of infamy, by denying to those who have perpetrated it, a decent interment, except in cases of insanity. But the wisdom of this usage may be doubted; for it is rather a mean of increasing and continuing the anguish of surviving friends, than of preventing the evil in others. The consideration, how the lifeless body will be disposed of, can have no great influence on those, who are driven to so unnatural a purpose. In the divine law given to the Jews, no such order was instituted, and among that people no such usage was adopted. Ahitophel, who hanged himself for chagrin, because his counsel to Absalom was rejected, was buried in the sepulchre of his fathers.

In pagan history cases are mentioned, in which a prevailing passion for suicide was restrained by laws threatening an infamous distinction to the bodies of such as destroyed themselves. Admitting the truth of the fact, which probably we may admit, yet I am not sure, that it can be a precedent for *christian* nations.

It is natural to the mind of man to look forward. Heathens, who had but faint and doubtful apprehensions, and many of them no apprehensions, of the eternal world, seldom extended their views farther beyond death, than to the treatment which their bodies and their names would meet with among survivors. And these views probably made deeper

impressions on them, than they can make on such as by the light of revelation can look into an eternal futurity. If they, to whom the grand and awful scenes of the everlasting world are opened, so utterly disregard *these*, as to resolve on suicide, it can hardly be supposed, that so small a circumstance, as the treatment of the body after death, will divert them from the resolution. Among an enlightened people the surest means to prevent suicide is to represent its guilt and madness by bringing to view the rational and religious arguments against it.

To some of these arguments we will now attend.

1. Suicide is a manifest opposition to the will of God.

Though the divine law has given no distinct and particular prohibition of the sin under consideration, yet there is an *implied* prohibition of it in the general laws against murder. The command which says, "Thou shalt not kill," may as well be understood to forbid killing ourselves, as killing another. The reason of the law, "that man is made in the image of God," equally extends to both cases. If I may not shed my neighbor's blood, because he is made in God's image, I may not shed my own; for I am made in that image, as well as he.

That principle of self preservation, that desire of life and dread of death, which the Creator has implanted in us, demonstrate, as clearly as any express law could do, that self destruction is contrary to his will. A law written on stone cannot be more solemn and binding, than this law inscribed on the heart and wrought into our nature. The will of God, that we should use all lawful means to avert death and prolong life, is expressed in our very constitution, and could not have been expressed in more plain and indelible characters on tables of adamant.

2. Any act of sin is more criminal in proportion as it is more contrary to nature. Murder of any

kind is criminal, as on other accounts, so particularly on this, that it is contrary to that natural principle of philanthropy and compassion, which is common to mankind, and which is intended as a guard against mutual injuries. To murder a friend and benefactor is still more criminal, because to him we are under the peculiar obligations of gratitude and relationship. To murder a parent or child, a husband or wife, is yet more atrocious, because these relatives come much nearer to ourselves. Now if the nearness of relation and the strength of natural affection aggravate the guilt of murder, no other species of murder can be so criminal as self murder, because there is none so near to us, and none for whom we so naturally care, as ourselves.

3. The violation of a trust is, in any case, a crime. And the crime is greater in proportion to the magnitude of the trust which is violated. For a parent to destroy his child, or a guardian his ward, or a preceptor his pupil, is a crime highly aggravated by the protection which he owed to, and the confidence which he claimed from the person whom he destroys. But God has, in a most peculiar sense, committed to us the care of ourselves. No other possesses equal ability, or is under equal obligation, to consult our safety, as we to consult our own. The man therefore, who destroys his own life, violates the most sacred trust, that can be committed to mortals.

4. This act is one of the greatest injuries which a man can do to his friends; for he not only deprives them of the comforts of his presence, and the benefits of his assistance in life, but by the awful manner of his death pierces them through and through with the keenest anguish, and opens in their hearts a rankling wound, which time cannot close. He leaves them under inconsolable distress arising from many considerations, and particularly from this,

that his rash and criminal exit gives cause to fear the worst with regard to his condition in the other world.

It also does an injury to society by removing a member, who might have contributed to the general happiness. As God has endued us with a capacity for usefulness, we are bound faithfully to serve the interests of mankind according to this capacity, until we shall be regularly dismissed from our places. The great Lord of nature has assigned us our post, and here we must stand. We have no right to quit our station, before he calls us away, and gives us our discharge. Wilful desertion will certainly incur his highest displeasure.

5. "To God the issues of death belong." In his hands is our breath, and his are all our ways. He has given us life, and to terminate it is his prerogative. Suicide is therefore a bold and impious assumption of that authority, which he has not committed to mortals, but reserves in his own hands.

But if to terminate life is God's prerogative, it will be asked, What right has civil government in any case to inflict capital punishments on offenders? I answer, No right, but that which results from the will of God declared by the voice of revelation, or the voice of nature.

If we are bound to preserve our own life, we have a natural right to defend it against unjust violence, and to take away the life of the assailant when we cannot otherwise preserve our own. Society has the same right of self defence, as the individual. There are certain crimes, which, if permitted, would destroy society. These crimes must be restrained. If capital punishment appears to be a necessary mean of restraining them; then, on the principle of self defence, society has the same right to ordain and execute this kind of punishment, as it has to take arms for repelling an unprovoked inva-

sion, or as the individual has, in a case of extreme necessity, to apply force against the murderous attempt of a truculent ruffian. To neglect the necessary means of self preservation would be a kind of suicide in society, as well as in the individual. But as the individual may not use violence, when by milder means he can secure or deliver himself from danger, so neither may society annex death to the commission of crimes, which may as well be prevented by more moderate punishments. For it is not the atrocity of crimes in a moral estimate, but the necessity of a case in a social view, which is to determine the degree and proportion of punishments.

To proceed with our arguments.

6. Suicide is an act full of ingratitude. Life is a favour, unless we, by our own folly and vice, render it otherwise. God daily loads us with benefits. He bestows upon us the riches of his goodness. Evils, indeed, there are in every man's condition : but good things preponderate. Our afflictions may be severe ; but compared with our blessings, they are short. Our troubles may seem many ; but they are really few, compared with our enjoyments ; yea, much the greater part of our troubles arise from our own perverse tempers, from pride, impatience, avarice and ambition. Let us deduct from the list of our adversities all those, which we create to ourselves, and the rest will be brought within a small compass. Under our real and unavoidable afflictions, religion brings us solid support and refreshing consolation. Under the troubles, which spring from our guilty passions, religion ministers no direct consolation : It first teaches us to subdue our passions, rectify our mistakes and correct our tempers ; then its consolations come spontaneously, and the heart can feel and apply them. Now since life is a favour, or may be such, unless we pervert it, to

shorten it is to spurn the divine mercy and goodness.

7. The present life is our probation for future and eternal happiness ; and it is the only probation that will be allowed us. " There is no work nor device in the grave." A guilty life and impenitent death will be followed with misery eternal and extreme. A great salvation is now offered, and may be obtained ; but if we finally neglect it, there is no escape. Death terminates our only probation, and fixes our future condition. " As falls the tree, so it lies." What rashness and presumption must it then be to contract this already contracted term of life—to shorten this short space of trial, on the improvement of which depends our escape from endless misery, and our enjoyment of everlasting felicity ? What madness and infatuation to cut ourselves off from all remaining opportunity of securing our final salvation, and to run the dreadful hazard of falling into intolerable and interminable woe ? However severe present sufferings may be, they cannot justify an impatience of mind, which urges to so awful a step. No man knows, in what ways, nor how soon, God may send him deliverance from his troubles : no man knows, what strong consolations may be imparted to soften his adversities and cheer his desponding mind : no man knows, what blessings may result from the things, which seem to be against him. And, which is more, no man knows, what a wretched exchange he shall make, when, to throw off his present burdens, he plunges himself into the eternal world.

They, who in the exercise of reason, (if reason, in such a case, can be said to be in exercise,) have taken this tremendous step, have generally been urged to it by worldly disappointments, by the distresses of poverty, by blasted ambition, by the apprehension of disgrace, by the fear of punishment for some infamous crime, or by the horrors of a guilty despairing conscience. The mo-

tives prompting them to it are criminal in their nature, or in their cause; for they have their existence in the vices and corruptions of the mind; in pride, impatience, avarice, or some previous wickedness. Saul, in the haughtiness of his spirit, fell on his own sword, lest he should become the sport and mockery of his insolent and victorious enemies. Ahitophel, by disappointed ambition, was urged to hang himself, when he found, that the counsel of another was preferred to his own, and that his political scheme would be utterly frustrated. To the like fatal act was Judas driven by the horror of guilt and the phrenzy of despair, when he reflected, that he had betrayed innocent blood, and perceived that the cruel and perfidious action could not be recalled. The fear of punishment for the supposed escape of his prisoners hurried the jailer to draw his sword on himself.

But 8. The greatest aggravation of this sin is, that it leaves no opportunity for repentance; and, therefore, while it destroys the body, it ruins the soul. According to the tenor of the gospel, no wilful deliberate sin can be forgiven without a distinct and particular repentance; and repentance must be a work of the present life. They who, urged by pride, ambition, impatience and worldly disappointment, wilfully destroy their lives, die under all the guilt of a depraved and vicious character; and to this they add the dreadful guilt of finishing their probationary space with one of the most horrible crimes in their power. As, therefore, there is no opportunity for repentance, there is no scriptural hope of their obtaining mercy, except in those cases, in which death lingers after the fatal stroke is given, or the deadly dose is received. In such cases it would be rash to conclude that repentance is never exercised, and mercy never obtained. But they, who from the mere impulse of a vicious temper, close

life by an act of *sudden* violence, leave us no positive hope of their pardon in this world or their happiness in the next.—We commit them to a sovereign God.

We ought, however, to entertain more favorable thoughts of those, who are urged to this violence by a distempered body and a distracted mind. To these maladies good men are liable, as well as others; and for miscarriages, which proceed wholly from causes of this kind, we cannot think them answerable. As they are not themselves, so their conduct is not their own, considered as rational beings and moral agents. It is rather the effect of a disease operating mechanically. If people, under the power of a wild delirium, which wholly deranges the thoughts, or under the darkness of a fixed and settled melancholy, which totally absorbs the reason, commit violence on themselves, they are probably no more accountable for their own death, than if it had been the effect of lightning or an apoplexy.

It is difficult to say, what are the delusions of imagination in a delirium. They, who emerge from such a state, can seldom distinctly recollect and relate the thoughts, which then possessed their brains and urged their actions. Some, however, after reason has resumed its dominion, have said, that they fancied themselves to be a species of beings different from the human, or in a situation different from what was real; and that the fatal actions which they attempted, were thought to be necessary means of preservation from some danger which seemed to pursue them.

A charitable opinion, founded in a person's good life, ought not to be altered by the unhappy manner of his death, when this appears to be the probable effect of a disordered mind. But whatever hope we may have for such a person, the case of those, who, through pride, impatience, discontent, or any crimi-

nal passion, violently force their passage into the other world by their own rash hands, and madly rush before the tribunal of God, to disburden themselves of the troubles of life, leaves no room for this charitable hope.

We have said, that insanity exempts men from accountableness for their actions : but then, it must be remembered, that some may be accountable for their insanity. If this be the effect of their own vices, of intemperance, idleness, prodigality, or any criminal passion harboured and indulged, however it may excuse subsequent conduct, it admits no excuse for itself. The vices, which produced it, stand chargeable with this effect and all its horrible consequences.

We have considered the words of the text, as they respect the case of the jailer. In this application, they are a prohibition of violent self murder.

But the words admit a more extensive application. "Do thyself *no* harm." The expression is so general, that it may be applied as a caution against *every* kind and degree of self injury. If it be criminal to harm ourselves at all ; if it be unlawful to terminate life by a sudden act ; for the same reason it is unlawful to destroy our health, and bring on death by slow and moderate means. He who designedly takes a fatal dose of poison is guilty of self murder, whether the poison be intended to operate hastily or gradually. The apostle may therefore be understood as warning us against every thing in our temper and conduct, which tends to shorten our life, or to render it unhappy while it lasts.

This part of our subject we shall distinctly illustrate in another discourse.

SERMON IX.



Causes leading to Suicide.



ACTS xvi. 26.

Do thyself no harm.

THESE words of Paul to the jailer, who had drawn his sword to kill himself, contain an express prohibition of self murder. And they may also be considered as giving a general caution against harming ourselves in any way, or by any means whatever,

We have already applied the words to the particular case, which was the occasion of them. We will now,

II. Improve them in their more general application.

I shall here mention some particular evils by which men often do themselves harm.

1. *Intemperance* is included in this general prohibition.

All things needful for the support, and conducive to the pleasure of life, God has given us richly to enjoy. Every creature of God is good, and nothing

to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving; and used with prudence and sobriety. The animals may be governed by appetite; for as they have no principle superior to this, so this is well adjusted to the exigences of their nature, and will ordinarily direct them rightly in the choice of their food and in the measure of indulgence. This is doubtless true of the beasts of the forest, who are left wholly to nature. But man is endued with reason; and reason, not mere appetite, must guide him in all his sensitive gratifications. When gratification is his great object, and when this is carried beyond what nature requires for its comfort, or can bear without oppression, then imaginary pleasure turns to real pain. Customary excess in animal indulgence debilitates the frame, impairs the understanding, distempers the body, and hastens a dissolution. It creates dangers and casualties, banishes prudence and caution, proves the occasion of violent injuries and sometimes of sudden death. "Who hath wo? who hath sorrow? who hath wounds without cause? They who tarry long at the wine.—Look not on the wine, when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thou shalt be as one that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as one that lieth on the top of a mast."

But if intemperance should not cause death suddenly, yet it tends to that issue gradually. It works in the frame like a slow poison, and its deadly effects, though moderate, are not the less certain. Besides its baneful influence on the body, it consumes the substance, inflames the passions, stupifies the conscience, blasts the reputation and puts an end to usefulness. Yea, it often transforms a man of hopeful abilities and amiable manners into a vexatious companion, a fractious parent, a quarrelsome neighbor, a mischievous member of society. It

destroys every thing, which belongs to him, as a *man* ; as a *rational, moral, social* being. It leaves to him only the *animal* part, and this sunk lower than it is in the *natural* brute. And say, is not this creature, as really a self murderer, as if he had plunged a sword in his bosom, or swallowed a dose of poison ?

The drunkard may, in a sober hour, be shocked at the sight of one, who has done violence to himself. But his own guilt is, in many respects, far more aggravated. The felon perhaps destroyed himself by a single and sudden act, and under the force of a strong temptation. The drunkard destroys himself deliberately, by repeated acts, and in cool blood. The former may perhaps wish, when it is too late, to recal his rash and hasty deed. This some, who have been rescued and restored, have confessed. And such have rarely made a second attempt. The latter persists in his injurious treatment of himself, even after he has begun to experience its ruinous and fatal effects. He finds his substance wasting, his health declining, his constitution tottering, and his infirmities increasing ; but still he goes on adding drunkenness to thirst. " Though the fool is brayed in a mortar, yet his folly departs not from him." What is all this, but deliberate self murder ? He does not, indeed, aim at his own destruction. But he pursues a course, which reason, observation and experience shew him, must tend to his destruction. The ruffian, who, in robbing a man, gives him a fatal wound, cannot exculpate himself from murder by pleading, that his intention was, not to kill the man, but to get his money. No more can the drunkard excuse himself by alledging, that his intention was only to gratify his appetite ; not to injure his life. He, who voluntarily does an unlawful action, is by the law of reason, as well as by the law

of man, responsible for the natural and obvious consequences of that action.

2. *Idleness* is a pernicious and often a fatal vice.

The man who pursues no regular course of business, or neglects the business, which he pretends to pursue, brings ruin on himself, and involves others with him. He is assailed by temptations, which his debilitated mind has no fortitude to resist. He is drawn into vices, against which sober industry would have secured him. A derangement of his affairs ensues, and he resorts to gambling and swindling as expedients to retrieve them—to deceitful promises and ostentatious parade, as means to defer his misfortune and disgrace—to company and drinking, as the diversions of his gloomy thoughts, and the sedatives of his anxious foreboding fears. He seduces the simple and unwary to associate with him, that he may abuse their unsuspecting confidence, and take advantage of their inexperience. If he has some address and much conceit, he will talk aloud about matters of state, will affect vast wisdom and patriotism, and will slander worthy men, that he may be put into some office, by which he can riot at the public expense. But the time comes, when his ambition is blasted, his fraud detected, and his plans disconcerted. Then ruin bursts upon him with irresistible force; and he sinks into inactive despondence, or quits his country by flight, or perhaps the world by suicide; and he departs loaded with the execrations of those whom he has undone. This is no imaginary description. It is often realized.

3. Men do themselves harm by the habitual indulgence of a *melancholy spirit*. This is one cause of self murder.

Gloomy apprehensions of God and religion, and dismal conclusions concerning ones self, render life a burden, and embitter all its comforts. A severer distress cannot be imagined, than that which arises

from this source. Every other distress will admit of some consolation. It may be allayed with the hope of good to come, either in this world or the next. But the anguish of a settled melancholy is inconsolable, because it shuts out hope, that faithful attendant in ordinary afflictions. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" This is the reason why it has so often urged men to put a speedy end to life. Viewing themselves as abandoned to misfortune here, and doomed to misery hereafter, they found nothing to invite their stay, or forbid their exit. Imagining, that they already knew, and had begun to feel the worst that could befall them, they seemed to themselves to run no risk by plunging headlong into another world, or whatever might be the consequence there, at least they were sure of getting rid of what they suffered here. They therefore chose strangling and death, rather than life.

Since these gloomy and desperate apprehensions are so painful in themselves, and so dangerous in their tendency, we ought carefully to guard our souls against them; to rebuke them when they begin to arise, and to banish them before they get full possession.

The primary cause of settled melancholy is usually, no doubt, some nervous affection, which distempers the imagination, and beclouds the mind. People thus affected complain of wicked, and often, of blasphemous suggestions; and of great incoherence and confusion in their thoughts, whenever they attempt closely to fix them on any subject. And if they are of a serious disposition, this confusion will be most observable in religious duties; although if they did but notice it, it is probably as real in many other cases. In this gloomy state of mind, they draw dark conclusions respecting every thing which seems important; and especially with

respect to their final salvation, which they regard as an object of the highest importance. From the evil thoughts which haunt them, and from the versatility and unfixedness of their minds in holy duties, they conclude that there is nothing of the temper of religion in them. They look to former times—they reflect on that refreshing light and spiritual sensibility—that cheerful hope and lively comfort, which they have once known; and hence they make out a new argument against themselves. Comparing their present darkness and perturbation with the clear light and calm joy of better days, they imagine that they have committed the unpardonable sin, or at least some great, though perhaps unknown transgression, which has provoked God to withdraw his spirit from them; and that now their case scarcely admits of hope. Brooding over these melancholy thoughts, they hatch them into the viper despair, the poison of which drinks up their spirits. When they have come to this stage in the progress of religious melancholy, their case is extremely unhappy, because they refuse to be comforted, and reject every consideration, which might give them relief. It is easy for every one, but themselves, to see that bodily disorders lie at the bottom of their complaints—that their dark conclusions are unreasonable and unfounded, that their case bears no resemblance to the case of those who are forsaken of God. It is easy to tell them, that their strong sense of the importance of religion discriminates them from the hardened wretches, who have sinned away their hopes—that as the mercy of God is infinite, no man has cause for despair, but he who has cast off the care of his soul—that their evil thoughts being a grief and burden to them, cannot be supposed to arise from settled impiety and a love of sin—that their unfixedness and confusion in religious duty are no evidence of a wicked temper, as long as the same in-

firmity appears in every other case in which they labour to command their attention. But these arguments take little hold on them, because their state is such, that they will turn every thing against themselves. The blackness of their minds absorbs all the rays of light. In these circumstances they are much exposed to temptations, and poorly able to make their defence; their adversary is busy, and he readily gets an advantage against them. It is easy to give them good advice; but hard for them to apply it. For this reason it is more necessary to guard against the first invasion of melancholy, when it is more in one's power to resist it.

That we may prevent this danger, we must form just and consistent ideas of God's character and of the gospel scheme; we must contemplate his mercy and grace, as well as his justice and holiness, and the promises and invitations of the gospel, as well as its warnings and threatenings; we must attend to those things which are clearly and plainly revealed, and which are the ground of our faith and hope, and not perplex ourselves about the secret mysteries which are not revealed, and which we could not understand, if they were; we must apply ourselves to present duty, and not curiously pry into the unknown events of futurity; we must readily obey the plain commands of God, and trust his faithfulness and power to fulfil his promises; we must daily walk with God, keep up an intercourse with him, and commit ourselves in well-doing to the keeping of his providence and grace.

4. Men do themselves harm, when they indulge *immoderate passions*; such as impatience, avarice, ambition, grief, envy and wrath.

“The sorrow of the world breaketh the spirit, and worketh death.” “Envy is the rottenness of the bones.” “Wrath killeth the foolish man.” These

passions, like scorpions, sting and torment the soul, and spread a malignant poison through the whole frame. They embitter life's dearest enjoyments, aggravate all its pains, and exclude the consolations of religion. In many cases they have proved excitements to self murder. The *pride* of Abithophel, chagrined, that the counsel of another was preferred to his own, drove him to hang himself. The *avarice* of Ahab, disappointed in an attempt to annex Naboth's garden to his own field, deprived him of the joys of life, and confined him to his bed, sick with discontent, and unable to eat bread. His passion, though it did not prompt him to do violence to himself, yet instigated him to destroy honest Naboth, and thus brought on him the wrath of God, which doomed him to a premature death. Haman, in the *haughtiness* of his spirit, deemed all his riches and honors of no value, while he saw Mordecai sitting in the king's gate; and refusing him the homage which he claimed. Jonah, when the predicted catastrophe of Ninevah was suspended, thought it better to die, than to live! And when exposed to the intense beams of the sun, he was deprived of a friendly shade, he was very angry, and said, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." The Jews, impatient of their troubles in the wilderness, wished to God, that they had died in the land of Egypt. Some worried with this peevish, discontented spirit, have not only wished for death, but executed their wish; and because the world did not gratify their restless humour, they would stay in it no longer. This uneasy temper, if it does not destroy life itself, destroys all that is good in life, and banishes every real enjoyment.

Envy, malice and revenge are still more dangerous passions. Under their malignant influence, a petty affront, a trifling injury has hurried men to

such desperate actions, as have caused the death of others, and terminated in their own. When men harbour and indulge such pernicious and baneful passions, they know not what harm they incur, nor what danger may await them.

5. Men, who admit and entertain *irreligious* and *licentious principles*, do themselves infinite harm, and if they avow and diffuse such principles, they do immense injury to others.

Religion is the only solid foundation of comfort in this world, and of happiness in the next. This, embraced in the heart, banishes envy and malice, impatience and discontent, anxiety and fear; inspires with benevolent affections, calm resignation and cheerful hope; and gives a sure title to glory and immortality. The man, who renounces religion, abandons all his rational comforts and future prospects. He makes himself a prey to temptation, vice and fear. He becomes a creature exposed, defenceless and forlorn. If he should see his condition, he would be a terror to himself. If others should see his heart, he would be a terror to all about him. If all men were like him, he would have no security from the violence of his neighbors. He has now no security from the violence of his own hands; nor have others any security from this violence, but the laws of society. There is in him no principle to restrain him from any outrage, which his passions may dictate, whether against himself or mankind.

There are some, who view this life as the only term of human existence. If in words they acknowledge a God, who made and sustains the universe, yet in reality they discard the idea of his moral government, and consequently of a future retribution. These, as they believe no existence, fear no punishment, after death, and consequently are under

no moral restraint from vice while they live. And whenever their troubles make them weary of existence, they claim a right to terminate it. Many, on this principle, have been their own executioners; and some have, with themselves, destroyed their nearest friends. They consider men merely as a superior race of animals; and what evil will they see in killing a man, more than in killing any other animal? This sentiment directly tends to extinguish those social affections and human feelings, which are our natural restraints from mutual injury, and our natural excitements to mutual beneficence. If we have a right to retire from existence, because we experience trouble, we shall claim as good a right to put another out of existence, because he gives us trouble.

There are some, who, though they profess to believe a future existence, yet deny all future punishment, and persuade themselves, that a God of infinite goodness will make all his creatures happy at last, and will inflict punishment on none, whatever may be their character. In this persuasion, they can fear nothing from vice, except some present inconvenience, and this, they imagine, may be overbalanced by some solid advantage; and they can fear nothing from death, but the pain of dying; and this they must submit to sooner or later. If this world is become troublesome to them, and likely to continue so, why should they not quit it for the more speedy possession of a better? And if their dearest friend is in a state of suffering, and there is no good prospect of relief, why should they not, in pure humanity, hasten his transition to a more desirable condition? When other means fail, why should not death be applied as the last, and the only remedy? Such has been, in some instances, the dreadful consequence of this nefarious sentiment.

There are others, who imagine, that every man's destiny is eternally fixed, and every man's conduct immutably determined by an absolute fatality ; and hence they conclude, that it is their true wisdom to cast off all concern about their own actions and the final issue of them, to follow their own inclinations without fear, and to meet with boldness the fate which is allotted for them, and which they cannot divert or avoid. These, if urged to suicide, as a relief from pain and sorrow, embrace it as their destiny, and flatter themselves, that they are not accountable. If they should chance to fall into misery in another world, they say, it is their fate, not their fault. It is not what they have procured to themselves, but what the general system of nature has fixed for them. All these schemes come to the same issue, that no man's happiness depends on his moral conduct, and that it is indifferent with regard to his future condition, how he lives, and how he dies.

The awful tendency of such principles is manifest from their effects. Since they have prevailed, instances of murder and suicide, and of duelling, which involves in it both murder and suicide, have become much more frequent, than they were formerly. They have lamentably increased in our own land ; and in France, after the general prostration of religion, they were astonishingly multiplied. And, so far as my information enables me to judge, all those, who have destroyed themselves, except such as were insane, had professedly adopted sentiments subversive of religion, and had thrown off the restraints of a future retribution. And in some, who were partially insane, licentious principles co-operated with their mental disorders, and might probably first operate to the production of them.

It is not my intention to enter into a discussion of these principles. This would open too extensive a field for the time now allotted me. I shall, how-

ever, refer you to one summary argument, which must be sufficient to give conviction to every intelligent mind.

Only consider what is the natural tendency and the frequent operation of the principles, which have been mentioned. Enquire whether a man possessing and acting upon them, would be safe to himself: and whether his family, his friends, his neighbors would be safe in connection with him, if he was unrestrained by the laws of society. Enquire whether a society, actuated by such principles, could protect its members, or could itself subsist. Enquire whether any rational, free, and efficient government could ever be maintained on these principles. Answer these enquiries, and you will have a full, practical demonstration, that the principles are absolutely false. No sentiments are true, which cannot safely be applied to practice. These, applied to practice, would dissolve families, disband societies, annihilate government, and destroy mankind.

One of the surest ways to prove whether opinions are true, is to bring them to the test of practice, and examine what would be their consequence. We may always act in conformity to truth. If we are all to be annihilated at death, we may act as if we were to be annihilated. If there is no divine moral government, we may act, as if there was none, and may live as if we were not accountable. If we are under the power of an uncontrolable fate, we may give ourselves up to this fate: we need not consult our reason, but may implicitly follow every impulse of passion. And if *we* may act in this manner, so may our neighbors, and so may all mankind. And what would be the consequence? The world would be a Babel: it would be an Aceldama. Let the infidel bring forth his strong reasons, and this appeal to practice will at once confound them all.

6. Men do themselves harm by the commission of *presumptuous sins*.

There are some crimes, which by the laws of God and men are capital. The man who ventures on these, adds to them the crime of self murder. He forfeits life, puts himself out of the protection of society, and becomes a victim to justice, whenever it can arrest him. Burglary and arson, which by law are punishable with death, are in their nature horribly criminal. But their criminality is dreadfully aggravated by the consideration, that the hardened and desperate villain, for a paltry gain, or for the gratification of an infernal passion, gives up the security of his life. Presumptuous sins are often followed with a horror of conscience, which poisons every comfort, and which has sometimes sought relief in suicide. Judas, when he had betrayed his Lord, threw back in painful disgust the reward of his treason; and goaded with sharp reflections of guilt and pungent apprehensions of punishment, he plunged himself headlong into the very misery which he dreaded, and the anticipation of which was more than he could bear.

7. Men are continually doing themselves harm, while they live in a *course of sin*.

Some atrocious crimes are more immediately subversive of peace, comfort and security; but all sin is destructive of the soul. Thus wisdom instructs us: "he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me, love death." "Righteousness tendeth to life: but he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his death." He who endangers his soul for any worldly object, even for the preservation of life itself, purchases the latter at too great a price. "What shall a man be profitted, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? and what shall he give in exchange for his soul?" Every thing should be regarded according to its worth. As the future

is of more value than the present life, that always claims our first attention and regard. If he who destroys his estate by imprudence, his health by a debauch or his life by violence, does himself harm; infinitely greater harm does he incur, who ruins his soul by a course of sin. Even self murder, were it only the destruction of the body, would be comparatively a moderate crime: its criminality chiefly arises from other considerations. The wrong done to the soul is the great thing. But all other sin, persisted in, and not repented of, has ultimately the same effect. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." If then we would live without doing ourselves harm, we must have nothing more to do with sin; we must renounce it immediately, withdraw from its service without delay; for the wages of sin is death. We must abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, for lust, when it is conceived, bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death. We must mortify our earthly members, our worldly affections; for led by these, we shall fall into temptation and a snare, and many dangerous paths, which terminate in destruction, and perdition. We must lay hold on eternal life, which is now proposed; for while we linger and delay, the offer may be withdrawn, and our neglect will be our destruction. In a word, it is only in a course of religion, that we shall proceed with safety, and without danger of doing harm to ourselves, or receiving damage from others. "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that perverteth his ways shall fall. The path of the just is as the shining light; but the way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble."

REFLECTIONS.

1. It is a great mercy to be protected from ourselves.—We are afraid that others will harm us;

but our greatest danger is, that we shall do ourselves harm. Who is he that will harm us, if we be followers of that which is good? But if we pursue that which is evil, who will protect us? Men can but seldom secure us from a mischief, which we are working against ourselves; we may effect it before they know our danger, or may execute it in a manner, which they have not power to prevent. We are safe under the divine protection only; and let us beware, that we forfeit not this. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous; and his ears are open to their cry; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off their remembrance from the earth."

2. We have reason to pray for divine restraints. We have known some, who have done violence to their own lives. Such sad instances teach us, that our security is not in ourselves, but in the care of God's providence.—The way of a man is not in himself; God keepeth him in all his ways. To his keeping we are therefore always to commit ourselves in well doing. The jailer, left to the impetuosity of his own rash resolution, would in a moment have destroyed himself. What prevented the execution? Not his own spontaneous reflection, but a special divine interposition. Paul was in the inner prison—it was midnight—the jailer was without. His design was made known to Paul by divine suggestion. The apostle exclaimed, and bade him forbear. This call prevented him from destroying both body and soul together. How important was this critical moment: his eternal salvation was depending. He was an unbeliever—such he would have died, if he had been left to himself. But in consequence of the apostle's call to him, his life was preserved—he became a believer, and salvation came to his house. For this interposition the jailer doubtless blessed God all his days. Our preservation may often de-

pend on interpositions as critical, though less obvious. Let us watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation.

3. We have great cause to be thankful, if we have been kept back from *presumptuous* sins. Many have ruined their substance, health and reputation, and involved themselves, and their friends with them, in calamity and distress, by bold and daring transgressions. Had we not been under the restraints of God's providence and grace, how do we know, to what lengths in wickedness we might have run, and what mischiefs we might have brought on ourselves? David prays, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults; keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." The advice of the apostle we should all apply, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." For as Solomon observes, "Happy is the man, who feareth always, but he that hardeneth himself shall fall into mischief."

4. What numbers will at last be found guilty of self murder? Some have done direct violence to their lives through pride, impatience and discontent. Some have brought destruction on themselves by capital crimes—some have ruined their health and shortened their life by intemperance and excess—and every sinner will be found to have destroyed his own soul. We condemn the man who is guilty of direct suicide; let all beware, lest they indirectly involve themselves in similar guilt.

Let us endeavor to secure to ourselves the constant protection of God's providence and grace, by devoting ourselves to him, and walking humbly with him. God is with us while we are with him: but if we wickedly depart from him, we may justly

fear, he will abandon us to our own choice, and cast us off forever.

While we apply to ourselves the admonitions suggested by the late awful events in this place, we wish to administer consolation to those, who by these events are peculiarly afflicted. We wish them abundant supplies of that grace, which alone can give adequate support in an affliction like theirs.

Your friends forsook you in the midst of their days and broke away from you in a manner, which must aggravate your distress. We are troubled for you. But what shall we say ! Repair to God, spread your case before him, and in the multitude of your thoughts within you, let his comforts delight your souls.

Anxious thoughts concerning the condition of your departed friends naturally arise in your minds. But let not these thoughts operate to produce murmuring and impatience. Think not that God is unjust in withholding those restraints, which might have prevented so unhappy a termination of life. Suspect not any injustice in the disposal which he has made of your friends, who are gone from you. How far a derangement may have prevailed, it is difficult for men to determine. Secret things belong to God. The Judge of all the earth does right. Call not in question the rectitude of his proceedings. Be solicitous to secure your own acceptance with God. Admitted to his presence in heaven, you will certainly approve of the manner, in which he has disposed of those, whom you loved on earth. Anxiety about the dead is unavailing. A concern for the living is wise ; for now is the day of salvation. Live under a sense of the future world, and under the influence of religious principles, that you may have comfort in your afflictions and peace in your death, and may leave to your surviving friends

the same consolations, which you wish your departing friends may leave to you.

Let the solitary widow be advised to inculcate on her children the fear of God, the belief of a future state, and the obligations of piety and virtue, and thus secure them from the path, which leads down to the chambers of death.

It is ardently wished that the only surviving brother may deeply feel the warnings, which have been solemnly repeated to him. Should he harden himself against them, who knows, but in God's just judgments, he may be left without restraint, to terminate his life in the same awful manner. It is hoped that he will shun every step, which might tend to an issue like that which he has seen. It is hoped, that he will indulge no licentious principles, no indifferent thoughts of religion; no light opinions with respect to a future retribution—that he will harbour in his breast none of those passions, which vex the mind, and alienate the soul from God and virtue—that he will yield to none of the seductions of sensuality: but will restrain every unruly desire, expel every dangerous sentiment, and study to acquire the purest habits of piety, benevolence and sobriety. It is hoped, that by a humble, godly, virtuous and discreet conversation, he will console his afflicted friends, and secure his own comfort in this world, and his eternal happiness in the next.

My young friends; I have, this day, set before you the malignant nature, and awful tendency of irreligious sentiments. I beseech you, pay an early attention to the religion of the gospel, and let the knowledge, belief and love of it be deeply wrought into your souls. "Cease to hear the instructions, which cause to err from the words of knowledge." If you should ever happen to hear a sentiment uttered, which tends to shake your belief of a future judgment, and of the necessity of a holy heart and a

godly life, repel such a sentiment with indignation and horror ; for it is charged with death—with the second death. Say with the Psalmist, “ depart from me, ye evil doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.” Remember and follow his advice ; “ hearken to me, O ye children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he who desireth many days, that he may see good ? Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile ; let him eschew evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it ; for the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry : but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off their remembrance from the earth.”

Ye, who are parents, look on your children. You wish them happy here, and forever. You wish they may survive you, and enjoy the fruits of your labour. Or if they die before you, you wish for comfort in their death.

Train them up, then, in the way in which they should go. Let them have some evidence, that you believe in God, and reverence his name. Maintain the worship of God in your houses, and require of them an orderly attendance. Communicate to them salutary instructions ; instil into their tender minds virtuous principles ; and guard them against those loose and licentious opinions, which might corrupt their morals and destroy their souls. They are coming forward in a dangerous period. The days are evil. There are many vain talkers and deceivers, whose mouths ought to be stopped. If this cannot be done, at least let the ears of your children be stopped against them. If you neglect them, there is great danger, that the errors of the wicked will lead them astray. But if you should set before their eyes corrupt examples, and often drop into their ears irreligious sentiments, you will probably

fix them in wickedness and hasten their destruction. And say, in what respect will your guilt be lighter, than the guilt of those idolators of whom God complains ; “ Thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, thou hast sacrificed to be devoured : thou hast slain my children. And is this a small matter ?”

My friends in general, let me entreat you, under the impression made on your minds by the late awful events, to unite your influence in promoting the great interest of religion. Let not any matters, which relate to this world, whether private or public, so engross your thoughts, agitate your passions, or disturb your harmony, as to divert your attention from the one thing needful—needful for yourselves, your children, and your brethren. Consider, that there is one grand interest, in which you are all concerned, the advancement of religion in your hearts, in your houses, and in society, and the transmission of it to those, who are coming after you. Let every one, in profession and practice, stand forth as an open friend to the gospel, and declare to all men, that he is not ashamed of it. Strengthen one another’s hands in the work of family education and government. Strive together in your prayers for the unity and growth of the church, and for the increase of religion in it. Be fellow helpers to the truth, and fellow workers to the kingdom of God. And may the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.

SERMON X.



*The Completing and Opening of the Great Bridge
at Springfield.*



ISAIAH xlv. 18.

*God himself that formed the earth and made it—he created it
not in vain—he formed it to be inhabited.*

EVERY rational being directs his operations to some end. To labor without an object, and act without an intention, is a degree of folly too great to be imputed to men. We must then conclude, that the Being, who created the world, had a purpose in view adequate to the grandeur of the work. What this purpose is the prophet clearly expresses in our text and a preceding verse. “He made the earth—he created man upon it—he formed it to be inhabited;” to be inhabited by men; by such beings as we are.

Let us survey the earth, and we shall find it perfectly adapted to this design.

Moses, in his history of the creation, informs us, that man was the last of God’s works. The earth was enlightened and warmed with the sun, covered

with fruits and herbs, and stocked with every species of animals, before man was placed upon it. It was not a naked and dreary, but a beautiful and richly furnished world, on which he first opened his eyes. He was not sent to subdue a rugged and intractable wilderness, but to occupy a kind and delightful garden, where, with moderate labor, his wants might be supplied.

When Adam first awoke into existence, contemplated his own wonderful frame, surveyed the ground on which he trod, beheld the groves which waved around him, tasted the fruits which hung before him, and traced the streams which meandered by his side, at once he knew, that there must be an invisible Being, who formed this pleasant place for his habitation.

The same evidence have we, that the earth was made for the children of Adam.

The sun, that vast body of fire in the heavens, is so stationed, as to cheer and fructify the globe, and render it a fit mansion for human beings. By the regular changes of the seasons, those parts of the earth become habitable, which otherwise would be burnt with intolerable heat, or sealed up with eternal frost.

Around this globe is spread a body of air, so pure as to transmit the rays of light, and yet so strong as to sustain the flight of birds. This serves for the breath of life, the vehicle of sound, the suspension of waters, the conveyance of clouds, the promotion of vegetation, and various other uses necessary to the subsistence, or conducive to the comfort of the human kind.

The earth is replenished with innumerable tribes of animals, of which some assist man in his labors, some yield him food, and some furnish him with ornaments and clothing. "To man God has given dominion over the works of his hands: Under man's

power he has put all things ; all sheep and oxen, the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the deep.”

The productions of the earth are various beyond conception. Some spontaneous—some the effects of human culture—some designed for the support of the animal tribes, and some more immediately adapted to the use of man.

On the surface of the earth we meet with springs and streams at convenient distances to satisfy the thirsty beast, as well as to serve the purposes of the rational inhabitant. And beneath the surface there are, every where, continual currents of water, spreading, like the veins in a human body, in various ramifications, from which, with little labour, daily supplies may be drawn.

The great bodies of water, with which the land is intersected, furnish food for man, facilitate the commerce of nations, and refresh and fertilize the earth.

By the heat of the sun, and other co-operating causes, waters from the seas, rivers and fountains are raised into the cooler regions of the atmosphere, there condensed into clouds, wafted around by winds, and sifted down in kind and gentle showers. Thus are our fields watered without our labor or skill.

The earth supplies us with timber, stone, cement, metals, and all necessary materials, from which we may fabricate implements for labor, coverts from cold and storms, bridges for passing the streams, and vessels for navigating the seas.

The natural world is governed by uniform and steady laws. Hence we may judge, within our sphere, what means are necessary to certain ends, and what success may ordinarily attend the works of our hands.

Now to what end was all this order and beauty of nature—this fertility and furniture of the earth, if

there were none to contemplate and enjoy them? Without such an inhabitant as man to behold the works, and receive the bounties of God, this earth would be made in vain; it might as well have been a sandy desert, or an impenetrable rock.

But still the earth, richly furnished as it is, would lose more than half of its beauty and utility, if man the possessor were not endued with a faculty of invention and action. "This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working—for his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him." God has done much for man; but has left something for man to do for himself. The materials are furnished to his hand; he must fit and apply them to actual use.

In the first ages of the world, when its inhabitants were few, its spontaneous productions in a great measure supplied human wants. But as men increased in numbers, they found it necessary to form society, institute government and introduce arts for a more easy, and less precarious subsistence, and for more effectual defence and security. History carries us back to the time when arts first began—when iron and brass were first wrought into utensils by the hand of the artificer—when tents and houses were constructed for human accommodation—when musical instruments were invented to amuse the mind, or to assist devotion. The history which we have of the beginning and progress of arts—the state in which we now see them, and the improvements made in them within the time of our own recollection, all tend to confirm the Mosaic account of the origin of the world.

The improvement in arts, though in general but slow, has nearly kept pace with human exigences. For some time past, their progress has been remarkable. Their present state of advancement would have been thought incredible a century ago. Λ

century hence there may be such additional discoveries and improvements as would seem incredible now.

Not only in Europe, but also in our own country, especially since our late revolution, great progress has been made in astronomical discoveries, by which navigation is assisted ;—in medical science by which diseases are prevented or cured—in agriculture by which our lands have much increased in their produce and value—in instruments and machines to expedite and diminish human labor—in the mechanical construction of mills and other water-works to effect the same and superior ends by a lighter impulse of water—in the formation and erection of bridges to break the power of ices, and withstand the impetuosity of floods—in opening artificial canals by which the falls and rapids of streams are surmounted or avoided ; and in “ cutting out rivers among the rocks, and binding the floods,” so that an inland navigation is accomplished.

Who among us, twenty years ago, expected to see the two banks of Connecticut river united at Springfield by a bridge, which should promise durability ? Yet such a structure we see, this day, completed and opened for passage—a structure which displays the wealth and enterprize of the proprietors, and the skill and fidelity of the artificers, and which will yield great convenience and advantage to the contiguous and neighboring towns and to the public at large.

“ Except the Lord build the edifice, they labor in vain that build it ; and except the Lord keep it, the watchmen wake in vain.” In a work of this kind, there is the same reason to acknowledge the favoring and preserving hand of God, as in all other enterprizes and undertakings ; and more in proportion to its complexity, difficulty and magnitude. The seasons have kindly smiled on the operations ;

and the work was nearly completed without any unhappy accident or evil occurrent.

We lament the casualty, by which a number of the workmen were endangered, some were wounded, and one lost his life,* a life important to his family and valuable to society. And yet, considering the nature of the work, the length of time spent, and the number of people employed in it, we must gratefully ascribe it to the watchful care of providence, that no other casualty has occurred. And when we consider the suddenness and unforeseen cause of that event, by which so great a number were imminently exposed, we see great cause of thankfulness, that it was not more disastrous. They who escaped without injury, or with but temporary wounds, ought often to look back to the time, when there was but a step between them and death.

This work, though the unhappy occasion of one death, may probably be the means of preserving many lives. If we were to calculate on the same number of men, employed for the same number of days, in constructing and erecting our ordinary buildings, we should certainly expect casualties more numerous and disastrous, than what have happened in this great, unusual, and apparently more dangerous undertaking.

The structure, which we this day behold, naturally suggests to us a most convincing evidence of the *existence and government* of a Deity.

Let a stranger come and look on yonder bridge; and he will at once know that some workmen have been there. Let him walk over it, and find that it reaches from shore to shore; and he will know that it was built with design, and will not feel a moment's doubt, what the design is. Let him then descend and examine the workmanship; and he will be sure,

* Captain AMOS SNOW, of Ashford, Connecticut.

that much skill and the nicest art have been employed in it. And now let this same man cast his eyes around on the world, observe its numerous parts, the harmonious adaptation of one part to another, and of all to the use and benefit of man; and he will have equal evidence, that there is a God, who made, sustains and rules this stupendous fabric of nature, which he beholds every day, and which surrounds him wherever he goes.

Such a structure as yonder Bridge convinces us of the importance of *civil society*, and of a *firm and steady government*.

It is only in a state of society and under the influence of government, that grand works of public utility can be effected. There must be the concurrence of many—there must be union and subordination—there must be transferable property—there must be a knowledge of arts—there must be some power of coercion; none of which can take place in a savage state. An agreement purely voluntary among a number of individuals, without any bond of union, but each one's mutable will, would no more have been competent to the completion of this Bridge at Springfield, than it was anciently to the finishing of the tower on the plains of Shinar. It was necessary here, that there should be a corporation vested with a power of compulsion over each of its members, and with a right to receive gradual remuneration, for the expense of the work, from those who should enjoy the benefit of it. And such a corporation must derive its power and right, as well as existence, from superior authority.

The man of reason will pity the weakness, or rather despise the folly of those visionary and whimsical philosophers, who decry the social union, and the controlling power of government, and plead for the savage, as preferable to the civilized state of mankind, pretending that human nature, left to its

own inclinations and energies, "tends to perfectability."

If society were dissolved and government abolished, what would be the consequence? All the useful arts would be laid aside, lost and forgotten; no works of public utility could be accomplished, or would be attempted; no commercial intercourse could be maintained; no property could be secured, and little would be acquired; none of the conveniences and refinements of life could be obtained; none of the cordialities of friendship and relation would be felt; more than nine tenths of the human race must perish to make room for the few who would have the good fortune, or rather the misfortune, to survive.

Compare now the savage and the civilized state, and say; Is it better, when you are on a journey, to climb ragged mountains, and descend frightful precipices, than to travel in a plain and level road? Is it better to pass a dangerous stream by swimming with your arms, or by floating on a log, than to walk securely on a commodious bridge? Is it better to till your ground with your naked hands, or with a sharp stone, than with the labor of the patient ox, and with instruments fabricated by the carpenter and the smith? Is it better to cover your bodies with hairy skins torn from the bones of wild beasts, than with the smooth and soft labors of the loom? Is it better to starve through a dreary winter in a miserable hut, than to enjoy a full table in a warm and convenient mansion? Is it better to live in continual dread of the ruthless and vengeful assassin, than to dwell in safety under the protection of law and government?

When men plead for the preference of the savage to the social state, they either must talk without thought; or must wish to abolish a free government, that it may be succeeded by another more absolute,

in the management of which they expect a pre-eminent share.

The work, which we, this day, see accomplished, suggests some useful thoughts in relation to the *nature* of civil society.

The undertakers of this work have steadily kept their great object in view, have pursued it with unanimity and zeal, have employed artificers skilful in their profession, and workmen faithful to their engagements, and they have spared no necessary cost. Thus they have seen the work completed to their satisfaction, and to universal approbation.

Here is an example for a larger society. Let every member act with a regard to the common interest, and study the things which make for peace. In his single capacity, let him be quiet and do his own business ; but when he acts in his social relation, let the general interest predominate. Let him detest that false and miserable economy, which, under pretext of saving, enhances expense, and ultimately ruins the contemplated object. Let him never consent to withhold from faithful servants their merited compensation. In the selection of men to manage the public concerns, let him always prefer the wise to the ignorant, the experienced to the rude, the virtuous and faithful to the selfish and unprincipled, the men of activity in business to the sauntering sons of idleness and pleasure ; and in such men let him place just confidence, and to their measures yield cheerful support. Thus he may hope to see the works of society conducted as prudently, and terminated as successfully, as the work which we this day admire.

In the work itself we see an *emblem* of a good society. The parts, fitly framed and closely compacted together, afford mutual support, and contribute, each in its place, to the common strength ; and the whole structure rests firm and steady on a solid foun-

dation. In society there must be a power of cohesion, resulting from benevolence and mutual confidence; and there must be a ground work sufficient to support it, and this must be *religion*.

It is obvious, that no society can subsist long in a state of freedom, without justice, peaceableness, sobriety, industry and order among the members; or without fidelity, impartiality and public spirit in the rulers. It is equally obvious, that the basis of these virtues can be nothing less than religion. Take away the belief of a divine moral government, and the apprehension of a future state of retribution; and what principle of social or private virtue will you find?

It is too much the humor of the present day to consider religion as having no connection with civil government. This sentiment, first advanced by infidels, has been too implicitly adopted by some of better hearts. But it is a sentiment contrary to common experience and common sense, and pregnant of fatal evils. As well may you build a castle in the air, without a foundation on the earth, as maintain a *free* government without virtue, or support virtue without the principles of religion. Will you make the experiment? Go, first, and tear away the pillars from yonder Bridge. See if the well turned arches will sustain themselves aloft by their own proportion and symmetry. This you may as well expect, as that our happy state of society, and our free constitution of government will stand secure, when religion is struck away from under them.

If a breach should be made in those pillars, immediate reparation will doubtless be made. Let the same attention be paid to the state of religion and morals. Let every species of vice and every licentious sentiment be discountenanced—be treated with abhorrence—Let virtue and piety be encourag-

ed and cherished—Let the means of religion be honored and supported. Thus only can our social happiness be maintained ; thus only can we hope, it will descend to our posterity.

The progress of arts naturally reminds us of the *importance of revelation.*

The acquisition of these is left to human experience and invention. Hence they are more perfect in the present, than they were in preceding ages. But to instruct us in moral duties and in our relations to the invisible world, God has given us a revelation, and this he has communicated to us by men inspired with his own spirit, and by his son sent down from heaven. Some arts, known in one age, have been lost in succeeding ages. If we attentively read the book of Job, we shall find, that in his day, the arts, among the Arabians, had risen to a degree of perfection, of which some following ages could not boast. But the revelation, which God has given us, he has taken effectual care to preserve, so far that no part of it is lost to the world.

Now say, why has God given a revelation to instruct us in the truths and duties of religion, and none to instruct us in husbandry, astronomy, mathematics and mechanics? May we not hence conclude, that religion is a matter which demands our principal attention?

If a number of men should combine to exterminate the arts, who would not deem them enemies to mankind? who would not rise to oppose so nefarious a design? But these would be harmless men compared with the malignant enemies of revelation. Yet the latter may talk and write ; and hundreds may attend to, and smile at their talk, and may read and circulate their writings ; and few seem concerned for the consequences. Yea, some will scoffingly say, “ if religion is from God, let *him* take care to preserve it ;” as if they thought, none were bound

to practise it, and none but God had any interest in it.

While we contemplate the progress of arts, we are led to believe a *future state* of existence.

If this world was made for man, certainly man was not made merely for this world, but for a more exalted sphere. We have capacities which nothing earthly can fill—desires which nothing temporary can satisfy. This rational mind can contemplate the earth and the heavens—can look back to its earliest existence and forward to distant ages—can invent new arts—can improve on the inventions of others, and on its own experience—can devise and accomplish works, which would have been incredible to preceding ages—can make progress in science far beyond what the present short term of existence will allow. Its wishes, hopes and prospects are boundless and eternal. There is certainly another state, in which it may expand to its full dimensions, rise to its just perfection, and reach the summit of its hopes and prospects. O, my soul, what is wealth or honor, a mass of earth or a gilded title to such a being as thou art, who canst contemplate the glorious Creator, partake of his divine nature and rejoice forever in his favor? The inhabitants of the earth, like travellers on the bridge, appear, pass away, and are gone from our sight. They enter on the stage, make a few turns, speak a few words, step off, and are heard and seen no more! their places are filled by others, as transient as they. How vast is the number of mortals, who, in one age only, make their appearance and disappearance on this globe? can we imagine, that these millions of moral and rational beings, who, from age to age, tread the earth, and then are called away, drop into eternal oblivion? as well may we suppose, that the successive travellers on that Bridge terminate their existence there. This surely is a probationary state. Here we are to pre-

pare for a glorious immortality. For such a design the world is well adapted. Here God makes known his character and will, dispenses a thousand blessings, mingles some necessary afflictions with them, calls us to various services, puts our love and obedience to some trials, gives opportunity for the exercise of humility, gratitude, benevolence, meekness and contentment, and proves us for a time, that in the end he may do us good.

This world has every appearance of a probationary state—that it really is such, revelation fully assures us. Happy is our privilege in the enjoyment of a revelation, which instructs us, what beings we are, for what end we were created, what is our duty here, and what is the state before us.

God manifests himself to us in the frame of our bodies, in the faculties of our minds, in the wonders of his creation, in the wisdom of his providence, in the supply of our wants, and the success of our labors; but more fully in the communications of his word. Into our world he has sent his own Son, who, having assumed our nature, dwelt among mortals, taught them, by his doctrines and example, how they ought to walk and to please God, opened to them the plan of divine mercy, purchased for them a glorious immortality, and prepared a new and living way into mansions of eternal bliss.

Let us gratefully acknowledge and assiduously improve our moral and religious advantages; regard this life, as it is, a short term of trial for endless felicity and fulness of joy; and while we remain pilgrims here on earth, walk as expectants of the heavenly world.

Let us be fellow helpers to the kingdom of God. That is a kingdom of perfect benevolence. To prepare for that state, we must begin the exercise of benevolence in this. God is the great pattern of goodness. Our glory is to be like him. We then

shew ourselves to be like him, to be his children and heirs of an inheritance in his kingdom, when we love our enemies, relieve the miserable, encourage virtue and righteousness, and promote the common happiness within the humble sphere of our activity and influence.

How active and enterprizing are many in the present day, to facilitate an intercourse between different parts of the country by preparing smooth roads in rough places, by stretching bridges over dangerous streams, and by opening canals around rapid falls, and through inland towns? their motives, we trust, are honorable; but whatever be their motives, they are advancing the interest and prosperity of their country. May all these works be a prelude to works more pious and more extensively beneficent. May the time soon come, when an equal zeal shall appear to remove all impediments, which lie in the way of a general spread of the gospel and a general conversion of mankind to the christian faith. May the public spirit, which operates so successfully in the former cause, rise and expand until it ardently embraces the latter. May we soon hear a voice, crying in the wilderness, "prepare ye the way of the Lord, make strait in the desert a high way for our God. Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling blocks out of the way of his people." And may we see thousands and thousands promptly obeying the call. "Then shall every valley be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; the crooked shall be made strait, and the rough ways shall be made smooth. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

SERMON XI.



Illustrations and Reflections on Saul's consulting the Witch of Endor.



In December 1805, a foreigner, who then resided in Springfield, was occasionally on the west side of the Great River; and very late, in a dark evening, went from a house not far from the bridge with an intention to return home: but by some unknown casualty miscarried and was lost. The prevailing opinion was, that in the extreme darkness of the night he missed his way and fell into the water and was drowned. But as there had lately been a most daring robbery and murder, on the public road, a few miles east from Springfield, the minds of people were alive to the suspicion of murder; and a man was sent to Albany to learn from a woman, professing a knowledge of secrets, what was the fate of this foreigner, who had so suddenly disappeared. This mission which was encouraged by a number of people, was the occasion of the following Discourse.



I SAMUEL xxviii. 6, 7.

And when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman, that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.

THE great and fundamental principles of religion, the existence and unity of the godhead, were taught, as soon as man was placed on the earth. Nor does it appear, that in any part of the antediluvian age, corrupt as mankind then were,

these principles were rejected, or polytheism and idolatry admitted.

The first idolatry of which we have an account, was in the days of Abraham. He was commanded by God to depart from his country and from his kindred and from his father's house, and to go into the land of Canaan, where, God promised, that he would bless him, give him an inheritance and make of him a great nation. The reason of this command is assigned by Joshua. He says to the tribes of Israel, "Thus saith the Lord, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood," the Euphrates, "in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor, and they served other gods; and I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him through all the land of Canaan.

Abraham was called from his native land into Canaan, that he might escape the superstitions of his countrymen, might know and worship the one true God, might train up his children in pure and pious sentiments and manners, and might thus lay a foundation in his own family for the continuance and spread of true religion in the world.

Those nations, which, renouncing the one supreme God, served gods many and lords many, generally admitted the delusive arts of divination, magic and sorcery, which were pretensions to immediate intercourse with invisible beings, or to a profound and occult knowledge of nature, by which they boasted to have learned important secrets, undiscoverable by the ordinary wisdom and sagacity of man.

These arts were conducted with subtile artifice and crafty contrivance, with pompous rites and ostentatious ceremonies, with the collusion of two or more confederates, and with a certain legerdemain or slight of hand, to amuse and deceive the igno-

rant and credulous. The responses made by the pretended oracles were uttered in such ambiguous terms, as to admit the application of contrary events.

These delusive arts, we find, were much practised and highly esteemed in Egypt, during the time that the Jews sojourned in that country.

The Jews, though instructed in the character and government of one Supreme God, yet by long residence in Egypt, had fallen into a belief of the reality, and a fondness for the exercise of such arts. There were some so impious as to profess the knowledge of them, and many so credulous as to consult these wicked pretenders. Against this dangerous propensity, God, in the constitution of their religion and government, took early care to guard them. He gave them a written law prescribing the great rules of their duty to himself and to one another. The law was communicated in such a manner as tended to impress them with a belief of the existence, and a reverence for the majesty of one all-perfect Deity. It was introduced with great solemnity. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." And the first precept is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

This law expressly forbids all kinds of divination and sorcery, and all application to those who practice such arts. "There shall not be found among you any one that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination to the Lord; and because of these abominations the Lord driveth out the nations which were before you. They hearkened unto diviners and observers of times; but as for thee the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee to do so."

God also gave them prophets, who, being endued with his own spirit, could occasionally instruct

them in all things necessary to be known, which were not communicated in the written revelation. And these prophets were enabled to give clear and undeniable proofs of their divine commission.

Besides these, there was the oracle of Urim and Thummim, from which the high priest gave divine answers to those, who religiously consulted him on great and national concerns. And these answers were given in a public manner, in open day, and with an audible voice, so that there could be no suspicion of fraud and imposture.

Notwithstanding all these precautions, those arts still existed. And in the reign of Saul, they had become more common, than in former times. And Saul, probably by the advice of Samuel, who had considerable influence upon the king, "had put away those who had familiar spirits and the wizards out of the land."

After the death of Samuel, the Philistines, encouraged probably by the removal of that great and good man, made war upon Israel, and collected a numerous army to invade the country. Saul gathered an army to oppose them. The two armies encamped in sight of each other. Saul, viewing the host of the Philistines, "was greatly afraid, and his heart trembled." In his terror and perplexity, "he enquired of the Lord." In the book of Chronicles it is said "He enquired *not* of the Lord." He made a pretence of enquiring of the Lord; but did not enquire in that humble, penitent and persevering manner, which God required, and which would have entitled him to an answer.

In this embarrassment, Saul said to his servants, "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her and enquire of her," concerning the event of the impending battle. Strange inconsistency! He had put away those who had familiar spirits; and now he would consult a creature of this descrip-

tion himself. Since God would not answer him, he determined that, contrary to the command of God, he would try if he could not get an answer from a witch. But God had departed from him: And what absurdity can be too great for a man, that is forsaken of God?

The servants inform him of a woman to his mind, who lived in Endor, a place not far distant from Gilboa, where he now was. That he might not be discovered by the Philistines, nor suspected by the woman, "he disguised himself, and put on other raiment;" and in this disguise he went in the night with two servants to Endor to consult the enchantress.

Having arrived at her residence, he soon opened his business. "I pray thee," says he, "divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me up him, whom I shall name unto thee." See here another instance of inconsistency in the man. He had no idea, that the woman, by her familiar spirit, could foretel what he wanted to know, the event of the battle, or could instruct him how to insure success; yet he imagined, that by her incantations she could raise the dead, which, if there is a difference, is a greater instance of power.

The woman did not yet suspect her querist to be the king; for he was in disguise; it was night; if she had ever seen him, yet she would not now be apt to think of him; she would not imagine, that a *king* could be so weak and credulous as to consult an ignorant sorceress, or so inconsistent as to apply to a person of her character after his severe orders to exterminate such creatures. She therefore, by way of excuse from undertaking the business, refers him to what Saul had done, and expressed to him a suspicion, that he was a designing man, who came to lay a snare for her life.

When Saul had given her the assurance of an oath,

that no punishment should happen to her, she expressed a readiness to comply with his request. In that day an oath was deemed ample security for the fidelity of him that made it.

Saul had proposed, that she should bring up to him such a person, as he would name to her. She now asks, "whom shall I bring up to thee?" He answered, "bring me up Samuel." The hag certainly had no expectation, that she could bring up Samuel, or any body else. She could not be so vain as to imagine, that she possessed a power to raise the dead, and to raise whom she pleased, and when she pleased. But probably she intended to amuse and satisfy her consulter, by the assistance of a familiar, or accomplice, who, from some secret cell, should give responses, as coming from the mouth of Samuel.

When she began her spells, a figure appeared which resembled Samuel. And she was horribly affrighted. "She cried with a loud voice." The appearance was wholly unexpected to her. She had no idea, that her incantations would produce an effect like this. The sight of Samuel, who had long been a counsellor to Saul, brought the king to her mind. She said, "why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul." The king endeavored to calm her spirits. He said, "be not afraid. What sawest thou?" She had a sight of the object before Saul had. He, perceiving that she was terrified at something, enquired, what she saw. She answered, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth." The word rendered *gods*, though plural in form, is often singular in sense. It is in scripture applied not only to the supreme deity, but to a magistrate, a judge, or a man of eminence, such as Samuel was. Saul understands the woman as speaking of a single person, and asks, "what form is he of?" she says, "an old man cometh up, and he is covered with a mantle." By this time,

Saul had a sight of the apparition. "And when he perceived, that it was Samuel, he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself."

It hence appears, that Saul *saw* the object; for he would not have bowed himself to a mere idea, or imagination in his own mind.

A question will naturally arise here, whether this apparition was really *Samuel*, or a mere phantom, an illusion on the senses? The sacred historian says, it was *Samuel*, and gives no intimation of its being a spectre.

The souls of men, existing in a separate state, may be sent into this world in bodies and habits resembling those, in which they appeared before death. Angels, in ancient times, came to men in human forms and conversed with them in human language. Human spirits may have been sent in the same manner on particular occasions. There is no more difficulty in supposing, that Samuel was raised and exhibited in his former habit, than that Moses and Elijah appeared on the mount of transfiguration. The apparition's discourse to Saul is such as we might expect from the prophet; but in no respect such as the sorceress would have put into the mouth of a spectre, which she had conjured up. The apparition predicts certain events, which were to be fulfilled in a day or two. The events actually came to pass. And they were events, which neither the woman, nor an evil spirit could foreknow; such as the death of Saul and of his three sons, and the defeat of his army. Isaiah thus challenges all false gods; "Let them bring forth and shew us what shall happen. Let them declare the things, which shall be hereafter, that we may know that they are gods." Here is a plain declaration, that none but the true God can foretel those events, which depend on the volitions and actions of men. If we should suppose, that, to amuse Saul, the woman ventured on some

bold conjectures, we must suppose, that like other impostors, she would predict good, and not evil. Had she promised success, she had nothing to fear. If success followed, she might hope Saul would reward her. If he should be defeated and slain in battle, he could not hurt her. But a prediction of disaster and death might be considered as an evidence of disaffection and malice; and, had it failed, it would certainly have exposed her to the king's resentment.

But if Samuel really appeared, was he raised by this witch's incantations?

This cannot be supposed; for, as we have already observed, she had no such power, nor had her charms any such tendency, nor had she any such expectation. But Samuel was sent by the power of God, that Saul, in his own way, and by the very person whom he wished to see, might be reprov'd for his past wickedness, and warn'd of the destruction which awaited him. His impious application to this vile creature to bring him up Samuel, was the crime which principally provok'd against him the awful sentence, which Samuel denounced. The request of Saul God answered in his anger, as he did the request of Israel, when he gave Saul to be their king. "Saul died for his transgression, which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit to enquire of it, and enquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom to David." And the story is recorded to teach men, how criminal, and how dangerous it is to depart from God, and to seek the knowledge of future events, or of any secret things, by consulting diviners, or by any means which reason and scripture do not warrant.

The conversation, which ensued between Samuel

and the king is solemn and interesting, and confirms the observations which we have made.

Samuel said to Saul, "why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" The saint feels no real disquietude in executing any behest, on which God sends him. But Samuel speaks after the manner of mortals, who are disquieted, when their repose is interrupted. Death is compared to sleep, and the resurrection to awaking out of sleep. As to be prematurely awaked from profound sleep is a painful disquietude, so Samuel speaks as if he had been disquieted by an unseasonable revocation into this world.

Saul answered, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war upon me, and God is departed from me." A distressing case indeed. Affliction is in itself distressing; and in it the only relief and consolation is the presence of God, the support of his grace, the light of his countenance, access to his throne and a consciousness of his approbation. If when trouble is near, God is afar off, trouble will press with all its weight, and the soul will sink under it. "God is departed from me, and answereth me not; therefore have I called thee, that thou mayst make known to me, what I shall do." Samuel said, "wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing God is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" What are creatures without God? "If he withdraw not his anger, the proud helpers stoop under him." Neither men nor angels can do more for us, than God allows and enables them to do. To forsake God, and provoke his departure from us, and then in our distress to seek relief from man, or from any other creature, and especially from a witch, is adding madness to impiety. Samuel proceeds; "the Lord hath done to him," i. e. to David, who is mentioned at the end of the verse, "the Lord hath done to him, as he spake by me; for he hath rent

the kingdom from thine hand, and given it to David. Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, therefore he hath done this thing to thee this day. Moreover the Lord will deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines, and to-morrow," i. e. in a short time, "thou and thy sons shall be with me;" shall be in the state of the dead. Such pious and solemn reproofs and warnings, and such minute and particular predictions to be immediately verified, cannot be supposed to come from wicked spirits, or from a vile woman under their influence. They must have proceeded from God, who alone knew what should be on the morrow. And if they proceeded from God, it is more pious, and more rational to suppose, that he communicated them by the mouth of Samuel sent from heaven, than by the voice or agency of an evil spirit issuing from the infernal regions.

The story, which we have been illustrating, will suggest to us some useful instructions.

1. It teaches us the separate existence of the soul after death, and affords a proof of the resurrection of the body.

If Samuel, after his death, was really sent to the king of Israel, clothed in a body similar to that in which he lived on earth, then the soul survives the death of the body, and may again be united to it. This appearance of Samuel, the translation of Enoch and Elijah, and the visit of Elijah and Moses to Christ and his disciples on the mount, were sensible verifications of the doctrine of a future state, which doctrine was taught by Moses and the prophets, and is more clearly brought to light by the gospel. Hence also we may,

2dly. Infer, that the spirits of pious men were formerly, and may be still, on some occasions, employed as ministers of God's providence in this world.

The angels, we are told, are ministering spirits. Many instances of their ministry are related in scripture. And though their ministry has chiefly been employed for the heirs of salvation, yet it has sometimes been vouchsafed to men of an opposite character, when they acted in a public capacity. An angel was sent to withstand Balaam in his way, reprove his perverseness and instruct him in the will of God. And if the spirits of just men are, as our Saviour teaches us, made equal to the angels, it is reasonable to conclude, that they are honored with the same employments. The appearance of Samuel to Saul, and of Moses and Elijah to Christ and his disciples, confirm this conclusion.

5. The story warns us of the guilt and danger, which we incur, when we take indirect measures to learn the secrets of providence, and the events of futurity.

Saul by applying to a sorceress, that he might know the issue of an approaching battle, brought on himself a sentence of death from the mouth of a divine messenger.

If we believe, that there is a being of perfect wisdom, power and goodness, who made and governs the world, and directs and overrules all events, we need be solicitous only to know and do his will; and in well doing we may commit our souls and all our interests to him, as to a faithful creator and kind preserver. Our duty we may know from the revelation, which he has given us. The few events, which it concerns us to foreknow, we may learn from experience, and from the steady course of providence. But events, which depend on the voluntary actions of other men, or on the unknown operations of providence, we have no means, and should have no curiosity to learn; but should humbly leave them to him, who works all things according to the

counsel of his will, and without whose inspection a sparrow falls not to the ground.

There were, in former ages, and there have been in modern times, some who pretended, by a power of divination, or by skill in occult sciences, to foretel men's fortune in life, and the good or ill success of their enterprises, to discover lost or stolen goods wherever deposited, and to point out by description the authors of theft, arson, murder and other mischiefs, however secretly committed.

It may possibly be a question with some, whether it can be lawful or reasonable to consult such persons for information in matters of this kind.

(1.) In the first place, it is certain that men cannot acquire this knowledge by any regular art, or by any natural sagacity. Such secrets are not subject to human calculation. There are no given principles in nature, on which a calculation can be grounded. The greatest philosophers, astronomers and mathematicians have pretended to no such occult science, but have disclaimed it as false. The pretenders to it have generally been people of indifferent education, and often of worse morals.

If then any possess this kind of knowledge, it must be imparted to them by an invisible being. But who is this being? Not the Deity, or a good spirit instructed and sent by him; for then the communications would be infallible; whereas now, we know, they are often fallacious. Besides; we well know, that miracles, prophecy, inspiration and supernatural knowledge have long since ceased, as the apostle has foretold they would do, being no longer necessary, after the written revelation is completed. And while they existed, they were given to be applied, not to trivial purposes, to little personal concerns, to the gratification of vain curiosity, but to the grand interest of religion, and to objects of public and national consequence.

Hence then it follows, that these revealers of secrets, if they in any case possess the knowledge to which they pretend, must derive it from an evil source.

Infernal spirits, who are roaming about in the world, may doubtless have a knowledge of some things, which are not generally known to mortals. And though they have not a foreknowledge of the unrevealed purposes of providence, yet, from their natural subtilty and long experience, it is reasonable to suppose, that, in some cases, they can make more shrewd conjectures concerning future occurrences, than men can ordinarily make. And it is not doubted, but that, in some way or other, they can suggest to the human mind many thoughts, which would not have arisen spontaneously. Now when men addict themselves to divination as a trade and profession, as well as when they pursue any other wicked course, they lay themselves open to the influence of evil spirits, become in a peculiar manner susceptible of suggestions from them, and are, perhaps without any consciousness or suspicion of their own, led captive by them at their will. And though these diabolical suggestions frequently prove fallacious, yet, if in a few instances they should be verified in fact, these few would be sufficient to keep up the credit of the diviner and his pretended art; besure among weak and credulous people; for the failures are seldom mentioned and soon forgotten; but the verifications are often related and long remembered.

That diviners, in ancient times, were assisted by an evil spirit, is manifest from scripture. The sorcerer in Paphos is called, for mischief and subtilty, "a child of the devil." The damsel at Philippi, who brought to her masters much gain by soothsaying, was actuated by "a spirit of divination;" and Paul in the name of the Lord Jesus commanded this spirit "to come out of her." St. John speaks of certain "un-

clean spirits, the spirits of devils, which go forth and work miracles ;” or enable deceivers to do and tell strange things, which among credulous people pass for miracles. Moses says to the Jews, “ if there arise among you a prophet or dreamer, and give thee a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder come to pass, saying, let us go and serve other gods, thou shalt not hearken to him.” It is here supposed, that a false prophet may shew a sign, and the sign may happen to come to pass. He may, by chance, or by the suggestion of the devil, now and then foretel an event, which will follow. The father of lies will tell the truth, as far as he knows it, when truth is necessary to establish the credit of his agent, and increase his influence in deceiving and corrupting men. But such a prophet, though his sign should come to pass, is to be rejected as a vile impostor, because he is enticing men away from the service of God. No sign or wonder can justify men in hearkening to such an enticer.

If the professed revealers of secrets, so far as they have a knowledge of the secrets which they pretend to reveal, must derive it from infernal suggestion, then plainly we ought never to consult them in this character, for this is indirectly to consult the devil ; and it is directly to encourage a profession, which every friend to religion and society ought to detest and reprobate.

2. The use of such pretended arts, and intercourse with those who use them are, as expressly as any other crime, forbidden in scripture. Moses, enumerating, under various names, the pretenders to occult science, tells the Jews, that God did not allow any such persons to be found among them, nor suffer any to *hearken* to such persons, if they were found. This prohibition respects us under the gospel, as well as the Jews. For Moses immediately adds, “ A prophet shall the Lord your God

raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me : To *him* shall ye hearken." "This prophet," the writers of the New Testament tell us, is Christ. And hearkening unto this prophet is opposed to hearkening unto diviners and observers of times.

In the writings of the prophets and apostles all kinds of sorcery, magic and witchcraft are interdicted and condemned, as contrary to true religion ; and consequently all application to the professors of these arts is utterly disallowed. When Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus, "Many, who had used curious arts," being converted to the faith, "came and confessed their evil deeds, and brought their books together and burned them before all men."

3. God only can look into futurity and unfold the secret events of his providence. If we acknowledge any creature, visible or invisible, as having an independent power to open the volume of futurity, and disclose its secret contents, to that creature we ascribe a distinguishing prerogative of Deity.

By giving credit to diviners and conjurers we dishonor and set at nought the revelation of God ; for we introduce other revelations, as teaching things which this has not taught ; and by receiving and obeying them, we pay the same deference and respect to them, as to this. What if the diviner should tell you, to serve other gods—to renounce the bible—to reject some of its doctrines and precepts? Will you hearken to him still? Where will you stop? Stop where you are. Reject all commerce with him in his wicked profession. This is what your bible requires.

It was by magical incantations and artificial tricks that some deceivers in the apostles' times, endeavored to obstruct the progress of the gospel. And if such men can obtain credit and countenance, why will they not do the same at any time? Paul, speaking of evil men and seducers, says, "They resist the

truth, as the magicians withstood Moses." The conjurer in Paphos, full of all guile and subtilty, "sought by his sorcery to turn away believers from the faith." Such was the danger from this sort of men, that the apostle gives a particular caution to the believers in Ephesus, "that they be not carried about by the *sleight* of men, and *cunning craftiness*, wherewith they lie in wait to deceive." Simon, a sorcerer in Samaria, "giving out that he was some great man, and possessed a mighty power from God, *bewitched* the people with his sorceries. Some of the Jewish priests, pretending to skill in magic, made use of their wicked arts to detach believers from the purity of the gospel. Alluding to such impostors, Paul says to the Christians in Galatia, "O foolish Galatians, who hath *bewitched* you, that ye should not obey the truth."

4. Harkening to diviners tends, not only to destroy religion, but to dissolve our mutual confidence and subvert our social security.

Let us suppose that people generally give credit to such persons; and then see what will be the consequence. A casualty happens, or some mischief is done in our neighborhood; a barn is burned, or a man is missing, possibly dead, or property is lost. We know not how; but we suspect, it is done by some designing villain. We dispatch a messenger to the conjurer. What is the moral character of this conjurer, we know not, nor do we much care. It is not the man, but the conjurer with whom we are now concerned. If we cannot trust him in any other capacity, yet we can trust him in his conjuring capacity. The messenger goes and opens his business; an answer is given importing, that the mischief was perpetrated by a certain man of such a description. We think of somebody, to whom the description, with a little help of imagination, will suit tolerably well. Or perhaps the messenger

has an enemy whom he suspects, and prejudice will easily modify the picture so as to represent him. A hint is given—it is thrown into circulation—it gains credit ; and an honest man is ruined. Thus divination, when it is held in general repute, puts it in every man's power to destroy every man, whom he will.

Why do you wish to know the author of a mischief which has been done? You will say, You wish the villain may be punished, the injury repaired, and evil prevented. Very well: Then take the proper steps to detect and arrest the offender. If a conjurer points out such, or such a person, as the criminal, he may indeed gratify your curiosity, and perhaps your malice ; but he does no good to society. His suggestion is not evidence, on which the supposed perpetrator can be convicted. If it was, no mortal would be safe. You perhaps believe the insinuation, and you make others believe it. But when the general suspicion falls on an innocent man, investigation stops ; this innocent man suffers the reproach, and the really guilty lies unsuspected, and escapes unpunished. And when a new mischief happens, the same scene may be acted over again.

On social, therefore, as well as on religious principles, these diviners ought to be prosecuted rather than encouraged—to be punished rather than patronized. Judge Blackstone says, that “pretending to tell fortunes, and to discover stolen goods by skill in the occult sciences, is a misdemeanor, deservedly punished by law.” The reason why it deserves punishment is, because it not only tends to subvert religion, but also to disturb the peace of society, and destroy the reputation and security of every virtuous member.

There is one use more, which we will make of this story.

4. Some of the reasons against consulting diviners will apply to superstitious interpretations of unusual sights and noises, remarkable dreams and extraordinary impressions. By them nothing is revealed, and from them nothing can be learned. They are neither injunctions of duty, nor prognosticks of events. An undue regard to them exposes us to groundless terrors and dangerous delusions, and weakens our faith in God.

The prophet cautions the captive Jews, that they "learn not the way of the heathen, nor be dismayed at the signs of heaven, as the heathen were," who from comets, meteors and the aspects of the planets predicted calamitous events, and thus excited consternation in themselves and others.

The strange sounds and appearances, by which people are sometimes affrighted, doubtless proceed from some natural cause, which might, in most instances, be discovered by calm enquiry. But whether the cause be investigated or not, so much is certain, they point out to us no new duty, and inform us of no particular event. If they suggest to us the thought of death, or bring this thought more closely to our minds, very well. Let us entertain the thought and be excited by it to stand daily prepared for all events, which may await us in this changing world. But let us not yield to a dismay, which would unfit us for the duties, and incapacitate us for the enjoyments of life.

"Dreams come through the multitude of business." They are the casual and incoherent associations of thoughts and images, which had occurred in our waking hours. Or if we suppose, that they may sometimes be suggestions from invisible spirits, still what shall we make of them? we have no rule in reason or scripture by which to interpret them, and therefore they teach nothing, and forebode nothing. But if a *good* thought arises in sleep, whether

by casualty or suggestion, let us make a good use of it, when we are awake. It is never the worse for coming in a dream. If it be of a moral tendency, we may improve it to a moral purpose. But we are never to turn a dream into a precept or prophecy; for thus we substitute it in the place of scripture, and expose ourselves to dangerous seductions and endless delusions. Among the deceivers who had crept into the christian church, St. Jude mentions "*Dreamers*, who defiled the flesh, despised dominion and spake evil of dignities." By pretending to revelations in dreams, and by persuading others to confide in these pretended communications, they subverted the doctrines of the gospel, broke the bands of society, and opened a door to licentiousness.

An impression on the imagination when we are awake, has no more authority, than a suggestion when we are asleep. The impression, however strong, is not to be obeyed implicitly as a certain dictate of heaven, but to be examined seriously, whether it accords to scripture, and tends to virtue. If a sacred truth, or religious obligation be deeply impressed on the mind, let us take the benefit of such an impression by obeying the truth, and fulfilling the obligation. But never let us conclude that an action is right, merely because we feel an unusual inclination to do it, or that an event will befall us or our friends, merely because we feel an unaccountable apprehension of it. This would be to expose ourselves to continual terrors and temptations, to give imagination the dominion over reason, and to substitute our own impressions in the place of divine revelation.

Finally: we have great cause to be thankful, that God has favored us with a revelation, which contains all that we need to learn in relation to our most important interests. With this let us converse, and this let us follow, and we shall be safe and happy.

“ Secret things belong to God ; things which are revealed belong to us that we may do all the words of God’s law.” Let us be content to know what may be known, and to be ignorant of things which cannot be known. Why would we foresee the events, which are before us ? would we diminish our blessings, and augment our calamities by anticipation ? all events God will order well ; and the events which now await us, he will make known to us in the fittest time ; and that is usually the time when they come.

There is one event, concerning which we need no diviner to inform us. This is our own death. The event is certain ; the time of it is uncertain ; it is happy for us, that it is so. Did we know it to be distant, we should probably become more dilatory and negligent in our duty. Did we know it to be on the morrow, we might be as much overwhelmed as was Saul. Terror might render us incapable of repentance. Or if a repentance took place in such a situation, it might seem to be rather a matter of necessity than of choice ; and the sweet comforts of hope would be wanting. Our times are in God’s hands : and in his hands let us calmly leave them. “ What *our* hands find to do, let us do it with our might, for there is no work, wisdom nor device in the grave, to which we are going.”

SERMON XII.

Reflections on a remarkable Solar Eclipse.



AMOS viii. 9.

It shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.

AMOS was bred an husbandman and a shepherd. From his rural employment he was called to the office of a prophet. He says "I was not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet; but I was an herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. And the Lord took me, as I followed the flock, and said unto me, go, prophesy unto my people Israel."

Many expressions in his book are taken from observations, which a shepherd would naturally make in attending to the business of his calling. In Judea the shepherds watched their flocks, not by day only, but also by night, to guard them against beasts of prey, in which that country abounded. In their attendance on their flocks, they would naturally observe the motions of the planets and the appearances in the heavens, that they might foresee changes of

weather and approaching storms. Hence the prophet, calling on the degenerate tribes of Israel to renounce their false gods, and to worship the great author and governor of nature, uses a language suggested by his former pastoral occupation. "Seek not Bethel, enter not into Gilgal, nor pass to Beer-sheba," the idolatrous places, where the sun and moon and hosts of heaven were worshipped; "but seek him, who maketh the Seven Stars and Orion; and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night."

The stated course of nature, the order of the heavenly bodies, the vicissitude of day and night, and the regular succession of seasons, demonstrate the existence and providence, the wisdom, power and goodness of God. "Day unto day uttereth speech; night unto night sheweth forth knowledge." "God hath not left himself without witness, in that he giveth rain and fruitful seasons, and filleth our hearts with food and gladness." But common appearances, as they become more familiar, are less impressive. Unusual phenomena, though no less the effects of natural causes, more powerfully arrest the attention, and more deeply affect the mind. The prophet, therefore, predicting some dire calamities on the house of Israel, alludes to an unusual and solemn appearance in the skies, which probably they had lately seen; a total eclipse of the sun in the midst of a clear day. "Thus saith the Lord, I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day." The phenomenon, which we beheld on Monday last, will naturally lead us to understand these words, as a poetic description of a solar eclipse.

Archbishop Usher, in his annals of the world, says, that, in Amos's time, there were two remarkable eclipses of the sun, which happened at solemn festivals, and struck the people with great conster-

nation. In ancient times, when astronomy was but imperfectly understood, eclipses were by many considered, as prternatural and portentous. The prophet, therefore, foretelling the judgments coming on the land of Israel, might with great propriety figure to them the changes soon to take place in their political hemisphere, by an allusion to the change, which they had seen with terror and amazement, in the natural hemisphere. "God would cause their sun to go down at noon, darken the earth in the clear day, turn their feasts into mourning, and their songs into lamentation, and bring up sackcloth on all loins."

The use, which the prophet makes of a solar eclipse will justify us in some moral and religious reflections on the singular scene, which was exhibited in the past week.

1. We have reason to rejoice in the progress, which has been made in the sciences, and particularly in the noble science of astronomy. By this we are freed from many superstitious terrors, which, in the dark ages of the world, tormented mankind.

Eclipses have been observed from the remotest antiquity; and of those which were most remarkable, accounts have been transmitted to us by some of the earliest historians, who have also related the disastrous events which followed, and which the eclipses were supposed to portend.

The *cause* of eclipses must have been known long before they could be the subjects of mathematical calculation. It was well understood, many ages ago, that an eclipse of the moon was caused by its passing through the shadow of the earth, when the earth was between that and the sun; and that an eclipse of the sun was caused by the moon's passing between us and the sun, and intercepting its light. This knowledge, however, was not common to the

vulgar ; nor did the more learned view these causes as operating by regular and stated laws.

There were predictions of some eclipses, which appeared several centuries before the birth of our Saviour. But these predictions were probably, like the present predictions of comets, conjectures grounded on a course of observations, and not the result of exact calculations.

The relations, distances and motions of the heavenly bodies are now so well ascertained, that accurate calculations can be made of all the eclipses, which shall be in ages to come, and of those which have been, since our system was framed. These calculations are of great utility to mankind, in husbandry, navigation, geography, chronology and history. The credit of some ancient histories derives confirmation from this source. The historian relates some great events, which he supposes, were portended by a certain eclipse, which he describes. The astronomer finds, that there was in fact such an eclipse, at such a time, and hence justly gives more full credit to the historian.

These phenomena have also their *moral* uses. They enlarge our views of the works of God, and of the grandeur and extent of his creation and providence. They display his wisdom, power and goodness, and his continual agency in the government of the world. They teach us his constant care for the creatures which he has made, and call us to reverence and adore him, who thus manifests himself to us in the works of his hands.

We see innumerable worlds rolling around us at vast but various distances ; with different, but inconceivable rapidity. These all perform their motions with regularity, and observe their times with exactness. They obey their destination, they keep their order, they never interfere. Shall we not fear the power, admire the wisdom, adore the goodness

of that being, who made and adjusted, who sustains and directs such a stupendous system, and renders it subservient to our happiness? These rational sentiments are pleasant and delightful in themselves; and are far more conducive to piety and virtue, than the terrors of that superstitious ignorance, which views every comet flaming in the sky, every obscuration of the sun at noonday, every failure of the full orb'd moon at night, every unusual noise bursting from the clouds, every strange appearance in the heavens and in the earth, as awfully portentous of some dire, but unknown calamity.

Superstitious terrors may operate as a temporary restraint upon vice. But when the dreaded calamity is delayed, the restraint ceases, and vice regains its dominion. A rational fear of God, arising from a calm contemplation of his agency and government, displayed in his works, and taught in his word, will have a steady and permanent influence. "Fear ye not me, saith the Lord, will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, who give the former and the latter rain, and reserve to you the appointed weeks of harvest?" The more just are our thoughts of God's government, and the more rational our reverence of his majesty, the more uniform and cheerful will be our obedience to his will.

2. An eclipse of the sun, though it is not an omen of any particular calamity, yet may properly lead us to contemplate the gloomy changes which await us in this guilty and mortal state.

By a total obscuration of this glorious luminary, at noon, in a clear day, a gloom is suddenly spread over the face of nature. Not only the human mind, but the animal and material creation is deeply affected. Night seems to anticipate the time of its return. The stars hang out their lamps; the dews descend on the earth; the grazing beasts forget their hunger;

the fowls hasten to their resting places; the bird o' night chants his evening ditty; every thing wears a sober and mournful aspect.

Here is an emblem of declining age and approaching death.

'The time is coming—to some of us it is near; when the sun and the light will be darkened; the eyes, which look out at the windows, will be bedimmed, surrounding objects will be hidden, and "we shall go to our long home—to the land of darkness and the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness."

"While we have the light, let us walk in the light, lest darkness come upon us. Let us give glory to God, before he cause darkness, and before our feet stumble on the dark mountains; lest, while we look for light, it be turned into the shadow of death." The eyes of our understanding still remain unextinguished, and the sun of righteousness shines upon us with salvation in his beams. Let us attend to the glorious discoveries which are made to us, and apply ourselves to the momentous work before us. Let us work while it is day. The time is short—night is at hand. What we find to do, let us do it with our might. There is no work in the grave.

Some of you are in youth and in full strength. My friends, your morning sun shines bright and pleasant; you think your day will be long. But oh! flatter not yourselves. Your sun may go down at noon, and your prospect be darkened in a clear day. Employ these morning hours in the work of your salvation. You know not what a day, or an hour may bring forth.

The darkness of an eclipse the prophet improves, though not as an omen, yet as an emblem of national judgments. He warns his people that a metaphorical and political darkness may overspread their

country, in the same surprizing manner, as literal darkness in a solar eclipse falls on the unsuspecting earth. "Thus saith the Lord unto me, An end is come upon my people; I will not pass by them any more. Hear this, ye that swallow up the needy, and that say, when will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn, and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat? The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will not forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? Thus saith the Lord, I will darken the earth in the clear day. I will turn their feasts into mourning, and their songs into lamentation."

Sudden darkness caused by eclipses, clouds, vapours and storms, is, in the prophetic writings, a common figure for great and unexpected plagues; such as war, discord, pestilence and famine. The prophet Isaiah, describing the calamitous state of the Jews on the invasion of the Chaldeans, says, "They shall look to the earth, and behold, trouble and darkness, and dimness of anguish; they shall be driven into darkness." In the same figurative language, Joel describes the devastation and famine caused in the land by clouds of devouring locusts, and by the rage of subsequent fires. "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh and is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and gloominess, of clouds and thick darkness. There shall be wonders in the heavens and in the earth; there shall be pillars of smoke, and the sun shall be turned into darkness."

When we see the sun darkened in the heavens, and the earth covered with a gloom, we are reminded, how easy it is for Him, who in a moment extinguishes the sun, to cast a cloud over our earthly prospects; to turn our joys into anguish, our confidence into terror, and our songs into lamentation—

to subvert our national security, to let loose the infernal spirit of discord, to remove restraint from hostile nations, to send a blast on the labors of our hands, and to spread among us pestilence and death.

On God we are dependent not only for the daily visits of the sun, but also for his friendly beams, when he returns. The moon, which chases away the gloom of night, now and then steps in, and intercepts the light of day. If it should make a stand in that position, our day would become night, and the warmth of summer would be changed into the frost of winter. But the moon obeys the divine command, moves forward in its course, and gives us again the cheering beams, which it had, for a few moments, withholden.

The creatures, which are our ordinary comforts, may, by God's direction or permission, become the occasions of affliction and anguish. The sun, which enlivens the rational, animal and vegetable world, may dart malignant fires and scatter pestilential diseases. The rains, which refresh and fructify our fields, may "wash away the things which grow out of the earth, and destroy the hope of man." The friends, in whom we confide may become our tormentors, and "a man's foes may be those of his own household." Government, which is our defence against injustice, fraud and violence, falling into the hands of cruel and unprincipled men, may be made an instrument of oppression and misery. "They who lead us may cause us to err, and destroy the way of our paths."

Where then is our security? It is in the protection of Him, who created and upholds the frame of nature, "who made and guides the Seven Stars and Orion, turns the shadow of death into the morning, or makes the day dark with night—who calleth to the waters and sends them on the earth, and restrains the floods" within the bounds prescribed—who

rules the raging of the sea, and stills the tumults of the people"—“who turns the hearts of men, as the rivers of water are turned”—“who causes the wrath of men to praise him, and the remainder of that wrath he restrains.” How shall we enjoy his protection? He has told us; “If ye will walk in my statutes, keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary, then I will give you rain in due season, your fields shall yield their increase; I will give peace in your land, and ye shall lie down and none shall make you afraid.”—“But if ye will walk contrary unto me, I will walk contrary unto you, and make your plagues wonderful.”

Learned astronomers can calculate with exactness the times when, the places where, and the quantities in which the luminaries of heaven will be eclipsed; but they cannot with the same accuracy predict the judgments of God. Nor do we here need their astronomical skill. There are other signs by which we may discern impending judgments. Our Saviour has taught us a kind of moral astronomy to direct our prescience of such events. The prevalence of infidelity, immorality and vice as surely indicates approaching calamities, as clouds indicate a shower, winds forebode a storm, or the conjunction, or opposition of the sun and moon, in certain places in the heavens, presignifying an eclipse. He said to the people, “when ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway, ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. When ye perceive the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it, that ye cannot discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?” The blindness and stupidity of the ancient Jews to the impending judgments of God, the prophet upbraids by referring them to the sagacity and discernment apparent in the fowls of

heaven. "The stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed time; the turtle, the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people knoweth not the judgments of God."

There are now, as there were in former times, many who ask, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" And the watchman's answer then, is seasonable now, "If ye will enquire, enquire ye" wisely; "return, come," return to God by repentance; then come and enquire, and you may hope for a favorable answer.

It is common for people to look forward and enquire, what will be our national state in future years—what will be the result of certain public measures—what shall be done to obtain this favorite object, and avert that threatening evil, and to make future times better than these? But they enquire not wisely concerning this matter. Let them enquire what iniquities abound, and what share their own iniquities have in the common guilt? Let each one repent of his own wickedness, and apply himself to his own duty. Let each one use his best influence to correct the errors, and reform the manners of those with whom he is connected. Then things will go well. "Righteousness will exalt a nation: sin will be a reproach to any people."

3. The darkening of the earth in a clear day brings to mind the *final judgment*.

The scripture assures us, that "God has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and render to every man according to his works." It teaches us, that the judgment will come on a guilty world by surprize—that "when men shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh." The manner of its coming is compared to the catastrophe of Sodom. "As it was in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day,

that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone out of heaven, and destroyed them all. Even so shall it be in that day when the son of man is revealed." To heighten the solemnity of this scene, the sacred writers tell us, "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken—the heaven shall depart as a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island shall be removed out of their place." What effect the expectation of such a day should have, St. Peter instructs us. "Seeing all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the day of the Lord. Let us be diligent, that we may be found of the Lord in peace without spot and blameless."

You think that great day to be remote. Perhaps it is so. But whether it be near or remote, it will come. And when it shall come, it will be as real and important, as if it were now present. "Count the longsuffering of God's salvation. He is not willing that you should perish, but that you should come to repentance."

Were you sure, that, within ten or twenty years, the frame of nature, as well as the works of man, would be dissolved, the heavens with all their splendours would vanish, and the earth with all her furniture and inhabitants would pass away, how vain would all your property, all your designs and labors appear? What folly would be stampt on avarice, ambition, worldly grandeur and ostentation, political intrigues, party contests and animosities? But, my fellow mortals, where is the mighty difference to you and me, whether the world is to be dissolved within twenty years, or whether within that time we are to leave the world forever. The latter will certainly be the case with many of us in a shorter, and with

all of us in a little longer time than this. Under an impressive sense of this solemn truth, let us banish all worldly passions, and direct our cares to the grand interests of futurity.

4. Total darkness at noon-day reminds us of the solemn scene of the Saviour's crucifixion.

The evangelists tell us, that when Jesus hung on the cross, "there was darkness over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour;" or, according to our calendar, from midday to the third hour; "and the sun was darkened." The darkness continued for three hours. This, we know, could be no natural eclipse; for, in the eclipse of the week past, which appeared to be central, the total obscuration continued but about four minutes.

The darkness of the crucifixion, was very extensive. It was "over all the land." Yea, it was beyond the land of Judea; or "over all the *earth*," as the words are, in one place, rendered. It was observed in countries distant from Judea; and is related by profane historians, as a phenomenon, for which no natural cause could be assigned. In a natural eclipse, the *total* darkness cannot be of very great extent. I have had correct information, that within the space of less than two hundred miles, from north to south, a segment of the sun appeared during the whole time of the late eclipse.

Nay, farther, at the time of the crucifixion there could be no natural eclipse; for the sun and moon were then in opposition. Christ was crucified at the time of the passover. The passover was to begin on the fourteenth day of the month. The Jewish month began at the first appearance of the new moon. On the fourteenth day, the moon, being full, and in opposition to the sun, could not cause an eclipse. The obscuration therefore must have been preternatural and miraculous.

That there really was such an obscuration is indubitable. It is recorded by three of the evangelists, who published their narrative so soon after the crucifixion, that many spectators of the scene, both friends and enemies to Christ, were still living. They would not have asserted such a strange phenomenon, as being universally known, in that and neighboring countries, and as having happened on a certain day, if it had not been a fact; for every man, woman and youth, living at that time, would have been able to contradict it. Had the evangelists been impostors, they would not have published a falsehood of this kind; for nothing could have been more fatal to their cause. There is no room to question the reality of the fact.

This darkness, the earthquake, and the rending of the veil of the temple, which occurred at the same time, had a great effect on the spectators. The commanding officer, who stood by the cross of Jesus, struck with astonishment, said, "Surely this was the son of God." "And all the people, who came together to that sight, beholding what was done, smote their breasts, and returned."

These miraculous appearances in the earth and in the heavens, at the time, when Jesus was suffering on the cross, were such divine attestations in his favour, as reason could not resist; and they were also most awful indications of the wrath of God against the horrid and impious work, which the infidel Jews were then transacting.

But were these the only persons against whom the darkness denounced the anger of heaven? No; It equally manifested, and still it manifests the amazing guilt of all unbelievers under the gospel—of all who are enemies to the blessed Jesus—of all who despise and oppose his religion.

Infidelity and impiety involve in them the same guilt now, as in former times. The gospel comes

to us with equal evidence and authority, as it came to the Jews. They who reject it, crucify afresh its heavenly author, and are bringing on themselves swift destruction—To such is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. As they walk in the darkness of unbelief and wickedness, they will fall into the darkness of misery and despair. “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, he will come in flaming fire, and will take vengeance on them who know not God, and on them who obey not the gospel.”

5. The temporary darkness of an eclipse is followed with cheerful light, which “shines more and more unto the perfect day.” This is a natural emblem of that moral change, in which a soul is brought out of the darkness of sin and guilt into the marvellous light of purity, pardon and peace.

How sad and gloomy is the condition of a guilty mortal, who, convinced of his numerous transgressions, feels himself condemned to eternal death. The divine law, which was delivered from Sinai in smoke and darkness, in clouds and tempest, thunders terror and destruction in his ears. But how happily is his state reversed, when light, beaming from mount Sion, in the discoveries and promises of the gospel, breaks in on his soul, exhibits to him a dying Saviour, a forgiving God, a sanctifying spirit? What joy springs up, when he finds the power of sin subdued—his enmity to God slain—his opposition to the gospel conquered—and every thought captivated to the obedience of Christ? The light is sweet, and its sweetness is increased by its succeeding to previous darkness. So the hopes and comforts of religion in the soul are exalted by their contrast to preceding anxieties and fears.

Ye awakened, desponding souls, look up to the sun of righteousness. He shines from heaven with salvation in his beams. However guilty, unworthy

and impotent ye feel, there is grace sufficient for you ; there is righteousness to justify you, promises to support you, the Spirit to help you. Light arises in darkness. Turn your eyes from the cloud, and direct them to the sun. Christ came a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in him should not walk in darkness. Look to him, and be ye saved.

Finally : The obscuration of the sun in the sky bids us contemplate the uninterrupted brightness of the heavenly state. Could we rise above the moon, the sun which is eclipsed to the inhabitants of the earth, would shine to us in all its splendor. When the christian has the moon under his feet, he will be clothed with the sun, and crowned with stars.

There is no darkness, no night in heaven : all is light ; all is glory there.

In heaven there is the light of purity, and love : The pure in heart shall see God ; he is light ; in him is no darkness. Nothing enters into his presence that defiles.

There is the light of *knowledge*—glorious discoveries of God—of the Saviour—of the works of providence and grace—of the wonders of creation and redemption. Here we see through a glass darkly ; there we shall see face to face. Here we know in part, there we shall know as we are known.

The light of heaven is constant ; it is never eclipsed nor clouded. The holy city needs not the sun to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and Jesus is the light thereof. The nations of them who are saved shall walk in the light of it, and there shall be no night there.

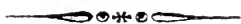
How different will be the state of good men in heaven from that which they experience on earth ? Here they have some light, but it is often interrupted, and always dim. How little do they know of God and his works—how much error is mixed with their faith—how much doubt with their hope—how

much fear with their courage; how much carnality with their devotion? In heaven it will be otherwise. Knowledge there will be full without error, certain without perplexity and clear without confusion. Holiness will be perfect without sin, and refined without dross and corruption. And they will serve God continually without reluctance or weariness.

Let us begin the life, and accustom ourselves to the works of heaven, while we dwell on earth, that we may be prepared for admission into heaven, when we depart hence. Here God sheds down some beams of heavenly light to invite our thoughts and affections upward. The light is mingled with shades, and interrupted with clouds, because this is a state of trial, and our faith and patience must be exercised. Here we must walk by faith; we cannot walk by sight. "It is by faith and patience, that we inherit the promises." "We are saved by hope. But hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? And if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. And the spirit helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for us according to the will of God."

It is but little, that we can at present know of heaven; but "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Let our souls follow hard after him; for what is there, which we can desire in comparison with him? "It doth not yet appear what we shall be. But when our Lord shall come, we trust, that we shall be like him, and see him as he is. And having this hope, let us purify ourselves as he is pure."

SERMON XIII.



*An Aged Minister commending his People to God.
A half century Discourse.*



ACTS xx. 32.

And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up. and to give you an inheritance among all them, which are sanctified.

PAUL, on his passage from Phillippi to Jerusalem came near to Ephesus, where he had before spent some successful seasons in preaching the gospel. As he was in haste to reach Jerusalem before the feast of Pentecost, which would give him an opportunity to preach to a large collection of people, he chose not to visit Ephesus, lest he should be too long detained; but he stopped at Miletus about ten miles short of it, and sent to the Elders of Ephesus to meet him there. They came, and with them a number of the Christian brethren, to whom, on their arrival, Paul delivered an affectionate valedictory discourse, a part of which I have now read.

He gave them a summary of the doctrines which he had preached, while he was among them. He

appealed to them for the fidelity with which he had discharged his ministerial duties. He reminded them of the conflicts and self denials, which he had suffered in their service. He expressed his apprehension of greater, but unknown trials, which, whatever they might be, he was resolved to meet, without declining from the line of his duty. He warned them that this was the last interview, which he should enjoy with them, and that, after his departure, new dangers would arise from the attempts of designing men to break their union. He exhorted the Elders to watch over their respective flocks with the diligence, of which he had set them an example, and thus suggested to the brethren the necessity of preserving their union by a steady attendance on the ministry of their several pastors. He concluded the solemnity with an appropriate prayer, in which "he commended them to God, and to the word of his grace, which was able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all those, who were sanctified."

In these words the Apostle expresses an affectionate concern for the Christians in Ephesus. He commends them to God's merciful care. And he encourages them to expect happy consequences from attending on God's word and confiding in his grace. We observe here,

1. That the Apostle expresses an *affectionate concern* for the people and believers in Ephesus.

For this concern he mentions several reasons.

1. He had spent much *time* in *preaching* the gospel among them.

His office as an Apostle required him to visit various parts of the world. He was not the stated minister of any particular church, but a missionary ordained to carry the gospel among the Gentiles. There was a line of service assigned him by apostolic agreement, beyond which he did not stretch him-

self, to enter into the sphere of other men's labors. But this line was so extensive, that he could not abide long in any one city or village. In Ephesus he spent more time than in most other places. He was here for the space of three years. And he had great success. Divers indeed were hardened; but many believed. The church became so large, that several Elders were employed in ministering to it. Or perhaps, being too large to assemble in one place, it might be divided into several branches, each of which had an attendant pastor. When Paul preached there, not only the citizens of Ephesus, but "almost all Asia came together to hear the word of the Lord."

After his long residence and successful service among this people, they must have been greatly endeared to him. There is no relation more sacred and important, than that between a minister and his people. And the peaceable and useful continuance of it for a number of years will produce an affection more tender and sensible, than what is felt in most other relations. A people in such a case usually feel a cordial regard for their minister: but, I am persuaded, it is in no measure equal to the regard, which he feels for them. They seldom will make for him those sacrifices of temporal interest, which he can take for them. The affection is mutual; but there is the same disparity, as in the affection between a parent and his children. What this disparity is, you, who are parents, well know.

When a minister, looking around on his people, views them as pilgrims on their passage to another world—when he considers, that he has been with them in all seasons, has shared in their afflictions, and has experienced their attention in his own—that many of them have been baptized by his hands, consecrated to God by his prayers, and educated under his ministry—that the present generation are

soon to pass away, and to be succeeded by a new race of transient mortals, whose virtue and happiness will much depend on the instructions which they may receive from their parents, and from a succeeding minister; he has feelings, to which the private christian must be a stranger.

2. Paul's solicitude for the Christians in Ephesus was increased by a recollection of his *labors* and *sacrifices* in their cause.

His *labors* had been abundant. He says, "I have been with you in all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears." He had not affected a superiority to their persons nor felt an indifference to their afflictions; but had stood on the ground of equality with them, and taken a sensible share in all their sorrows. He adds, "I have kept back nothing, that was profitable to you; and have taught you publicly; and also from house to house," when your circumstances called for my attendance. "I have testified repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." He did not amuse them with dry and useless speculations; but preached those great truths, which essentially concerned their salvation. He took them to record, that "he was clear from the blood of all men."

This consciousness of his fidelity, while it filled his soul with comfort for himself, awakened his anxiety for them. Many had not received the love of the truth, nor felt its transforming power. They were yet in their sins. His faithful labors, though they would increase his own reward, would augment *their* guilt, and aggravate *their* future misery, if they should continue still in impenitence and unbelief. His preaching, which to some had been a savour of life unto life, he was afraid, would be to others a savour of death unto death.

His *sacrifices* in their service had been as great as his labors.

He says "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; but these hands of mine have ministered to my necessities."

When Christ sent forth his disciples to preach among the *Jews*, who knew the commandment of God, that "they who served at the altar, should live of the altar," he forbade them to take purse or scrip of their own, because "the laborer was worthy of his hire;" and if any would not receive and support them, they were expressly required from such to turn away, and bestow their labors elsewhere. But when Paul preached among *heathens*, who had never known this divine institution, he thought himself at liberty to make the gospel without charges to them.

We always feel an interest in a cause, in the prosecution of which we have expended and have been spent. If a minister has relinquished inviting prospects for the service of a people, he desires to see fruit, which may abound to their account. If after all his self-denials for their sake, they appear to be little benefited by his ministry, and under it religion seems rather to have declined than prevailed, painfully disappointed, he complains in the language of the prophet, "I have labored in vain, and spent my strength for nought." Paul, having reminded the Corinthians, that he had preached the gospel among them *freely*, and had sought, not *theirs*, but *them*, expressed his fears, lest, when he should come to them again, his God would humble him among them, and he should bewail many who had sinned, and had not repented.

3. Another circumstance which excited the apostle's concern for the Ephesian christians was the *termination* of his labors among them. "I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more."

He was now, by divine direction, going to Jeru-

salem. "He knew not what things would befall him, save that the Holy Ghost witnessed in every city, that bonds and afflictions awaited him. But none of these things moved him, neither counted he his own life dear to himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Though, in the consciousness of his fidelity, he trusted, that death to him would be gain; yet he knew, that for the churches it might be needful that he should abide in the flesh. To have spent more time among these Ephesians would have gratified his benevolence; but God had otherwise ordained: and to God's will he must submit. He was now taking leave of a people, who, for some years, had been dear to him as christians and friends and seals of his apostleship. And between duty and affection there was an unavoidable conflict.

An aged minister may have similar sensations. His age gives him the same apprehensions, which personal dangers gave to Paul; that "they among whom he has gone preaching the gospel, soon will see his face no more." Finding himself one of the oldest of the ministerial brethren, and looking around on his assembled hearers, and seeing only here and there a person as aged as himself, he considers every year as the last of his ministry—every communion as perhaps the last time of his meeting his christian brethren at the Lord's table; every sabbath as possibly the last, in which he shall speak to his beloved flock; yea, every sermon which he writes, as a kind of farewell sermon. And he wishes and prays, that it may meet the same attention, and leave the same impression, as if they all knew, that they should hear his voice no more.

4. What farther awakened Paul's anxiety for the Ephesians, was the peculiar *danger* which attended

them. " I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock ; yea, also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them."

It appears from Paul's writings, that there were, in his time, many corrupt teachers and evil workers, who, under the vain pretext of superior knowledge and sanctity, were assiduous to make divisions in the church of Christ. These he calls " grievous wolves." He knew, from their past, what would be their future conduct—that, when a gap was opened by his final departure, they would enter into the fold to make a prey of the flock. Yea he says, " from among yourselves shall men rise" to co operate with these evil workers. Saint John, speaking of false teachers, says, " they call themselves apostles, and are not, but do lie." The apostles were sent forth to form churches from among the *heathens*. In execution of their commission, they went from place to place, preaching the gospel, planting churches and ordaining pastors over them. These deceitful workers assumed to be apostles too ; and under pretence of apostolic example, they went from church to church to make divisions in them, and gain proselytes from them to their own sect. But John says, their pretensions were false ; they were not apostles, but liars. The churches had pastors of their own ; and no man had a divine commission to make proselytes from the church to a sect, as the apostles had to make converts from heathenism to the church.

Saint Paul, foreseeing what advantage some would take of his departure from Ephesus, and what dangers would arise to the christians there, from the arts of designing men, gave them this faithful and seasonable warning ; and it had a happy effect. John writing some years after to the elder of

this same church, thus commends him, " I know thy works, and how thou canst not bear them who are evil, and hast tried them who say, they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars ; thou hast laboured for my name's sake, and hast not fainted."

Having shewn the particular reasons of Paul's concern for the christians in Ephesus, we will,

II. Consider what is implied in " his commending them to God, and to the word of his grace."

1. This supposes *faith* in God's promise to preserve his church in times of danger, and *prayer* grounded on this promise.

There are, in relation to the *general* church, promises of divine care, which each particular church may apply for her encouragement. And there are also promises made to *particular* churches, that while they keep the word of God's patience, he will keep them from the hour of temptation, which shall come on the world.

Every church is dependent on God's *providence* to preserve her from outward trials ; to secure her from internal disorders ; to continue her in the enjoyment of her religious privileges ; to give her a succession of faithful ministers ; and to frustrate the designs of her open, and secret enemies.

She is dependent on God's *grace* to accompany the means of religion, and to render them successful in the edification of her present members and in the addition of new members.

The faithful minister, realizing his speedy departure from the people of his charge, and feeling a deep concern, that their spiritual prosperity may continue, after his labors among them shall have ceased, commends them to God in fervent prayer, hoping, that through the care of his providence, and the influence of his grace, they will be defended from

evil, preserved in peace, and built up in the faith and order of the gospel.

Our divine Lord, when he was on earth gave himself much to prayer. In his petitions his disciples often had a share. When the time of his departure drew near, his intercessions for them were more frequent and importunate. Paul imitated his master's example. For the churches, to which he ministered, he prayed much while he was present with them, and more when he was absent from them; and still more, when he had no expectation of returning to them. In his letters he told them, how affectionately he remembered them and how constantly he made mention of them at the throne of God. The last act of our Saviour, before his ascension, was committing his disciples to God's gracious keeping. "He lifted up his hands and blessed them, and as he blessed them, he was parted from them." The last act of the apostle, before he departed from the brethren at Miletus, was "kneeling down and praying with them all."

2. When Paul said to these brethren, "I commend you to God," he exhorted them to commend *themselves* to God. There could be no reason, why he should pray for them, but what was also a reason, why they should pray for themselves. When, at the hour of parting, he prayed for them, he prayed not alone, but *with them all*; they all joined with him.

A people who expect, that their minister will soon be taken from them, ought seriously to realize the dangers attendant on a vacancy; and deeply impressed with a sense of these dangers, to commit themselves to the care, guidance and protection of God.

3. Paul here warns them, that they were not to expect God's care for them, and grace toward them,

as a church, unless they retained the instituted ministry of the word, and faithfully attended upon it.

By commending them to God's *word*, he exhorted them to *have* God's word. How would the word be able to keep them, unless they were faithful to keep that? What could the word do for them, if they put it from them, and would neither provide for its being preached to them, nor hear it when it was preached? Thus they would judge themselves unworthy of eternal life.

My hearers; here is the plain advice, yea, the most pointed injunction of an inspired apostle, to every christian society, to maintain the ministry of the word among them; to seek the resettlement of it, whenever it is discontinued; and diligently to attend upon it, while they enjoy it.

This leads us to the

III^d. branch of our subject, which states the *benefits* resulting from the word of God's grace. "This is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them, who are sanctified."

The word is *able*—how it is able, the apostle here intimates; It is the word of *God's grace*; and elsewhere more fully expresses; it is mighty *through God*. It is God, who, by the concurring influence of his grace, makes the faithful preaching of the word quick and powerful to recover sinners from their spiritual death, and to strengthen saints in the duties of a holy life. "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who alone can make us able ministers of the New Testament."

The word, though mighty through God, is not always effectual to the conversion of sinners. "To some it is a savour of life unto life; to some a savour of death unto death." There are those, who, when they have heard the word, put it far from them, and resist the spirit of grace which strives

with them. Hence these cautions and exhortations, "quench not the spirit; despise not prophesying. Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word which is able to save your souls." The word, thus received, is able through the grace of God to build you up. It will build up particular saints by increasing their knowledge, purity, zeal and love. It will build up the church by strengthening the bands of her spiritual union, and by adding new members to her body. Through the grace of God answering the prayers of saints, and accompanying the fidelity of parents, it will form the young to sentiments of piety, instil into them the knowledge and love of the truth, train them up in the practice of virtue, and encourage them to join themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant. The church is cleansed and sanctified by the word, that it may become glorious, and be presented before God without spot or wrinkle. Finally; the word is able to *give you an inheritance*. What is this inheritance?—It is "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, fading not away." Where is it to be found? "It is reserved in heaven." And what is the condition of it and qualification for it? It is "an inheritance among them who are *sanctified*." "God sanctifies us by the truth; his word is truth." In our faithful attendance on his word we are to seek, and may hope to receive that grace, which is sufficient for us. The gospel is a ministration of the spirit; and we receive the spirit in the hearing of faith.

My brethren; I have opened to you the important instructions contained in my text. If I have not misjudged, they are pertinent to the occasion, on which I have invited your attendance in the house of God.

Yesterday completed the 50th year of my ministerial relation to you; and the last day of October

next will complete the seventy-fifth year of my age. My time of service has been, within five years, equal to that of both my predecessors. Our relation must soon be dissolved. There are in this county but four ministers, and but three *officiating* ministers, older than myself. Two only are left of those who composed the council at my ordination. Of those who were then members of this church, not one male, and but one female remains among us. Two others, who have removed from us, are, I hope, still living. Scarcely twenty of those who were then heads of families are among the living; and of these I find but twelve within the parish. There are but about twenty as old as myself; and not more than thirty-one, or thirty-two who have surpassed seventy years.

Ten years ago, on a particular occasion, I gave you a summary history of the parish from the time of its incorporation. Some of the occurrences of the last ten years I shall now relate.

The number of persons, who within this time have died among us, is one hundred and seventy-nine, of whom twenty-seven were from seventy, twelve from eighty, and four from ninety years old and upward. In the last number were two Deacons, as eminent for their piety, as they were venerable for their age; *Atchinson* and *White*, the former in his ninety-second, and the latter in his ninety-fifth year, at the time of their death.

The persons baptized are one hundred and ninety-four, of whom sixteen were adults.

They who have joined our communion, including such as have transferred their relation from other churches, are eighty. I have a pleasing hope, that several others will soon be added to our number.

In the course of fifty years, the number of deaths has exceeded six hundred and fifty, which is more than the number of souls at the commencement of

that period. The baptisms administered to children, whose parents were members of this church, have been one thousand and fifteen. Adult baptisms thirty-seven. And admissions to the Lord's table there have been three hundred and seventy.

Within the last ten years the increase of the parish has not been more than three or four families. The emigrations from it have been more numerous, than in any preceding period of the same length.

The year one thousand eight hundred was distinguished by sickness and mortality. There died in that year fifty persons; these made nearly a twentieth part of the number of souls in the parish, which was about one thousand and one hundred. We have never known a mortality equal to this.

During the period under review, you have been so happy as to see our long controversy relative to the location of a meeting house, peaceably terminated by the erection of this house in which we are now assembled, and in which we have assembled for a little more than four years.

Your external circumstances are highly favorable. Your funds in money and lands are rich; the produce of them will go far towards the support of the ministry. Your husbandry is flourishing, and your wealth increasing. You enjoy a comfortable degree of internal tranquility. You are not broken into sects. I do not know that there is any great diversity in your religious sentiments. If there is a diversity, it is accompanied with so much candor, charity and discretion, that it never has materially affected your social harmony.

Let brotherly love continue, and be ye perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

The time is at hand, when the resettlement of the gospel ministry will be an object of your deliberations. Let there be no divisions among you. Let

the prudence which, under providence, has hitherto led you in the paths of peace, direct all your future steps.

Remember, it is your indispensable duty to provide for the supply of a ministerial vacancy whenever it shall occur. Taking good advice, look out a man of respectable talents—of adequate education—of pious character—of evangelical principles, and of a candid mind—one who will teach the things which become sound doctrine—who will study the things which make for peace and who will be a pattern of good works.

Liberally support your minister, that he may give himself wholly to your service. Injustice to the gospel will bring leanness into your souls.

Attend on the word preached, and give earnest heed to the things which you hear. Require the attendance of your children; thus your minister will assist you in their education.

Follow peace with all men, and be at peace among yourselves. “Mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine, which ye have received, and avoid them; for they who are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own lust, and with good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” If there be any, who under pretence, that there can be no church without a conformity to their discriminating speculations and ceremonies, exclude you from their communion until you will come over to their sect and will adopt their peculiarities, and who thus endeavor to make divisions among you and draw away disciples after them; these are the very persons, whom the apostle charges you to mark and avoid. To cause divisions is their object. From them the danger is greater, because they act under religious pretensions. By fair speeches they beguile the simple.

Maintain an accommodating spirit. Heavenly wisdom is pure, but peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated. In social transactions there will often be difference of opinion ; there will consequently be need of candor and condescension. No man should act in opposition to his brethren, where the matter in question is less important than the peace of society.

In choosing a minister, regard essential qualifications. If the general choice fall on a man possessed of these, all ought to acquiesce, though some smaller accomplishments may seem to be wanting. This is agreeable to Paul's advice to the Corinthians, when he heard that there were divisions among them ; and one said, I am of Paul ; and another I am of Apollos. In a word ; let the spirit of the gospel reign in all your hearts ; and peace will accompany all your transactions. Humility, meekness, condescension and love are prominent traits in the christian character.

The peace and edification of this society will be much promoted by the wise and exemplary conversation of the *professed* members of the church.

Be ye, therefore, my brethren, like minded one toward another ; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous ; attend on all divine institutions with diligence ; let your speech be always with grace ; manifest a rational and steady zeal for the interest of religion ; exhibit its virtues in all your relations ; thus it will appear that God is among you of a truth, and many will take hold of your skirts, and say, " We also will go with you."

I solemnly call upon all who believe the truth and feel the importance of the gospel, but have not openly professed it, to come forward without further delay, and join themselves to Christ's church, take a seat at his table, and honor him before all men. Live no longer in the neglect of a duty, which

he has expressly enjoined on you. Remember also that every one who nameth the name of Christ, is required to depart from iniquity. All are bound to confess Christ's name, and to eat and drink in his presence ; but know, that this will avail you nothing, unless you obey him as your Lord, and do the things which he says.

Ye youths ; hereafter I shall not talk much with you. Recollect what I have heretofore spoken, and receive what I speak now. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, that you attend to the concerns of your immortal souls ; that you acquaint yourselves with God, and be reconciled to him ; that you forsake the foolish and live, and go in the way of understanding ; that you devote yourselves to God in the profession and practice of religion ; and that you encourage one another in the ways of wisdom and piety. Entice not others to evil, nor consent when others would entice you ; but consider one another to provoke unto love and good works. Let this be your mutual advice ; " Come and let us go up to the house of the Lord, for he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." The continuance of the church will greatly depend on you. Your fathers are soon to depart ; their seats at Christ's table are emptying from year to year, and will all soon be empty. Christ expects that you will come and fill them. Your parents have communicated his religion to you ; take it, carry it with you through life, and hand it over to the next generation. Sacred is the deposit in your hands ; solemn is your charge. If this deposit should be lost with you, what account will you be able to render ? The servant who hid his talent could say, " Here thou hast that is thine." What will you say, if the talent itself be lost ? The servant, who had been guilty of *neglect*, was con-

signed to utter darkness. If you shall be found guilty of *waste*, how great will be your darkness?

My aged brethren and friends; for many years we have dwelt together in unity; and we have found how good and how pleasant it is. We are soon to part, and to see each others faces no more. Let us remember one another in our prayers; and according to our time and strength be fellowworkers to the kingdom of God. If any of you have neglected to come to Christ's table, I now affectionately intreat you to pay this honor to him and his religion on earth, before you go to abide with him in heaven.

Ye heads of families; bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; maintain God's worship in your houses; walk in a perfect way; allow no evil thing in your dwellings; let nothing be heard from your lips, or seen in your conduct which shall tempt your children to think lightly of religion, or to suspect that you think lightly of it yourselves. Shun the places of vain amusement and dissipated pleasure; and let the hours of recess from the busy cares of life be sacred to mental improvement and domestic instruction and devotion. Anticipate the day, when you and your households must appear before the Lord Jesus at his coming; may you and they appear with mutual congratulation, and with exceeding joy.

That at the close of the 50th year of my ministry, I should meet you in the house of God, and impart a word of advice, was agreeable to my own feelings, and consonant to your wishes.

But to what purpose is advice, if it be forgotten and disregarded? If the things which have been spoken are words of truth and soberness, allow me to believe, they will leave on your minds a deep impression—allow me to hope, that from this day's

solemnity some happy effects will follow—allow me to expect, that there will be an increased attention to religion among the youth—that there will be order and devotion in all your houses—that there will be a general attendance on the worship of God's house—that from among persons of all ages there will be additions to the church. We hear of great attention to religion, and of an increase of the number of professors in the towns around us. Pray for the effusions of divine grace among us. That your prayers may be heard you must apply the means of grace. It is vain to expect, that prayers for the attainment of any object will avail, while the means relative to that object are neglected. God grants his spirit in the hearing of faith.

To see religion prevailing, the church increasing and the gospel going forth with power, and with the Holy Ghost and with much assurance, would be a pleasing spectacle. It would enliven our sacred pleasures, and brighten our heavenly prospects.

My friends; if I should speak to you again, yet probably I shall never speak on an occasion so impressive as the present. I therefore, before I leave this place, renew and urge my request, that the things which have been spoken, may be religiously regarded.

Shall I suspend my discourse for a moment, to hear from your lips, what you are speaking in your hearts?—Your inward language, me thinks, is the answer of Israel to the farewell advice of aged Joshua. **THE LORD OUR GOD WE WILL SERVE; HIS VOICE WE WILL OBEY; GOD FORBID, THAT WE SHOULD FORSAKE HIM.** I reply in Joshua's words. *Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen the Lord to serve him.* Methinks I hear you rejoin, **WE ARE WITNESSES.**

My brethren; accept my thanks for all that attention, candor and kindness, which I have expe-

rienced from you in the course of my ministry. I feel a confidence, that your friendly dispositions toward me will not cease in my declining age. Defects and errors proceeding from infirmity, your goodness will excuse. I hope you will see none which proceed from a heart unfeeling to religion, or unfriendly to you. I shall probably leave children and descendants among you. I hope, they may be peaceable and useful members of your society. If any of them should fall into adversity, or if an aged companion should survive, oppressed with infirmity, I trust, your attention and prayers will not cease; but you will shew kindness to the dead and to the living.

Brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace. Be perfect; be of good comfort; be of one mind; live in peace; and the God of peace and love be with you.

SERMON XIV.



The Signs of Perilous Times. A Fast Discourse.



The author of the following Sermon, in his application of the Prophecies, has made a free use of Faber's Dissertations on the Prophecies, which relate to the great period of 1260 years. This is an elaborate and luminous work lately published in England.



II TIMOTHY iii. 1.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

OUR Saviour reproved the Jews for their inattention to the signs of the times, which were as obvious as the signs of the weather. If by observing the winds and clouds they could prognosticate heat and rain; as well might they, by examining the word of prophecy, by observing the moral state of their country, and by comparing these with the course of providence, judge whether national calamities were to be expected.

The Apostle in our text signifies, that there are tokens, by which the approach of perilous times may still be *known*. He speaks of this as a matter, not of mere conjecture, but of indubitable certainty. "This *know* ye, that perilous times shall come."

Our text therefore calls upon us to look into the scriptures, to cast our eyes around on the world, and to see, whether there be not manifest indications of dangerous times to ourselves and to our country.

In marking these indications we shall be guided, not by imagination or party prejudice, but by the instructions of scripture and the aspects of providence. Thus guided we shall not err.

1. If we are now in that very period, which the apostle calls the *last days*, then we may know, that perilous times are come.

It is well known, that Daniel and John have foretold, that there should arise in the church an idolatrous power, which would continue 1260 prophetic days, or so many literal years. * Such a power, we know, has arisen, which is called the *papal* or *Roman Catholic* power. The *latter days*, in the New Testament, as a very critical and judicious writer observes, signify the *Christian*, in distinction from the *Jewish* dispensation; and especially the above mentioned period of 1260 years. But the *last days* denote those times, which shall be near the close of that period, or a little before the commencement of the 1000 years, in which satan shall be bound. The rise of this idolatrous power was in the year 606 of the Christian era. Then, as appears from history, the bishop of Rome was declared universal head of the church; then the saints were given into his hands; then he began to speak great words against the Most High, to wear out the saints with persecution, and to change times and laws. The end of this period will consequently be in the year 1866, or about 58 years from this time. If the *last days* denote the times near the close of this period, then certainly we are *near*, and perhaps *in* the very times which the apostle intends.

Prophecy describes these as times of remarkable danger and distress. Then "a king shall go forth

with great fury to destroy, and utterly to make away many. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." Then the witnesses of the truth "shall be slain, and their dead bodies, for a short time, shall lie unburied in the streets." Then "the kings of the earth shall be gathered together to the battle of the great day of God Almighty;" and "there shall be great earthquakes," or convulsions of nations, "such as never were, since men were on earth."

If we are now in or near the days, which the scripture calls the *last days*, we are certainly to look for perilous times. This is a token which demands our deep and solemn attention.

2. We are most expressly warned, that in the *last days*, there will be great opposition to the gospel, and an unusual prevalence of irreligion and infidelity.

Under the latter vials of divine wrath, which shall be poured on guilty nations, men, instead of being brought to repentance, "will blasphemate the God of heaven, because of their plagues." John in his first epistle says, "Ye have heard that *antichrist* will come." "By this," he tells us, "we shall know the *last time*." The spirit of antichrist began to appear in John's day. But this spirit will become more prevalent and conspicuous in that time, which, by way of distinction, is called the *last time*. That we may know, who antichrist is, the Apostle describes him. "He is antichrist, who denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same denieth the Father also." John is the only inspired writer, who speaks of antichrist under this name. The name has generally been applied to the *papistical* dominion. But John's description of antichrist, as "denying the Father and the Son," by no means agrees to the papists, for they deny neither the Father nor the Son, but acknowledge both expressly as do the protestants. By this name he evidently means

those who deny all religion, natural and revealed. These will be numerous in the last time.

St. Peter speaks of the same persons under the name of *scoffers*, and points out the same time for their coming. "I write unto you, that ye may be mindful of the words spoken by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour, knowing this first, that there shall come in the *last days* scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." The persons here foretold are such as mock at the doctrine of a future judgment and eternal retribution, and consequently despise all religion: These will come in the *last days*. The apostle here refers Christians to the words of the *prophets*. He may have particular reference to the words of the prophet *Daniel*, who in the 11th chap. of his book, gives us this remarkable prediction: "At the time of the end, a king," i. e. a state or power, (for the word *king* in prophecy signifies, not a single person, but a *kingdom*, or *nation*,) "a king shall do according to his will, and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods; neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women," or that which women desire, (a prophetic name for the Messiah, because to be the mother of the Messiah was the desire of the Jewish women) "nor shall he regard any god, for he shall magnify himself above all; but he shall honour the god of forces," or tutelar gods; "and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honor with gold and silver and precious stones; and a strange god shall he acknowledge with glory."

Here is a plain prediction of an infidel power, which, in a public manner, would renounce the Sav-

our, and the moral government of the Deity, and would introduce, as an object of worship, an imaginary god, such as the image of liberty, like the ancient Romans, and adorn it with gold and silver and precious stones.

The fulfilment of this prediction was to take place in "the time of the end," or toward the end of the 1260 years. And a late writer remarks, that it was literally and exactly accomplished, when in the time of the French Republic, the national convention decreed that there was no God; no future state; no existence after death; when they abolished the worship of God in the churches; and, like the ancient Roman's, erected and adorned an allegorical god, the statue of liberty, as an object of mock-worship, and bestowed upon it the most costly ornaments.

A subsequent change in the government of that nation has in some respects meliorated their condition. It has tolerated the protestant, as well as restored the papal worship. The revival of the papacy, and its re-union with the civil power, the author now before me considers as an event intimated in prophecy.

The prophet proceeds to detail the progress of this wonderful power. "He shall overflow and pass over; he shall stretch forth his hand upon the countries, and many shall be overthrown; and he shall command the treasures of gold and silver; many people shall be at his steps; some nations shall push at him," but with little success: "He shall enter into the glorious land, and plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain." But like other great powers, which have prospered for a season, "he shall come to his end and none shall help him."

Whenever atheism assumes a predominant influence among the nations, especially among those,

which are nominally *christian*, there must be perilous times. They who have power, will do according to their will. They will not regard any God. No moral principles will govern them; no fear of a future judgment will restrain them; no promises, treaties or oaths will bind them; the only rule of conduct will be, what it is their interest to do, and what they have power to do. In such a state there is no safety to nations, and no security to individuals. "If the foundations be removed, what shall the righteous do? The Lord is in his holy temple, his throne is in the heavens. On the wicked he will rain snares. He trieth also the righteous: but still his countenance beholds the upright."

3. The Apostle warns us, that in consequence of the licentious sentiments of the last days, every kind of wickedness will abound. And prevailing iniquity always makes perilous times.

"In the last days perilous times will come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God."

In what particular place this horrible state of morals will most remarkably appear, the Apostle does not say; but he signifies generally that it will be somewhere in the *christian* part of the world. For the same persons who are described under such vicious characters, are said to have a *form of godliness*, or to *pretend* a regard for religion; but they deny the power of it, and endeavor by artifice or force to subvert and destroy it. "As the magicians of Egypt withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth, men of corrupt minds, reprobates concerning the faith."

This dreadful corruption has already appeared in some parts of Europe ; it may still increase and spread there ; nor can we promise ourselves security. Intercourse with the belligerent powers, the influx of foreigners, the increase of wealth, and our internal controversies all have a threatening aspect, and have already had a demoralising effect. And if war is before us as there is too much reason to fear, it probably will have the same baneful influence on our morals, as wars have usually had in this and other countries.

The prevalence of vice among a people always makes the times dangerous. It first *weakens* the energy of government : but ultimately renders it *severe* and *absolute* ; for under a free and popular government a corrupt people cannot long subsist. The support of this kind of government depends on the virtue of the people, and their virtue depends on the influence of religious principles. When this is lost, despotism must succeed. In the land of Judea, when children were princes, and babes bare rule, the people were oppressed one of another. And soon their condition became so desperate, that men of wisdom and ability declined to take a part in their government. If a man took hold of his brother, saying, " Thou hast bread and clothing ; be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thine hand ; he would swear, saying, " I have neither bread nor clothing ; I will not be a healer, for Jerusalem is ruined and Judah is fallen."

A state of moral corruption in society destroys all confidence between rulers and people, and between citizen and citizen. When the Jews renounced the knowledge of God, they proceeded from evil to evil, till the prophet, viewing their moral state, gave them this melancholy, but necessary caution, " Take ye heed every man of his neighbor, trust ye not in any brother ; for every brother will utterly supplant, and

every neighbor will walk in slanders. They will deceive every one his neighbor, and will not speak the truth. They have taught their tongues to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity. One speaketh peaceably with his neighbor, but in his heart he layeth his wait." Therefore, says the prophet, "O, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of way faring men, that I might leave my people and go from them, for they are an assembly of treacherous men."

Mutual confidence is the strength and happiness of a community. When this ceases, society becomes a terror to itself and to all its members. The prevalence of infidelity and wickedness destroys this confidence, awakens jealousy, puts every man in fear, and renders all an easy and defenceless prey to a common enemy. This leads me to say,

4. Divisions among a people denote perilous times, and portend times more and more perilous. Our Saviour has warned us, that "a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, but cometh to an end."

National strength depends on national union, and this depends either on internal virtue, or on external coercion. A body, between the parts of which there is no cohesion, can be held together only by the power of strong bands. A people divided into parties soon lose sight of that, which ought to be their object, the common happiness, and substitute in its place the dominance of their respective parties. Republican governments have generally fallen into ruin, either by intestine conflicts, which have terminated in despotism, or by foreign conquest, which has subjugated the whole. It is an erroneous idea, that parties in a republic are necessary to preserve freedom; their tendency is to destroy it. In an absolute government parties are less dangerous because there is an external force, which holds the society together, until the parts are separated by some vio-

lent shock. The existence of a free government depends on public sentiment. When this is divided the common strength is impaired, and may soon be lost. In the former kind of government, a foreign war strengthens the union; in the latter, it often confirms the division. The common enemy flatters with high promises the one part, or the other, and by the aid of one subjugates both. When a people are divided in their attachment to foreign powers, those powers will interpose, each to support its favorite party, and thus turn a foreign into a domestic war. Nothing more essentially concerns a free people, than to cultivate internal peace and union.

“Only from pride cometh contention.” It is seldom a zeal for the public good, but usually a lust of domination, that generates party spirit. When this becomes predominant, benevolence, candor, condescension and righteousness, which are the strength of a community, gradually expire; and the times, of course, become perilous.

5. Corrupt times are perilous, because they forebode the judgments of heaven.

God complains of his ancient people; “They proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me. They weary themselves to commit iniquity. Shall I not visit for these things? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? Because they have forsaken my law, and walked after the abominations of their own hearts, I will feed them with wormwood, and give them the water of gall to drink. I will send a sword upon them, till I have consumed them.”

God sometimes leaves a people to experience the natural consequences of their corruptions, that their iniquities may correct them, and their backslidings may reprove them, and that they may see and know what an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord, and renounce his fear. Besides this, he frequently

visits them with external calamities, famine, pestilence and war, and withdraws those providential smiles and protections, which he afforded them in their more virtuous days.

Thus he dealt with the Jewish nation. And however some may impiously alledge, that in the history of God's dealings toward that nation we have no concern, inspiration instructs us, "it was written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world are come." The same rule in the divine government, which was declared by Moses and the prophets, was continued after the Christian dispensation began; and our Apostle assures us, it will be continued still. The destruction of the Jews by the Romans was a punishment from God for their infidelity in rejecting the gospel. And other nations, who reject the gospel, after it has been communicated to them, may apprehend a similar punishment. Paul says to the Roman Christians, "The Jews were broken off by unbelief; and ye stand by faith. Be not high minded, but fear." However God may deal with nations, which have never known the gospel, those who have known it and put it from them, will feel the dreadful effects of their ingratitude and impiety. To them may be applied God's awful threatening to Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Prophecy announces terrible wars, and tremendous convulsions, as distinguishing the period, which is called the *last days*. If we are now in that period, such judgments are surely to be expected. Whether they will fall on this, or that part of the world, will depend on the state of religion and morals in those parts. The reason assigned by the apostle, why perilous times shall come, is because "men shall be covetous, proud, blasphemers, unthankful, unholy, and haters of those who are good."

Consequently, where the opposite characters are predominant, happy times will be enjoyed. That perilous times will exist somewhere, we know. Our exemption from a share in them will depend on a prevailing spirit of piety and religion. But I fear; that from this source we cannot draw much consolation.

6. If we cast our eyes on Europe, we see perilous times there.

The war, which has raged for many years, and which still continues to rage, has produced wonderful changes, and farther changes are still to be expected. We have a commercial intercourse with the great contending powers. Both wish to attach us to their respective interests. Whether we shall much longer maintain our neutrality, is, at best, a doubtful question. War, whether we consider it in a secular, political, or moral view, will be a dire calamity. It will make great waste of life and property, may terminate in a change of our present form of government, and will undoubtedly corrupt our morals to an awful degree. As appearances threaten this dreadful event, the present may be called perilous times; and they are more perilous, as there appears great disunion among our rulers, as well as among the people. If "our wisest men cannot decide what measures to pursue," we ought as a people to look to him whose wisdom is perfect.

7. Another circumstance which portends perilous times is our past abuse of the goodness of providence.

"When Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked; he forsook the God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. They provoked him to anger with their abominations. When the Lord saw it he abhorred them. He said I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end shall be; for they are a froward generation, children in whom is no faith." National prosperity is seldom of long

continuance, because it seldom fails to be soon abused. Its usual consequences are luxury, pride, selfishness and irreligion. Thus the prosperity of fools destroys them. For a number of years we have enjoyed an unparalleled degree and uninterrupted course of national prosperity. In this time our virtue and morals have declined; and our prosperity now threatens to forsake us. When was the general state of religion so deplorable, or when the danger of our nation so alarming, as at the present time? In national dangers, it becomes us to implore divine protection. But with what confidence can we look up to heaven, while our iniquities are increasing over our heads? How can we expect any special interpositions for our deliverance, while we profane God's name, abuse his sabbaths, despise his institutions, transgress his laws, and, instead of being zealous to repent, exhaust our zeal in party designs and mutual criminations and slanders? If to effect a moral reformation there were as fervent and persevering assiduity, as there appears in our political contests, we might reasonably hope for peace and security. But what peace can we expect while iniquities abound? A calm, honest zeal to maintain our free republican constitution is certainly commendable. But when our zeal overleaps the bounds of strict virtue and morality, it defeats its pretended object. The elective power of the people, which is the basis of our national fabric, ought always to be exercised with purity and freedom. If the building becomes rotten at the foundation, it must soon fall into irreparable ruin.

I have exhibited to you, my hearers, the signs which indicate perilous times. I believe, there is not a person present, but who will say, These signs are visible to the eye, and portentous of serious dangers. And shall I doubt, whether any of you will hesitate to accept the warning? If we will not attend

to our dangers and apply the means in our power to avert them, but rather resent the fidelity of those, who premonish and advise us, we add one more to the signs of perilous times; and this the most threatening of all. It was the guilt and destruction of Israel, that they regarded those as their enemies, who warned them of their dangers, and pointed out to them the only sure means of deliverance.

If it be asked, what are the means of deliverance? The scripture answers the question. "Hear and give ear, be not proud; give glory to God before he cause darkness, lest, while ye look for light, it be turned into the shadow of death."

When God threatens, he hearkens whether any man speak aright; whether any man repent of his wickedness, saying, what have I done?

Opposite parties eriminate each other. But let this be the enquiry with both, "are there not among us, even among us, sins against the Lord our God? Does any man look at home, and ask himself, what he has done? Does any man search out the plague of his own heart, and the iniquities of his own life, and begin the work of reformation with himself? Whatever zeal we profess for the liberty and prosperity of our country, if we still regard iniquity in our hearts, and practise it in our lives, our profession is vain; it is mere hypocrisy. Wickedness generally prevailing is the ruin of a people; and every wicked man contributes to this event.

Let every man study to promote piety and virtue within the circle of his influence. Let heads of families maintain religion in their houses, dedicate their children to God, restrain them from every immoral practice, educate them in sentiments of piety and in the habits of virtue, and enforce their good instructions by a correspondent example.

Religion exemplified in particular families will spread its influence far around. Here the seeds of

virtue must be sown and cultivated. Here the principles of benevolence, truth, justice, order and obedience must begin. Hence they must be diffused into the community at large. The character of families gives a prominent complexion to the larger community, which embraces them. In our social intercourse let us act with integrity, justice and charity, and with a firm and steady regard to peace, union and the general happiness. In the exercise of our civil rights let us remember, that we are accountable to God, our country and our conscience, for the part which we take, and the manner in which, and the principles on which we act. Thus let us preserve the purity, and strengthen the hands of government, recommend obedience to righteous laws, advance the respectability of the nation, and the welfare of our fellow citizens. When both rulers and people submit to the laws of God, human government is easily administered, and cheerfully obeyed.

As God has given us a revelation, let us revere and honour it, converse with it, and walk agreeably to it. As he has instituted a day for social worship, let us piously observe it, and faithfully attend on its appointed solemnities. If these should be generally neglected, piety and virtue would forsake the land, and ignorance, vice and every evil work would soon succeed. Hence God enjoins it as a condition of his favor, that "we observe his sabbaths, and reverence his sanctuary."

God is the ruler of nations, and on him we are dependent in our national, as well as individual capacity; and to him we must direct our prayers for public, as well as personal blessings. As righteousness exalts a nation, let us unite in the prayer of the prophet, "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, and in wrath remember mercy." The revival of religion is a work of God; but a work

in which he requires us to co-operate with him. While we look to him to accomplish it, we, as workers together with him, must attend to those duties and means, which, by his blessing, may be subservient to that happy end. Thus we may contribute to the safety of our country. Thus at least we shall deliver our own souls, and find rest in the day of trouble.

SERMON XV.



Female Influence in Religion, represented in a Discourse delivered May 15, 1810, to a Charitable Female Association in the first Parish in West-Springfield.



ACTS xvi. 13.

And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river-side, where prayer was wont to be made, and we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

PAUL and his associates, Silas and Timothy, were now on a mission in Macedonia. Paul had lately been at Troas. While he was there, a vision appeared to him in the night; "There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, come over into Macedonia, and help us." After he had seen the vision, immediately he and his companions endeavoured to go into Macedonia, "assuredly gathering, that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel there." Therefore loosing from Troas they went directly to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis, and from thence to Philippi, which was the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a Ro-

man colony. There they continued a number of days, preaching with much success, as we are informed in the following part of this chapter.

On a certain sabbath, while they were there, "they went out of the city by a river-side, where prayer was wont to be made."

When we read of the *sabbath* in the New Testament, we are always to understand the *Jewish sabbath*, or the seventh day of the week ; for the *Christian sabbath* is called the *Lord's day*, or the *first day of the week*. There were Jews in Philippi, as there were in most of the Roman provinces ; and they observed the seasons and forms of worship appointed in their law. The apostles, though they observed not the *Jewish sabbath* as a day instituted by *Christ* for stated worship, yet preached to the assembled *Jews* on that day. Hence we often find them on the sabbath, in the Jewish synagogues. The Jews had synagogues in most places, where large numbers of them resided. In Philippi they had a place of worship by a river a little without the city. Perhaps they were not permitted to build a synagogue within the city. Or they might choose a place retired from the bustle of the town and from the tumult of business ; for the citizens, being generally *Gentiles*, would not suspend their business on the sabbath to accommodate the *Jews*, whom they considered as a superstitious people. And probably a place near a river might be thought more convenient, than one in the city, for the ablutions and purifications required by their law.

To this place they resorted on the sabbath, and many Christians might attend with them ; for as Paul and others had preached for some time in the city, we must suppose, that by this time there were many converts to the gospel from among both *Gentiles* and *Jews*.

The historian observes, that “the *women* resorted thither.” We are not to conclude that the assembly consisted *wholly* of women. Probably some *men* assembled with them. But the women, on this, as on other occasions, were *distinguished* by their exemplary attendance at the stated place of worship. And perhaps, the gospel, which was preached in Philippi, had the greatest success among the female sex. These, of consequence, were most engaged to hear it. In other places where the apostles preached, the women, who believed and who followed them to hear the word, “were not a few.” The women, in many places, manifested a ready disposition to hear and embrace the gospel, and by all means in their power to encourage the preachers of it.

The support of religion depends greatly on the female sex. Men and women are appointed to act in different circles. The great transactions of society chiefly fall within the province of *men*. But *women*, in their more humble sphere, may contribute no less, and perhaps really more than the men, to the maintenance and transmission of religion in the world.

Their tender minds are more easily impressed with the solemn truths of the gospel. The troubles peculiarly incident to their sex render them more susceptible of religious impressions, and more solicitous to enjoy religious comforts. Their condition in life is attended with fewer temptations to irregular manners, and fewer diversions from the duties of piety. It is rare, in a christian land, that you meet with a female infidel—a female scoffer at religion—a female contemner of divine institutions. A profane intemperate or openly vicious female is viewed as a kind of monster. In most churches, so far as I am acquainted, there is a greater number of female, than of male communicants; and the former are more rarely subjects of discipline.

The religious education of children, especially in its earliest stages, depends principally on the *mother*. She has the most affectionate feelings for them. She is most conversant with them. She can best accommodate her instructions to their capacities. She can, with the most delicate hand, "rear the tender thought, and teach the young idea how to shoot." Solomon urges good doctrine on the young by reminding them, that "he had been tender and well beloved in the sight of *his mother*." The words of king Lemuel are called "the prophecy which his *mother* taught him." Timothy *from a child* had known the holy scriptures; and the faith which so early dwelt in him, dwelt before in his *grandmother* Lois, and his *mother* Eunice. A curse awaits the son, who despises to obey his *mother*.

The pious woman has more influence, than is generally supposed, in the maintenance of *family worship*. She encourages and requests it. She disposes her domestic affairs, morning and evening, so as to allow opportunity for it. She calls the attendance of her children. She gives notice that the family is in readiness for the solemnity. Thus she prevents evasions of the duty, and obviates excuses for neglect in her husband. If need be, she reads a portion of scripture as preparatory to prayer. And if, urged by the husband's refusal, she, with modest reluctance leads in the duty for once, probably a similar necessity will not return.

The female sex contribute much to the support of religion in *society*, and to the *spread* of it in the world.

When the tabernacle of worship was reared, not only the men brought their offerings to the Lord, but *all the women*, who were *wise hearted* contributed by their skilful labors and rich materials to finish and ornament the structure.

In times of prevailing irreligion and of threatening judgments, the prophets called on the *women* to arise and assist in a general reformation, and to encourage one another in the work.

In the time of our SAVIOUR'S *ministry*, the faith, charity and zeal of the *women* were so remarkable, as to be recorded by the sacred historians for the benefit of succeeding ages. We often find *women* among the devout people who attended on his preaching. There were many *women*, who ministered to him of their substance, and whose hospitable dwellings were places of retreat for him and his disciples. There were those, who in the most public manner testified their affection for his person and veneration of his character, and who industriously spread the fame of his preaching and miracles, and thus induced many of the *other sex* to become his hearers and followers.

When Christ was going to the place of his crucifixion, many *women* dared to express their regard to him by walking near him, and loudly lamenting his unrighteous sufferings. When he was suspended on the cross, though his disciples had forsaken him and fled, yet many *women* had the fortitude to stand by and behold the dreadful scene. When his body was taken down from the cross, and laid in the sepulchre, certain *women* came and observed the place and manner of the burial. They went and prepared ointments and spices, intending as soon as the sabbath was past, to embalm the precious corpse. On the morning of his resurrection, *women* were the *first* to visit his sepulchre—the *first* to carry tidings to his disciples that he was risen. They were the *first* witnesses and the *first* heralds of that great and glorious event, which is the foundation of our faith and hope and joy.

In the *Apostles'* days, women did much to promote the preaching and strengthen the preachers of

the gospel. Paul and his companions, while they were in Philippi, were made welcome at the hospitable house of *Lydia*. Paul speaks in general terms of the women, who labored with him in the gospel. In his epistles he salutes with much respect several women by name, who bestowed much labor on him and other missionaries, and were their helpers in Christ. *Priscilla*, as well as her husband *Aquila*, had the thanks of all the churches of the Gentiles for her services to the Apostle, and the dangers she incurred on his account.

The members of the church in Philippi distinguished themselves in the missionary cause. Paul says, "ye have done well, that ye did communicate with my afflictions. In the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again to my necessity. This fruit shall abound to your account." And when he was in Corinth, on a mission there, "that which was wanting to him, was supplied by the brethren who came from Macedonia;" or from Philippi, a chief city of Macedonia. Now in these contributions the *women* took an active part. Hence the Apostle gives an exhortation to the Philipian christians, to "help *those women* in that church, who labored with him in the gospel."

Phebe is commended by the Apostle, "because she had been a succourer of many and of himself also."

It appears from Paul's 1st Ep. to Timothy, that in the Apostles' times there were *female associations* formed, not only for the relief of the poor; but also for the instruction of female youths in the principles and virtues of religion. To preside in these schools some elderly and grave *matrons* were selected, who had been well reported of for their knowledge and

piety, hospitality and charity. For such institutions there may be occasion now in populous places; but there is not all the same occasion among us, where other provision is made for the support of the poor and for the education of children. There is, however, another object, to which the charity of *female associations* may with equal propriety be directed.

An extensive territory is opened in our country for new settlements. Into that territory multitudes have emigrated within a few years. The first settlers must necessarily be much scattered, and many of them in straitened circumstances, or at least destitute of such property as might most easily be applied to the maintenance of the ministry and of schools. Books must be scarce among them, and they cannot be obtained without difficulty. Children are growing up without those literary and religious advantages, which the young generally enjoy among us. To them christian benevolence will direct its attention.

For the benefit of those new settlements missionary societies have been instituted in various parts of the land, and have evidently been of great utility. In aid of those societies female associations have been formed in many of our towns, and one in this parish. The main object of their liberality is the procurement of useful books to be distributed in families for the benefit of the younger, as well as elder members. These pious and charitable associations are aiding the cause of religion among the young, as really as did the female associations in the primitive times.

Your society, my sisters, has been diminished by removals and by deaths. The late death of your treasurer is a sensible loss to your society and to us all. Her example in all relations is worthy of imitation. May her death impress it on our minds. The vacancies which have been made, we hope, will be

filled. I question not, but there are many, who will come forward and occupy the vacant ground. We now give them an invitation.

The distance of the objects of your charity can be no objection in a benevolent mind. We are to do good to *all*, as we have opportunity—to do good to *strangers* as well as to our next neighbors—to do good to them who are of the household of faith—to be fellow workers to the kingdom of Christ. The sum expected from each member of your association is but small. But even a mite thrown into the treasury of God by a female hand, will now, as it did formerly, meet Christ's high approbation. You know not what benefits may result to others, nor what rewards may accrue to you from your small, but pious charities.

Think, how many families there are in our new settlements, destitute of pious books; yea, even of bibles, and of the preached word. Say; are you reluctant to impart a little of your substance to their relief? Suppose yourselves with your families in their situation; would you not wish for help?—Suppose your sons or daughters, your brethren or sisters, with young families, thus placed in the wilderness; would you not think a little charity from your neighbors for their assistance, properly applied? We are to do for others the same, which, in an exchange of circumstances, we could reasonably desire from them.

Some perhaps will ask, "Why did those people remove from the places where they might have enjoyed religious and literary privileges?" Of this we are not judges. Some might have good reasons; and some might not. Be this as it may; they have removed; they are in the condition described; they are consequently objects of charity. The population of our new territories is a matter of public importance. The first adventurers, whoever they may

be, will for a time suffer the inconveniences natural to new plantations, and ought to be assisted in their religious interests.

“But are they not indifferent to the gospel?” If they are, there is so much the greater reason, why we should send it to them. But they are not universally indifferent. Many solicit aid; and they thankfully receive it. Like the man in Paul’s vision, they say, “Come into the wilderness and help us.” Hence we may assuredly gather, that the Lord has called some to preach the gospel among them. However indifferent we may suppose some to be, we must remember, they have *children*. And shall we have no compassion for children growing up under negligent parents? The gospel was first spread in the world by missions. If it had never been sent to any but those, who previously sought it, how would it have spread at all? how would it have come to us? “How shall men believe in him, of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How will any preach, except they be sent?”

Some perhaps will further ask, “Ought *women* to apply property to such a cause without the consent of their *husbands*?”

Besure, neither our charity nor our piety should be so conducted, as to disturb domestic peace. The heads of families should walk together as heirs of the grace of life, and should be fellow helpers to the truth. But who will suspect that our charitable women can meet with any impediment in such a work as this, from the opposition of their husbands? What man is there among us, who would restrain his wife from using her own discretion in the exercise of so small a charity for so pious and laudable a purpose? Does not every man leave it with his wife to give a meal to a hungry stranger, or a morsel of bread, or a rag of cloathing to a poor neighbor?

And will he be displeased, if she does as much for *Christ*? What she does for his brethren—what she does in promoting his gospel among the poor, she does for *him*. True yokefellows will help those women, who labor in the Lord. Is beneficence incompatible with the condition of married women? Will none of this class be found among those, to whom Christ will say, “Come ye blessed of my Father, for I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; naked, and ye cloathed me?” How did the wise women in Israel bring their offerings to the tabernacle; how did the wife of Herod’s steward and many other women minister to the Lord of their substance; if they were in such bondage under rigorous husbands, that they had no property—no substance at the disposal of their charity? We will not imagine, that there is less liberality in a *christian* husband, than there was in an ancient *Jew*, or in *Herod’s steward*. How did Solomon’s virtuous woman reach forth her hands to the needy, if her husband permitted her to take nothing in her hands, but her spindle and distaff? We will not suppose such penuriousness in husbands. It is placing them in too low a grade—in too unchristian an attitude.

Let all things be done decently and in order. Religion has no tendency to introduce contention or confusion into families—to set a man at variance against his wife, or a woman against her husband. If it ever has this effect, there is the want of prudence, and probably the want of piety in one or both of them. Let them walk as heirs together of the grace of life; and then neither their prayers nor their charities will be hindered.

Paul spake unto the women, who resorted to the place, where prayer was wont to be made. What he spake we are not particularly informed. But what it was in substance we may learn by attending

to that, which he charged *other* preachers to speak to them. He inculcated on them the duties of religion in all the relations of life. He exhorted them to guide their households, instruct their children, relieve the afflicted, help the saints, be modest in their apparel, obedient to their husbands, peaceable among their neighbors, sober in their manners, discreet and inoffensive in their language, and in all things to maintain a behaviour agreeable to their profession of godliness, that so the word of God might not be blasphemed, and no adversary might find occasion to speak reproachfully of it.

A charitable zeal for the promotion of religion abroad, is highly commendable. But in order to its having the best effect, it must also be employed near home. You must maintain religion in your hearts; exhibit it in your daily conversation; attend to the education of your children; shew kindness to the afflicted; diligently follow every good work.

The preaching of the gospel is among the instituted means of religion. Your exemplary attendance on this, while it aids the piety of your own hearts, will have a happy influence on your families and neighbors. The pious women in Philippi resorted to the place, where prayer was wont to be made. But that was not the *only* place where they could pray. Doubtless they endeavored to render *their own houses* places of prayer. Most certainly their *closets* were such places.

You, my female friends and hearers, will give yourselves much to prayer. You will pray for your children, and teach them to pray for themselves. You will pray for your minister, and for the church and society, of which you are members. You will pray for the effusion of God's spirit, to awaken, convince and convert sinners here, and elsewhere.

You will pray that God's work may be revived among us, and that success may attend the labors of love abroad.

God loves a *cheerful* giver. It is not expected that you will give largely; but you ought to give freely. This is the Apostle's advice; "He who giveth, let him do it with simplicity. He who sheweth mercy, let him do it with cheerfulness."

It is a prominent feature in Solomon's portrait of the virtuous woman, that "she stretcheth forth her hands to the poor; she reacheth forth her hands to the needy; she openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness." At the same time, "she looketh well to her household; her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Strength and honor are her clothing, and she rejoiceth in time to come."

A similar description the Psalmist gives of the righteous and good *man*. "He sheweth favor and lendeth; and, that the means of liberality may increase, "he ordereth his affairs with discretion. He hath dispersed and given to the poor. His name shall be exalted with honour. Though the wicked may see it and be grieved, yet they shall melt away. The desire of the wicked shall perish."

Whatever you give in the cause of religion, you lend to the Lord. He will repay it in the communications of his grace to your souls, in his blessings on your substance, in his smiles on your families, and in the rewards of a future life.

"There is that giveth, and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth, shall be watered also himself."

May God make all grace abound toward you, that ye may abound in every good work, being enriched in every thing unto all bountifulness, which will cause through you the thanksgivings of many unto God.

SERMON XVI.



Words of Comfort to the Afflicted. A Discourse delivered at the Funeral of a Lady, who died on a journey intended for her health.



I THESSALONIANS, iv. 18.

Comfort one another with these words.

IN this changing world, we are subject to a variety of sorrows. Of these, some of the most pungent arise from the dissolution of our intimate connexions. Without these connexions, there can be but little enjoyment in life : And, in proportion, as they conduce more to our happiness while they last, the dissolution is more painful when it comes.

The glorious Saviour, who came to deliver us from the miseries of the future world, still leaves us subject to mortality and the sorrows which attend it in this. But under those sorrows he kindly opens to us new sources of consolation. These our apostle points out in the words preceding the text. “ I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others,” the unenlightened heathens, “ who have

no hope” of the resurrection of their deceased friends; “for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him: For the Lord will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ shall arise; and they who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall they ever be with the Lord. *Wherefore, comfort one another with these words.*”

The apostle here instructs us, that religion provides many consolations for christians under the sorrows which arise from the death of their pious friends.

Under sorrows of this kind, divine consolations are peculiarly needful. When we lose our property, we hope to regain or replace it; but when death removes a friend, we know that he is gone the way whence he will not return. In pains of body we hope for mitigation and relief; but when we commit a friend to the grave, we know it will not render him back to us; we leave him in the dust, there to remain until the heavens are no more. Our worldly substance is inanimate matter; and though we place a value upon it, yet we cannot give it that kind of affection, which we feel for our friends, who, like us, are living, conscious beings. In the conflict of parting with them, we could, for their sakes, cheerfully sacrifice every other interest. We contemplate the momentous change before them—we enter into their feelings—we adopt their fears in the view of futurity;—there is nothing which we would not give to rescue them from their danger. In our worldly designs they have cooperated, and in our worldly enjoyments they have participated with us. When they are gone, our cares are multiplied, our labours are increased, and our pleasures are diminished; the world has lost half its value, and our anxieties are more than doubled. Former troubles

were lightened by the sympathy of those who felt them with us. When they are gone, we bear our burdens alone. Friendly conversation sweetens the joys and softens the pains of life ; when this ceases, our joys are flattened and our pains are sharpened. The Psalmist, when lover and friend were put far from him, and his acquaintance into darkness, was afflicted and ready to die.

In such a condition the Christian needs comforts ; and there are many which his religion will afford him.

1. He may collect comfort from the *useful* and *virtuous works* of his departed friends.

When Tabitha, a woman eminent for her beneficence, sickened and died, her weeping friends consoled their hearts by viewing and displaying the coats and garments which she had made for the poor, and by recollecting and relating how full of good works and alms-deeds she had been.

The contemplation of past blessings tends to refresh our spirits and silence our complaints under present afflictions. If the loss of a friend is a calamity, the enjoyment of that friend was a mercy. God sets prosperity and adversity the one over against the other in his dispensations ; and so should we in our meditations. Religion teaches us to acknowledge God in both. The unbelieving sinner looks only to the event ; the believing saint looks to Him who orders the event. The former feels his afflictions and forgets his mercies ; the latter views both together, and thus enlivens a grateful sense of the mercies he has received, and soothes the anguish of his heart under the afflictions which he feels.

If our *friends* are removed, yet the *benefits* which we derived from our connexion with them may still remain. If we can now enjoy them no longer, yet it is a great mercy that we *have* enjoyed them. Their example and conversation have aided us in

the practice of religion ; their advice has guided us in the path of wisdom ; their prudence and industry have assisted us in the education and support of a family ; their prayers have brought down from heaven, blessings on us and our houses, and these blessings still abide. Perhaps, by their means, we not only enjoy many *outward* accommodations, but possess better *hearts*, and see our families more virtuous and happy. There is an anguish in parting with useful friends ; but a pleasure in reflecting, that they have been useful. If the recollection of their good works awakens our sorrow, yet it is a pleasing *kind* of sorrow—a sorrow which brings consolation with it—a sorrow which we love to indulge. We wish to enjoy them still ; but we cannot say, that their life, short as it is, has not contributed to our happiness, and been a blessing on the whole. The greater the loss we sustain in their death, the richer we must esteem the happiness we enjoyed in their life. Our very tears remind us of our obligations to gratitude.

2. Religion leads us to view the death of our pious friends as their passage to a *better world*.

The uninstructed heathen, and the perverse unbeliever, extend their views no farther than to the grave. The former cannot, and the latter will not, look into futurity. It is the gospel which has brought life and immortality to light ; and it is the believer of this gospel, who looks not at things seen, but at things unseen. The apostle speaks of some, who sorrow without hope. These are they who know not, or believe not, the gospel of Christ. They leave their friends in the dust without the belief that their souls now live, and without the hope that their bodies will live hereafter. They contemplate these objects of their affection as forever blotted out of existence.

The believing christian has brighter views. He sorrows not as those who have no hope. While he sorrows in his own loss, he rejoices in the persuasion, that his friends have found infinite gain. Their bodies, indeed, are thrown aside ; but their spirits, he trusts, still live, and mingle now with angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. That which died was only the inferior part ; that which was deposited in dust, was dust before, and it has now returned to its kindred earth. The rational and intellectual part—that which was chiefly valuable—lives in higher perfection and in a happier condition than ever. It is absent from the body, and present with the Lord. What renders our friends amiable is not the form and comeliness of the body, but the capacities and virtues of the mind. And these will be enlarged and improved in their new state. Our pious friends then are not lost. They are gone from us, but they live elsewhere. They are nobler and holier beings, than they were when we knew them ; and they are placed in a more eligible and happy condition, than they were when they lived with us. They are now better saints ; they associate with better company ; they are employed in better services ; and they are admitted to better pleasures—than while they dwelt below. Paul, contemplating the glory of heaven, where Jesus reigns, had a desire to depart and be with him, which was far better than to abide in the flesh. If it was better for Paul, it is better for other christians, to be with Christ, than to be here. The body, while they dwelt in it, was, indeed, an instrument of many delights : It was an occasion too of many pains and sorrows. It was a seat of corruption, and an inlet to temptation. And they found it necessary to crucify their flesh and mortify their members on the earth. But now, having put off the flesh, they have ceased from sorrow and from sin. They are no more depressed

under a weight of clay, nor distracted with irregular passions, nor entangled in worldly cares. They are enlarged from their polluted prison, and released from their tiresome load. While they lived in this material, sensible world, they had occasion for the body; now they can do better without such a body, than with it. The other world is so different from this, that they must there have a different kind of body, when they have any. In their spiritual state, a body like this would be incompatible with the business they have to do, and the happiness they have to enjoy. A better body will be given them at the resurrection. Then this corruptible will put on incorruption; this mortal will put on immortality; this vile body will be fashioned like to Christ's glorious body. They have, then, been great gainers by death. They will be greater gainers at the resurrection. Christ says to his disciples, afflicted at the thought of his leaving them, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, *I go to the Father.*" If we believe our friends have died in the Lord, our love to them, while it awakens sensations of grief at their removal from us, will also produce sentiments of joy in the view of their happy condition in the presence of their Lord.

3. The good christian comforts himself, in the death of his pious friends, from the consideration, that *he is going to the place where they are*; that though they will not return to him, yet *he shall go to them*; that they have departed from him only for a season, that he may receive them again forever. ...

Our present connexion with friends is short. We are mortal as well as they. If they live longer, still they must die, and so must we. If we would enjoy permanent friendships, we must go to heaven for them. There is no passage thither but through the valley of death. We lament that our friends go before us, and leave us solitary and desolate. ... But

if we go before them, they will be left in the same solitude and grief which we feel.

When those dear connexions, on which the joys of life depend, are broken, our interest in the world is diminished, and our attachment to it should be weakened. Our fondness for a particular country, town or vicinity depends more on the friends which we have there, than it does on the soil or produce. The removal of a few companions to some other place lessens our regard to the place where we have lived, and excites an inclination to follow them. If some of our intimate friends have removed to heaven, this world is less valuable to us than it was before, and we should direct our thoughts to that better world, whither they are gone. The way thither is as open to us, as it was to them; and the way we know. Let us follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. If this world was more desirable to us, while they were in it, heaven will be rendered more pleasant to us by siding them *there*.

Those affections which are merely natural, and which spring wholly from natural relations, are confined to this life. They will not exist in heaven, because these natural relations will not exist there. But those pure and refined affections, which arise from grace and holiness in the heart, will continue in heaven; for charity there will never fail. If saints in the present world love one another on account of their similarity in spiritual tempers and virtuous manners, surely they will love one another more in heaven, where these tempers and manners will be improved, refined and exalted; and all corruption and irregularity, every thing that is disgustful to a holy mind, will be removed. In our best friends we now see some imperfections; but still we love their virtues, and esteem their characters. How will our love to them be increased, when we find

them such as we *wished* them to be, and when we become such as we *aspired* to be. How will holy and benevolent minds mingle, unite and transfuse themselves into one another, when envy, jealousy, anger, distrust, and all untoward passions are extinguished, and when goodness, complacence and every holy temper are wrought up to their just perfection.

While all holy minds love and embrace one another in heaven, there is reason to believe, those pious friends, who were united in pure affection on earth, who took sweet counsel together in their religious concerns, and who by mutual conversation, reciprocal example and social prayer, assisted one another in their spiritual improvements and heavenly hopes, will there meet in sentiments of peculiar congratulation, and will feel, in each others company, the warm return of former holy endearment. There is something in scripture, which favours this pleasing idea. To those who had been converted to, and edified in the christian faith by Paul's ministry, the apostle says, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy."—"We look for the Saviour from heaven; therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy, my crown, stand fast in the Lord."—"Work out your salvation—shine as lights in the world—hold forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ with you all, and that ye also may rejoice with me." Paul expected, that his happiness and joy would be exalted by meeting those in heaven, among whom his ministry on earth had been employed with success; and that their felicity would also be enlivened in meeting him, whose friendly and faithful labours had brought them thither. For the same reason, religious friendship among christian brethren, begun on earth, may

be renewed and continued in heaven. As they are to live together in the presence of Christ, so they should comfort themselves together now, and edify one another. Pure christian love—holy spiritual friendship will pass from earth to heaven, and become more pure, more spiritual there.

If our pious friends have left us for heaven, their absence from us, though grievous for the present, will be but temporary. They cannot come back to us, but we may go forward to them. Let us be followers of them, as they were of Christ; and we shall soon be with them where they are, and rejoice with them as they rejoice, in the presence of our common redeemer. In heaven we shall meet, not as occasional visitants, but as settled inhabitants—not as mortals soon to part, but as immortals to dwell together forever. The pleasure of earthly friendship is allayed by the anticipation of the painful hour of dissolution: The joy of heavenly friendship will be perfected by the assurance that it will never be broken.

4. The christian has the greatest comfort in the death of his godly friends, when he finds this operating to the promotion of religion in his own heart.

All God's providences toward us are full of instruction; but none seal instruction more deeply on our hearts, than those which remove from our embraces the friends whom we trusted and loved.

The death of *these* teaches us the vanity and emptiness of the world, and calls our hearts from it. What a melancholy vacancy we find in every place which *they* used to fill? What a gloom is spread over every object which brings *them* to our mind? The death of a single saint makes a dismal void.—What a miserable place the world would be, if *all* good men were gone from it! who could endure to live in it? It would be intolerable to the wicked themselves. The saints are the salt of the earth—

the lights of the world. If they were taken away, and none brought forward to succeed them, corruption and darkness would ensue. By the loss of a pious friend, we learn the worth and importance of the godly. Their prayers, instructions, conversation and example are the means of keeping religion alive and conveying it to future generations—of preventing divine judgments and of saving mankind from speedy ruin.

The death of a pious friend teaches us to place our confidence more immediately in God. It impresses on the heart this solemn admonition—“Trust not in man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of? but trust in the Lord forever, for with him is everlasting strength.” While our friends are with us, we usually place an undue dependence upon them. This earthly confidence weakens our faith in God. When they are removed, we learn, that all confidence is vain but that which rests on an immutable object.

Such trials give us an opportunity to know ourselves. When the blessings which God has lent us are recalled, we are to examine, whether we love him more than these—whether our wills are governed by his—whether we desire heaven more than the world—whether, as earthly comforts flee away, we experience more comfort in religion? Happy, if the examination terminates in our favour.

When friends leave us, we are called to look back on the time past—to review our lives—to enquire why God contends with us—to recollect the counsels and examples of our departed companions, and our behaviour towards them while they were with us. Thus their death gives new force to advice which had almost lost its influence; awakens repentance for many failings, which were nearly forgotten; and excites our attention to some social duties, which had been too much neglected.

A death in our family, especially the death of a near relative, or christian companion, calls our thoughts to the grave and to another world; makes our own death seem more near and real, and its consequences more solemn and important; and admonishes us to examine our state, put our houses and our hearts in order, and hasten our preparation for our own great change.

The sickness and death of a good christian may often teach us, how to bear distress—how to be strong in weakness—how to meet the King of Terrors, and how to conquer him. An example of patience, hope and courage comes with great advantage from the christian's death bed; and especially from the death bed of a christian companion. From this we learn—we see what principles support the hope, animate the courage, and strengthen the patience of the saint in the endurance of affliction, and in the view of eternity. We learn the importance of religion, the wisdom of living in the spirit and power of it. O, who, when he sees a christian's peaceful end, would reckon his own life dear to him, that so he may finish his course with joy?

Such are the effects which the death of a friend ought to produce in us. When we experience these effects, we have comfort in our affliction, because we find, it has answered its purpose; it has done us good; it has made us better. Hence we may conclude, it was sent in mercy, and the grace of God has accompanied it. We have now fresh evidence, that we are children of God and heirs of heaven. We may now apply the exhortation which speaks to children, "Despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when ye are rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. God dealeth with you as with children—be in subjection to him and live. Your affliction, however grievous

for the present, will hereafter yield to you the peaceable fruits of righteousness.”

We see what sources of comfort the gospel opens to the afflicted, and particularly to those who mourn the death of their godly friends. But let all remember, that, in order to draw refreshment from these sources, they must repair to them ; not stand at a distance—they must devote themselves to God ; not to the world. They who would appropriate the promises, and secure the blessings of the gospel, must be influenced by its doctrines, and governed by its precepts. To be prepared for affliction, they must embrace and cherish religion in their more prosperous days. She never has promised her consolations in trouble to those who spurn her friendship, till trouble comes.

If religion is necessary to our comfort in the death of friends, how necessary must it be in our own death ! The sorrow of afflictions may gradually wear off ; worldly losses, in many cases, may be compensated by new blessings similar to those which are gone ; gloomy thoughts may be diverted by company and amusement ; the death of a friend may soon be forgotten in the business and bustle of the world. But what shall we do, when death comes to *us* ?—Now every expedient for comfort, but sincere religion, utterly fails. We cannot be willing to leave this world without the hope of a better ; there is no solid foundation for this hope, but in the promises of the gospel ; there is no interest in these promises but by repentance of sin and faith in the Saviour ; there is no good evidence of our repentance and faith, but a life unreservedly devoted to God.

When death removes our friends, let us call up our faith, hope and patience—not be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, but comforted in the thought, that they have emigrated before us to a better world.

where we soon may meet them again, and find them more lovely and more happy, than ever we saw them before.

We love our friends ; we would not put them to pain by unkind usage, nor wound their feelings by harsh words. If we have grieved them in our haste by an unguarded expression, or an inadvertant action, we are grieved for them, and we wish to recall our unhappy mistake. Let us not then live in such a manner, that our death will leave them to sorrow without hope, and to mourn without comfort ; rather, let us not live in such a manner as to be hopeless and comfortless ourselves.

These mortal connexions will soon be dissolved. When our hearts are saddened in the forethought of that hour which will separate us from our dearest companions, it is happy, if we can refresh our spirits by the anticipation of a joyful meeting in the presence of our Lord.

The doctrine of Christ's second coming, and of a future life, should be a subject of contemplation, that we may comfort ourselves, and of conversation, that we may comfort one another in the troubles of this mortal state.

To this fountain of comfort, the solitary mourner, now present, will repair ; for here only can he find refreshment adequate to the anguish of his heart.

Your affliction, sir, is great in its kind, and attended with circumstances which give it a peculiar pungency. No earthly connexion is so intimate, as this which is now broken. It was strengthened by its early existence and by reciprocal attention ; endeared by the virtues which you saw in your companion ; and cemented by the pledges of your mutual affection. You have doubtless felt afflictions before. But they were not like this. In your former cares and sorrows, you had one to share them with you ; but you find none to divide your present

burden and take an equal portion. While you feel for yourself, you feel also for your children, who, being young and tender, still needed the mother's soft and gentle hand to lead them along, and rear them to virtue and glory. Ah! dear children;—they will weep with you; but they cannot, like you, realize their loss. While, with anxious fear and trembling hope, you was pursuing the last means to restore her declining health, she failed—she sunk and expired in your arms, at a distance from her home, from every other relative, and from her affectionate neighbours—among strangers to her—but not strangers to kindness and sympathy. They feel for you and would soothe your anguish. But, we know, that to have been in your own mansion, surrounded with intimate friends, at such an hour as this, would have yielded you a solace, which you cannot find here. We feel—perhaps in a slight degree—but we feel the sad tale you have to relate, when your children shall meet your return, and with disappointment in their faces, shall ask—where she is?—We anticipate your gloomy entrance into your dwelling, where she, whose smiles were wont to salute you, will be found no more. We sympathize in your redoubled cares for your beloved offspring, who are now to be cast on you alone, without a partner to assist you.

We wish you every consolation that religion can give. From this source only can you derive consolation adequate to your grief. You will repair to the God of grace, commune daily with him, and spread your sorrows before him. You will from him seek support under your burdens, and direction in your perplexities. To him you will resign yourself, and to him you will commit your children. In the midst of your sorrows, you will reflect with gratitude on the blessings which you have enjoyed in your connexion with this friend, and which still

may in some degree remain, though *she* is gone. You will assuage your grief in the contemplation of the exemplary virtue with which she acted, and the humble hope with which she closed this mortal scene. Viewing her in the world of glory, you will feel an increasing desire to be there, and will carefully tread the path which leads up thither. You will now see more of the vanity of this world, and more and more detach your affections from it. You will place your regard more entirely on the glorious and all-sufficient God, whose perfect character you cannot love to excess, and whose immutable goodness will never disappoint your humble trust. You will see more of the value, as you experience more of the power of religion; and you will embrace it with stronger affection, and cleave to it with warmer zeal. You will meditate more feelingly on the death and resurrection of Christ—on his compassion for the afflicted—on his intercession for believers, and on his coming to raise the dead and exalt his saints. You will lead and encourage your children in the path of piety, and direct their views to that world, whither He who redeemed them is ascended, and whither she who bare them, we trust, has followed him. You will discharge, in her place, those parental offices, which she would have discharged, had her life been prolonged, and which she would urge on you, were she allowed to speak. You will walk with God in all the duties of religion, as she would advise, were she now permitted to drop a word from the skies. Thus will your tribulation work patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and your hope will not make you ashamed.

SERMON XVII.



Waiting on God for Rain.



JEREMIAH xiv. 22.

Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles, that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou He, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait on thee; for thou hast made all these things.

THIS chapter is called “the word of the Lord, which came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth,” or concerning the *drought*, as the seventy Greek interpreters render the word. This drought, and the distresses which ensued, the prophet thus describes; “Judah mourneth, and the cities thereof languish; the people are black with famine; they cast themselves on the ground, and their cry is gone up to heaven. Their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters; they came to the pits and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty. They were ashamed and confounded; they covered their heads, because the ground is chapt, for there is no rain on the earth. The plowmen were ashamed and covered their heads. The hind also calved

in the field, and forsook her young, because there was no grass ; and the wild asses stood in the high places ; they snuffed up the wind like dragons ; their eyes also failed because there was no grass."

The distresses of the famine were increased by the terrors of the sword ; for it was a time of war ; the country was invaded and Jerusalem besieged by the Assyrian army. Hence the prophet says " If I go into the field, then behold the slain with the sword ; and if I go into the city, then behold them who are sick with famine."

This dreadful and complicated calamity was the occasion of that humble and fervent prayer, which the prophet makes in the latter part of the chapter. " Hast thou utterly rejected Judah ? Hath thy soul loathed Zion ? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing ? We looked for peace, and there is no good ; for a time of health, and behold trouble. We acknowledge, O God, our wickedness and the iniquities of our fathers ; for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us for thy name's sake. Remember ; break not thy covenant with us."

Why he thus applies to God for relief, he in the text assigns two reasons ; one is that relief could come from no other source ; the other is that God could easily grant it. " Are there any among the vanities of the gentiles, that can cause rain ? or can the heavens give showers ? Art not thou He, O Lord God ? Therefore we wait on thee, for thou hast made all these things."

The words of our text present us with these two observations, That God is the only author of rain ; and that for this blessing we must wait on him.

That the agency of God is the cause of rain the prophet proves by two arguments. First, the insufficiency of all other supposed causes ; and secondly, the sufficiency of God's power manifested in the creation of all things.

1. The insufficiency of all other causes.

The pretended divinities of the heathens were insufficient to cause rain.

The objects to which the heathens paid their devotions, and which they regarded as the authors of all good, the prophet calls *vanties*, to express their utter inability to perform any of those things, which were ascribed to them.

The worshipping of stocks and stones, and images graven by art and man's device, indicates a degree of ignorance and stupidity, into which we never should have supposed men capable of falling, had there not been undeniable proofs of its reality. The ridiculous folly of this species of idolatry the prophet exposes with all the force of sacred satire; for it is too palpably absurd to deserve a grave and sober confutation. "The customs of the people are vain; for one cutteth a tree out of the forest with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not. They must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them, for they cannot do evil; neither is it in them to do good. The people are altogether brutish. The stock is a doctrine of vanities. The gods which have not made the earth and the heavens, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens."

Nor was there less absurdity in paying adoration to particular animals, or to the heavenly bodies; for though these are not the works of men's hands, yet they are in themselves as remote from a power to bestow blessings on men, as the most despicable piece of inanimate matter.

There was, however, a species of idolatry practised among the heathens, a little more refined, though not at all more pious and rational. This was

the worship of *demons*, or of the *souls* of departed *heroes*. These were the *Baalim*, so often mentioned in scripture as the gods of the heathens. These, as well as images and animals, the prophet rejects, as having no share in the government of nature; for he says, "There are not ANY among the vanities of the gentiles, that can cause rain."

It appears, indeed, from the book of Job, that satan, when God gave him permission, had power to disturb the atmosphere and raise storms; but as he is only a creature, all his power must be dependent on the will, and subject to the controul of the Creator. And from the wisdom and goodness of God we may be assured, that he never has, and never will put into the hands of such a malevolent spirit so important a branch of his providence, as the government of the seasons.

That created spirits, as well as men, may be made instruments of God's providential designs, and may, according to their superior capacities, be employed in a higher sphere than mortals, there is no reason to doubt. But to suppose, that the regulation of the seasons, or the management of any part of the general government of the world, is committed to their hands, and left to their direction, without the superintendance of God's wisdom, power and goodness, is to suppose, that he has quitted his throne, and laid aside his sovereignty.

That evil spirits, as well as good, are absolutely under God's controul, we are abundantly taught in scripture, and particularly in the book of Job, in which we find, that satan could do nothing to afflict that good man, further than a particular permission was given him. We may, therefore, justly wonder at the easy credulity of some Christians in giving credit to the fabulous and romantic stories, which they hear, concerning the works of evil spirits; such as their granting favorable winds to

seamen on certain conditions ; and their watching over hidden treasures and raising storms to defend them. If such relations were founded in facts, they would prove, that evil spirits have the government of the elements in their hands. The prophet expressly teaches us, that the vanities of the heathens cannot give rain, and, consequently, that they cannot raise winds and storms, except when they are specially empowered and permitted by the great author and governor of nature. On the same ground we must reject many idle reports relating to astrology and witchcraft ; such as the prediction of men's fortunes, and other events, which have no connection with the settled course of nature, but depend on human liberty and the superintending providence of God ; and least of all should we give credence to such strange works, as not only surpass created power, but are impossible in their nature. By this superstitious credulity we make too near approaches to the most impious part of pagan idolatry, and give an honor to evil spirits which they do not deserve.

As the vanities of the Gentiles cannot cause rain, so "neither can the heavens give showers." The prophet here teaches us, that showers depend not merely on *natural* causes, but primarily on a divine agency.

That natural causes have an operation in the production of droughts, rains, and changes of weather, there is no doubt. But these causes cannot possess an independent power to produce the effects.—The same divine hand which gave them existence, gives them their efficacy. Nature is not an independent agent : It is only the manner in which God governs the world. Fire, air, water, and other substances have their distinct qualities ; but it is the great author and creator of these substances, which impresses these qualities upon them. God warms us with his fires, enlivens the earth with his sun,

moistens it with his rains, moves the atmosphere with his winds and purges it with his lightnings.

The virtues of all natural causes are as much the work of God, as the causes themselves. They have no more power to put themselves in motion, than to originate their own existence. When and where the winds shall blow, the rains shall fall, the lightnings shall blaze and the thunders roar, and in what measure these and other natural causes shall operate, God only can direct. Hear the Almighty's challenge to Job; "Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? Hast thou set the dominion thereof in the earth? Canst thou lift up thy voice in the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee? Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are?" These are all under God's command. "Fire and hail, snow and vapour and stormy winds fulfil his word." "Out of the south cometh the whirlwind, and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given, and the breadth of the waters is straitened. By watering he wearieth his thick cloud; he scattereth his bright cloud. And it is turned about by his counsels, that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy. Harken unto this; stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God."

Rain is so common and familiar a phenomenon, that we see it with little attention, and receive it with little gratitude; but when we contemplate it seriously, we cannot but be filled with wonder.

Who invented this expedient for watering the earth? Could it have entered into the human mind: or into any created mind? Had the expedient been suggested, who would have thought it practicable? By what power in nature are the waters detached from seas, lakes, fountains and rivers? How are

they raised into the air, and there suspended and condensed? How are they watted from the places of their exhalation, and spread over vast tracts of territory? What prevents their immediate descent in the spot from whence they arose? How are they sifted down in small drops to refresh the fields? Why fall they not in cataracts to deluge the ground? When a drought has continued in one place, until the moisture is exhaled, why does it not continue still? Rains must be brought hither by the winds. But when the winds have run long in a particular current, what natural cause can divert them into a new current, that they should bring to the parched soil supplies of water from distant regions? Who provided the vegetables with orifices to receive, and with tubes to convey the waters into all their parts? Who bade the leaves expand to catch the refreshing dews and showers? By what contrivance do the waters, imbibed by the roots, mount upwards and spread themselves through all the branches? Are these the operations of blind chance—the works of mere mechanism? No; they plainly indicate the hand of an intelligent Being.

As the agency of God in causing rain is manifest from the insufficiency of all other causes; so,

2d. It is summarily deducible from this single consideration, and self-evident truth, that he is the creator of all things. “Art not thou He, O Lord God, for thou hast made all these things.”

The world bears plain marks of a temporary existence. Every thing relating to it shows, that it is not eternal. If it ever had a beginning, there must be a creator. And this creator must be an eternal, self-existent, all-perfect being. “The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.” If God made the world, he made all things which be-

long to it. We can no more conceive, that any one thing, than that every thing, should exist independently of God. If God created all things, then he gave them their qualities, disposed them to their places, and impressed on them their motions. If he made the world, he governs it; and if he governs the world in general, he inspects every part of it, and superintends and directs every event which takes place, so that not a shower falls to the ground without him. "He has not left himself without witness, in that he does good, gives rain and fruitful seasons, and fills our hearts with food and gladness."

If rain is one of those good gifts, which come down from God; then, as the prophet teaches us,

II. We must wait on him to obtain it. "We will wait on thee, for thou hast made all these things."

Waiting on God implies *trust* in him. If in any cases we are to trust in God, it must be especially in those cases, in which we can do nothing ourselves. For the accomplishment of some of our designs, there are means which God has put into our hands, and which, according to his constitution, have a tendency to effect the designs in view. Here we are to apply the means, trusting in God for their success. But for obtaining the showers of heaven, there are no natural means in our power. The causes of rain are absolutely beyond our reach. We must therefore, for this important blessing, trust wholly in that Being, who made the world, commands the elements, and directs all the motions of nature.

We must wait on God with *prayer*. For nothing is more obviously reasonable, than that impotent and dependent mortals, in all their wants, should make known their requests to Him, who is infinite in wisdom, power and goodness.

But if God is good, of what use is prayer? It is useful as a mean to prepare us for the reception of needed favors. It makes no change in God; but it may make a change in us. Prayer is the desire of the heart directed to God. And if it is reasonable, that we should desire the things which we need, and that we should direct our desires to Him on whom we depend, then it is reasonable, that we should pray. God has commanded us to pray always, to call upon him in times of trouble, and particularly to seek the blessing of rain in a time of drought. And he has encouraged us to hope, that if we pray to him, confess his name, and turn from our sins, he will hear and forgive and send rain on the land.

“Trust in the Lord, and *do good*, says the Psalmist, and verily thou shalt be fed.” Sincere prayers are accompanied with a penitent sense of unworthiness, and humble resolutions of obedience. “If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us.” The prophet makes his prayer for rain with a humble confession of sin. “We acknowledge our wickedness and the iniquities of our fathers; do not abhor us for thy name’s sake.” God promises this blessing on condition, that his people return to him; and it was only on this condition, that Solomon presumed to ask it, “When heaven is shut up and there is no rain, because the people have sinned against thee, if they turn from their sin, then give rain upon thy land.”

We must seek rain in a way of *justice* and *charity* to one another; for to implore God’s blessing on our labors, while we withhold from our fellow men their dues, is adding impiety to unrighteousness.—God threatens his ancient vineyard, that he would command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it, because he looked for justice, but behold oppression; for righteousness, and behold a cry.”

And we must do justice, not only to one another by rendering to all their dues, but to God also by attending on his instituted worship, and by imparting our substance to maintain it. "Honor the Lord with thy substance, then shall thy barns be filled with plenty." Many, while they are solicitous to obtain the showers of heaven on their fields, defraud God of the small share of their property, which he demands for himself. "Will a man rob God?" says he to his ancient people, "yet ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." They ask, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" God answers, "Ye have robbed me in tythes and offerings; therefore ye are cursed with a curse. Bring ye now all the tythes into the store house, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

We must wait on God with patience and submission. Droughts may answer important purposes in the *natural* world, which we cannot foresee. We are incompetent to judge, what proportion of moisture and drought, heat and cold, is best for our own fields; and more incompetent to determine what measure of each is most suitable on the general scale. We should rejoice that the government of nature is in the hands of unerring wisdom.—Droughts may be important in a *moral* view, to remind us of our dependence on God, of our duty to him, and of our obligations to one another, which, while the course of nature is uniform and unvaried, are exceedingly prone to forget.

We must wait with *hope*. If the world was governed by fate, or by mechanical causes, without a superintending providence, we might despair of rain, whenever we found that nature had fallen into a course, which diverted the clouds and waters from

us ; for what counter cause could reverse this course? But since there is, at the head of the universe, a good and wise Being, who suspends, directs and countermands the motions of nature, as he pleases, we may, in the most unpromising seasons, hope for the return of his smiles, and trust him to give us showers, or provide for us in such other ways as his wisdom sees best ; and we may proceed in the regular line of our duty, committing ourselves to him, as a faithful creator.

We must wait on God with hearts prepared *thankfully* to receive returning favors. If every good gift comes from him, in every gift we must acknowledge him. Rains and fruitful seasons are such common favors, that we are apt to view them as coming of course, to calculate upon them as certain events and to ascribe more to our own prudence and industry, than to the providence of God. Droughts teach us how impotent are all our powers and how vain are all our labors, without the blessing of God. While we seek rain by prayer, we should prepare our hearts to receive it with gratitude. And God grant, that we may soon hear this call to thanksgiving and praise.

The present drought is much the most severe, that we, in this vicinity, have known for more than forty years. It is now almost seven weeks, since there has been a shower. It is a happy circumstance, that the commencement of the drought was not at such a period as to cut short our early mowing and our former harvest. The latter mowing and harvest, how soon soever rains may be sent, will doubtless be exceedingly diminished. God grant, they may not be totally destroyed, nor the seeding of our fields for the coming year be entirely prevented.

We certainly ought to view this drought as a great calamity. But if we apply it to awaken those pious sentiments and virtuous resolutions, which

are too easily lost in times of plenty, it will then become a blessing. For many years past, our husbandry has been remarkably successful, and our wealth has abundantly increased. It becomes us to enquire, whether our gratitude to God, our zeal for his worship, our charity to one another, our liberality to the needy, have been answerable to the blessings which we have received.

When we see our fields parched with thirst, our pastures drying up, our corn and grass withering away, let us enquire, whether religion is not declining around us, and the fruits of holiness decaying in our souls. We think it time to call on God to send rain on the earth : Is it not time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon us ? The prophet Hosea speaks of some in his day, who, in a time of drought, not only prayed in God's house, but also howled on their beds and in their private apartments ; but, he says, though they cried, they cried not to God with their hearts, and though they returned, they returned not to the Most High ; for they assembled themselves only for corn and wine, and they rebelled against him. In such a time as this it becomes us to call on God for his kind and refreshing showers. But if we have nothing higher in view, than to obtain the fruits of the earth, that we may eat and drink, enjoy the pleasures of sense, and accumulate worldly property, there is no more piety in our praying for rain, than in our going to market with our corn. While we pray for earthly goods, we must seek the grace of God to dispose us to a just and charitable use of them, to awaken in us pious and thankful affections, and to enliven our souls in all the duties of religion. We must pray, that God would not only revive our fields with his showers, but revive his work by his heavenly influences, and in wrath remember mercy.

We see our dependence on God for the success of our literal husbandry, and we implore his blessing. We are as dependent on him for the success of the spiritual husbandry. "Paul may plant and Apollos water; but it is God who gives the increase." Do we also pray, that he would multiply the seed sown, increase the fruits of our righteousness, and make all grace abound toward them who sow the seed, and toward those who receive it?

My brethren, the seed of God's word is sown among you, and though with a feeble, I hope, not with a sparing or negligent hand. Does it enter deep in the soil, take root and bear fruit? I fear, that some seeds fall by the way side—some among thorns and some in rocky places; and there is some ground on which none appears to fall. Is there much ground so well prepared, that the seeds sown, take root and bring forth fruits in plenty?—Let all take heed how they hear, and take heed that they do hear. Though God has withheld the rain, he has not withheld the word. But some withhold themselves from it. Though he has not sent a famine of the word, yet some create a famine to themselves by neglecting the word. If men starve in the midst of plenty, who makes the famine? Man, it is true, cannot live by bread alone; there must be a heavenly influence to render it nourishing. Is this influence withheld? It is because men seek it not, or improve it not when it is sent. The promise of the spirit is more full and explicit, than the promise of rain; if we seek the latter rather than the former, it is because we have the latter chiefly at heart. A spiritual is more calamitous than a natural drought. The showers of grace are more important, than showers of rain. Seek those with earnestness, and prepare yourselves with diligence to receive them. "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. It is time to seek the

Lord, till he come and rain righteousness." "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord. His going forth is prepared as the morning, and he shall come to you as the rain; as the latter and the former rain on the earth."

Act with the same wisdom in your religious, as in your literal husbandry. "The husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be patient therefore, brethren, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

You think, perhaps, that in the religious life you are under great disadvantages, because the promised blessings are distant and out of sight, and are wholly objects of faith; and you imagine, that if these, like the blessings of your husbandry, were near and visible, you should more sensibly feel their influence, and be more actively engaged to obtain them.

But in this matter you reason erroneously. Look around on the men of the world. They are industrious in their callings, patient in their labours, cheerful in their self-denials, persevering in the most unpromising seasons; and yet they walk by faith as really as you do; for the object which they pursue is as really future and invisible, as that which you are pursuing.

The man who sows his grain, sees not the harvest but waits in hope of seeing it. The merchant who commits his treasure to the ocean, has not an immediate return, but he expects future gain. So it is in almost all secular labors. The object which prompts men to undertake, and encourages them to endure them, is as really distant and out of sight as your object is. And you have this advantage above the men of the world; your object is more certain, more important, and perhaps more near.

Worldly good is small, temporary, and transient : Heavenly happiness is infinite, permanent and eternal. Earthly designs are subject to a thousand disappointments, which human prudence and power cannot foresee or prevent. Who could foresee the present drought, or prevent it, if it had been foreseen ? How greatly will this derange our worldly schemes : But it need not at all disconcert your spiritual designs. In the pursuit of your eternal interest there is no hazard, no uncertainty, but what arises from your own negligence and inattention. You think it difficult to walk by faith in the religious course ; but in your secular business you walk by faith every day. Were it not for that faith, which looks forward and realizes things, at present, unseen, all your worldly labours would immediately cease. The gospel in requiring you to live by faith, requires no more than what you find necessary, and think reasonable with regard to this world. However difficult a life of faith may seem, you never make a difficulty of it in any thing but religion. What man ever thought of complaining, that seed time and harvest did not come together—that when he had sowed his grain, he could not immediately turn about and reap back ? Here every man has long patience, and waits, till he receives the former and the latter rain. Exercise equal faith and patience in religion, and you will inherit the promises. It is natural to man to look forward, and seek future good : The fault is, that with the eye of natural faith we look not far enough, nor at the right objects. Let us live by that faith, which looks above and beyond this world to the heavenly state. There we shall behold better things than we can find here. And to obtain those we have surer means, than we have to obtain the riches of the world. It is the direction of the Apostle, “ Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth ; seek the things

which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory. Look not at things which are seen, but at things which are not seen ; for the things which are seen, are temporal ; but the things which are not seen, are eternal.”

SERMON XVIII.

*Daniel's Prophecy relating to the time of the End,
opened and applied.*

DANIEL xii, 10.

None of the Wicked shall understand, but the Wise shall understand.

THIS observation may be applied generally. The difficulty of understanding religious truths arises not from the obscurity of the truths themselves, but from the perverseness of men's hearts. "He that doth evil, hateth the light."

But Daniel makes this observation with particular reference to a preceding prophecy. He had foretold some important events which were to be accomplished in a time called *the time of the end*. These events would be highly interesting to the people who should live in that time. He therefore describes them, not in symbols and figures, but in plain historical language. And no history of past events, written in so concise a manner, could be more easily understood, than this prophecy of future events; at least when the events come into existence. Hence the prophet says, "The wicked

will do wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand"—none who are fully determined to pursue their wicked designs, will so attend to this prophecy and its correspondent events, as to see its accomplishment. "But the wise," who are purified from the corruptions of their hearts, "will understand."

Our Saviour reprov'd the Jews for their inattention to, and ignorance of the prophecies which related to the then present times. This inattention was one principal cause of their general infidelity and subsequent ruin. A disregard to the prophecies describing the events of *our own* times will involve us in similar guilt and danger.

As we are undoubtedly in, or near the time to which the prophecy before us refers, every man who is wise will wish to understand it. And you will think it my duty to assist your enquiries by giving you the result of my own.

My subject will not lead me to a discussion of party politics, but to an elucidation of the sacred scriptures. And I shall strictly follow the example of Christ and his apostles, who opened the prophetic scriptures relating to their own times; referred to existing facts in which the prophecies were fulfilled; and from thence made such religious and moral deductions, as were appropriate to the times.

Some preliminary observations will be necessary to the introduction of our main subject.

You well know, that Daniel and John have foretold a general apostacy in the Christian church, which would be accompanied with great oppression and persecution, and would continue 1260 years. Such an apostacy, you know, has already existed for many ages, and still exists under the name of *popery*. When 1260 years from its commencement shall have expired, it will then come to its end. It is generally supposed to have begun in the

year 606, when, by an edict of the eastern tyrant *Phocas*, the bishop of Rome was made *universal* bishop, and the saints were delivered into his hands. If we compute from that time according to our present callendar, the end of this period will be in the year 1866. If we compute, as perhaps we ought, according to the calendar in use in the times of the prophets, popery will come to its end in the year 1842. On either computation we are very near the time of the end, and may expect to see, as we actually do see, great and tremendous events.

Not only Daniel and John, but Paul and Peter, and indeed many of the prophets, expressly declare, that at the time, when the papacy is fast declining to its end, there will be a daring and awful eruption of atheism and infidelity, and that this will be accompanied with an unusual corruption of morals, and with horrible wars among the nations of the earth.

The most particular account which we have of this and its concomitant events, is in the preceding prophecy of Daniel. To this therefore I now request your serious and candid attention.

At the 36th and following verses of the preceding chapter, Daniel foretels and describes a *king*, who shall do according to his will. I wish you to bear in mind, that, in the prophetic style, a *king* signifies, not a *particular man*, but a *kingdom*; a *state*, or a *nation* under any form of government.

This king, who shall appear near the time of the end, is described by several remarkable characters—by characters, all of which can never be supposed to exist in two different nations; and cannot possibly exist in two nations at or near the same time.

“He shall do according to his will, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished.” He will be a warlike power; will extend his conquests with unusual rapidity; will exercise a capricious

sovereignty over the nations which fall under his domination ; will make his own pleasure, not any law human or divine, the rule and measure of his conduct ; and will prosper till the end of those perilous times, which shall come on the guilty nations.

“ He shall exalt himself and shall magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods.” He shall openly renounce the supreme God with blasphemous expressions of contempt, denying that there is any God in the universe, or any invisible power, which men need to worship or to fear.

“ Neither shall he regard the God of *his fathers.*” This abolition of religion will be accomplished *suddenly*, by an act of the existing government ; not, as in other instances, by a gradual declension in a succession of generations. The people, by a decree of their own constituted rulers, will at once reject the God, who was acknowledged by their fathers and immediate predecessors.

“ Neither shall he regard the desire of women, nor regard any God.” This *desire of women* being connected with *any God*, must signify some wonderful person, who had been an object of expectation and desire among the Jewish women. And we all know that the women among the Jews were remarkably desirous of being the mothers of children, and each wished to be the mother of the promised seed of the woman. The Messiah therefore must be here intended. He was eminently the desire of women. The meaning of this expression is, that the infidel power foretold would not regard the Redeemer, or the religion which he taught, but would contemptuously trample on all his doctrines and institutions, and “ would magnify himself above all.”

“ But in his estate,” or instead of the Messiah, “ he shall honour the god of forces ;” or gods protectors ; certain tutelary gods. “ He shall honour

them with gold and silver and precious stones and pleasant things ; thus shall he do in the strong holds with a strange or foreign god, whom he shall acknowledge and increase with glory, and he shall cause them to rule over many." Though he shall worship no *real* God, yet he will introduce from *another nation* an imaginary god, and will set up a fanciful representation of it in a place of public resort, will bestow upon it costly ornaments, and, in mockery of the worship of the true God, will pay to this phantom a kind of divine honour. In conjunction with this, he shall contrive other allegorical gods. And the supporters of this mock worship he shall exalt to places of authority, and shall give them power to spread this impiety as far as their influence can extend.

"And he shall divide the land for gain," or for a price. He shall assume into his hands the estates, which had been held by others, and shall dispose of them for a price to such men as will be subservient to his views.

These are the characters of that remarkable power, which shall appear in the last days. If all these characters are to be found, or have lately been found in any power or state now existing, this indubitably is the wonderful king or kingdom intended in the prophecy.

A writer of our own,* in some late "conjectures on the prophecies," says, "From the present time to the complete destruction of the *popish* powers, infidelity and wickedness will abound, and divine judgments will be poured on the inhabitants of the world ; and it is not unreasonable to suppose, that the tremendous scenes described by the prophet (Daniel) have, some of them, in a remarkable manner, been accomplished in the *French revolution*."

* BACON.

Mr. Faber, an English writer on the prophecies, has particularly and luminously applied Daniel's description of the infidel king to revolutionary France.

I shall give you a concise view of his illustrations on the subject.

The French revolution coincides with the time marked in the prophecy, "the time of the end;" the time when we were to expect, and when many did expect some great change in the political state of Europe.

France has done "according to her will;" has stretched her conquering hand over many nations; has been successful in her enterprizes, and has paid no regard to the laws of God, or to the rights of men, or to treaties of her own.

The French republic, in a national convention, chosen by the people and consisting of nearly 700 men, "exalted herself above every God," openly denied the existence of a Deity and the immortality of the soul, and proclaimed a God to be a phantom, and death an eternal sleep. Such was the atheistical rage of the times, that for a man to mention the name of God, unless it were in a way of contempt, would expose him, not only to be insulted as a fool, but to be arrested and punished as a fanatic.

They regarded not *him* who was the "desire of women," the Messiah, but declared him to be an impostor, shut up the churches, made it penal to open them for religious worship, and even altered the calendar, that the Lord's day might no longer be known.

This revolution was effected *suddenly*, by national authority in a representative assembly, so that it might properly be said, "they regarded not the God of their fathers"—the God of their immediate predecessors.

Yet they "honoured a *strange god*." The Romans deified liberty; and are said to be the only

ancient nation that placed this among the objects of worship. Republican France introduced this foreign god, and in contempt of the worship of the Deity, paid religious honors to this phantom of divinity.

In conjunction with this, they honoured with public festivals several other allegorical gods, such as reason, the country, the constitution, the virtues. And in their list of tutelary gods they enrolled several dead men, who had been distinguished in life by their atheism and their vices; as Voltaire, Rousseau, Murat and others. Churches were converted into repositories for the remains of such men; and these remains were placed on the high altar; and to them incense was offered.

France has caused the supporters of these fantastic, tutelary gods "to rule over many." It has been her avowed principle to spread anarchy and atheism among other nations, and thus prepare them for submission to her power. For this purpose cunning and deceitful emissaries have been employed, secretly to sow the seeds of revolution.

France has honoured these imaginary gods "with gold and silver and precious stones." The ornaments of ancient churches were taken by force, and conferred in rich abundance on the tutelary gods of infidelity. The images and treasures of the churches in Italy were conveyed by the French army into France, to be deposited in the temples of the strange gods.

The republican government "divided the land for a price." The lands of the crown, the nobility and the church were taken from their former possessors and sold for a price, but for a moderate price, to the adherents of the new government, to preclude the possibility of a counter revolution. It has not been uncommon for successful invaders to distribute conquered lands gratuitously among fa-

avourite officers. But to sell them for a price is so singular a measure, that it was worthy of being pointed out in prophecy, as a discriminating mark of this wonderful power.

Such were the characteristic marks of revolutionary France, during the existence of what was called a republican government, as every one knows, who has been in the least acquainted with the transactions of that period.

Since the present emperor has risen to the supreme authority, an alteration has been made in a remarkable consonance to prophecy.

St. John in the revelation, speaking of the present period, says, "Three unclean spirits went forth out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, to gather the kings of the earth together to the battle of the great day of God Almighty." The dragon is that old serpent the devil, who is the prime mover in the awful scene of destruction. The beast is a tyrannical civil power. The false prophet is the papal hierarchy. The two latter, under the influence of the devil, co-operate in gathering the kings to the battle of the great decisive day. The present emperor has, in some respects, meliorated the condition of France. He has replaced the ancient calendar, permitted divine worship, and restored the papal hierarchy; but restored it in a state of dependance upon, and subservience to the civil power; so that infidelity and popery—the civil and the ecclesiastical powers will act in conjunction, and will continue so to act in future wars, according to John's prediction.

I have now given you a view of this remarkable prophecy concerning a king or kingdom which should arise in the last days, and have pointed out the characters in a modern nation, which are supposed to correspond to the prophet's description. You will judge whether the application be just.

What follows, in this and the next chapter, is chiefly future, but so plainly expressed, that there is little difficulty in understanding the most prominent events.

The prophet, speaking of this mighty king or nation, says, "At the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him, and the king of the north shall come against him, like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen and many ships."

Mr. Faber is in doubt, who can be intended by the king of the *south*. The king of the *north* he supposes to be *Russia*. But *Russia*, lying out of the papal territory, does not seem to come within the scheme of prophecy. Nor do I find that any nation, not existing in the time when the prophecy was uttered, is so particularly and distinctly mentioned.

Why may we not suppose, that Spain with Portugal is the king of the south, and Britain the king of the north? If France be the infidel power described, the present opposition made to her designs by Britain and Spain may be the event intended by the pushing from the south and the whirlwind from the north. There is no continental power south of France, but Spain and Portugal. Britain lies in a northern direction from France, and she hath many ships.

What will be the event of the conflict with respect to these two powers, the prophet has not said. But if these be the powers intended by the kings of the south and of the north, they probably will survive the conflict. Other nations, as Prussia, Austria, Holland, Switzerland, have pushed at France; but have soon fallen, and been trampled under her feet. Those therefore are not mentioned in the prophecy. If these two kings were, in like manner, to be subjugated, I see no reason why they should be named rather than the other. If Spain should

fall, probably it will rise again, for there must, before the end comes, be somewhere a king of the south.

Be this as it may, it is very certain, the power of France is not now to be broken, and the efforts of these two kings will have no other effect, than to check her progress and divert her course. For the prophet immediately adds, "And he," or *yet he*, i. e. this victorious king "shall enter into the countries and shall overflow and pass over."

To understand this we must observe, that prophecy foretels the existence of the *mahometan* apostacy, and its duration for 1260 years. History informs us, that this began about the same time with the establishment of popery, and consequently will come to its end about the same time. Both appear now to be fast tending to their fall. The Ottoman empire, as well as the papal hierarchy, is feeble and tottering. Within a few years past a formidable and armed insurrection has appeared in Turkey against its established religion and government.

It is probable, that, as soon as the operations in Spain shall cease, whether by conquest or disappointment, the emperor of France, with his confederate papal kings, will send an army into Turkey. By the subjugation of Austria the way is completely open for such an expedition. And this is probably intended by the prophet, when he says, "The king shall enter into the countries and shall overflow and pass over." He shall bear down all opposition and shall bring that region under his dominion.*

* Mahometism and Popery will probably come to their end, as nearly at the same time, so much in the same manner, that is, by the predominance of *Atheism*. There have lately been many publications in Paris exposing the gross absurdities of popery; and one in particular concerning the power of the popes, which the Parisian Reviewers highly applaud, as written, not only with great force, but also with much *caution and discretion*; "for delicate eyes can bear only a *half light*." The *full light*, which is to follow, when the eyes are strengthened, will doubtless be directed against *Christianity itself*. It is to be expected, that when popery is nearly exterminated, a bold attack will

“ He shall pass over.” He is described as moving by land.* But here he shall pass over some water or narrow straight. This can be no other than the straight of Constantinople ; for we immediately find him in Palestine. “ He shall enter into the glorious land,” the land of Judea. “ And many shall be overthrown.” He shall obtain possession of that land and make great destruction in it.

“ He shall stretch forth his hand also upon the countries,” in the neighbourhood of Judea ; “ and the land of Egypt shall not escape. But Edom, Moab and the chief of the children of Ammon shall escape out of his hand.” The countries anciently called by those names shall escape his ravages, because they lie wholly out of his course in his march from Palestine to Egypt. “ But he shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver and over all the precious things of Egypt.” And some other nations in the African territory near Egypt, called “ Libyans and Ethiopians, or Cushites, shall be at

be made on the gospel, and that this attack will be supported by civil authority. “ The plan laid by the genius of *philosophy* will be accomplished by the genius of victory.”

When Turkey shall be invaded, we may expect that the invader, whoever he may be, will profess to admire the *Alcoran*. This is better adapted to the purposes of war and conquest, than the mild and pacific spirit of the gospel.

The *Alcoran*, however, will probably be new modeled. The dogmas and precepts, which relate to the mahometan religion, will be expunged ; but the more ferocious parts will be retained. There are now many atheists in Turkey. These will readily consent to the new modeled creed. Others, through fear, and by the influence of example, will do the same. An invader, spreading his conquests, will meet with no great difficulty in destroying the superstition of the country, and in substituting atheism under some specious name. Professing himself a musselman, extending his victories, and in all military appointments, giving a decided preference to atheists, he may soon effect a complete revolution in religion. See these thoughts more fully expressed in *The American Review*, No. 1, p. 186.

* It is remarkable, that Daniel's wilful king carries on all his operations by land. And though mention is made of a power which shall come against him with many ships, yet he is never described as meeting his enemy or doing his work by ships. We may hence probably conclude, that he never will possess a formidable navy, nor spread his conquests into any transmarine regions. If then we fall under his dominion, it will be in consequence of our own infatuation.

his steps"—or shall afford him all the assistance which he demands in his expedition.

While he is in Egypt, "tidings from the east and from the north shall trouble him." What these tidings will be the prophet has not informed us. But from what follows we may conclude, they will announce the approach of some unexpected enemy, and perhaps dangerous insurrections and a general revolt in Judea; for it is added, "Therefore shall he go forth" out of Egypt "*with great fury* to destroy and utterly to make away many." He will suppress the opposition, destroy great multitudes and recover possession of the country.

"And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain;" or in Jerusalem, which stands on a mountain between two seas, the dead sea and the Mediterranean.

Though he plants his tents and his palace here in full confidence of the continuance of his former successes, yet "he shall come to his end, and none shall help him." By what means he shall come to his end, the prophet has not said. As in other great events, so in this, human agency will doubtless be employed. But the manner of expression leads us to suppose, that there will be some grand and awful display of divine power, against which no human efforts will avail to defeat the concluding catastrophe of this mighty Drama. Paul, foretelling the destruction of the man of sin, says, "The Lord will consume him with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy him with the brightness of his coming."

If we were to judge only from the history of former nations, we should naturally conclude, that the gigantic power of the French empire, which has grown so fast and spread so wide, must, sooner or later, fall into ruins. This has been the fate of all mighty empires in ages past. And if this is the empire predicted by Daniel, we then have the word

of prophecy, in addition to the analogy of providence, to assure us that it is destined to the same fate.

This event cannot be very remote. It may be within about 50 years, or it may be at the distance of half a century.

Daniel proceeds in detailing the great events of this momentous period.

“ At that time,” or about the time when the before mentioned events shall be accomplished, “ shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of *thy* people ; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation to that time ; and at that time shall the children of *thy* people be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the books.”

Michael was considered as the guardian angel of the Jewish nation. The Jews were the children of Daniel's people. These kept, and many of them still keep, a register of their tribe and families, in expectation of repossessing their ancient inheritances. These, at the time of the end, will be delivered from their present dispersions and oppressions, brought home to their own country and resettled in a national and converted state. This will be a time of unprecedented trouble ; but in the general convulsions, they will be delivered.

By what means their conversion and restoration will be effected, other prophets have foretold. “ A great nation, shadowing the sea with the wings of their ships, having converted them to the faith by the labours of their missionaries, shall bring them as a present to the Lord of hosts, even to mount Zion.”

“ And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” These are the ten tribes, or the house of *Israel* in distinction from the house of *Judah*. The ten tribes have long been considered as lost

and swallowed up in other nations; as "sleeping in the dust of the earth." But many of the prophets foretel their final restoration. "They shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." They will generally be found, and will acknowledge their descent from Jacob. Many of them will embrace the gospel and obtain everlasting life. But some will retain their infidelity to their shame and everlasting contempt. Exactly parallel to this prophecy is Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones in the valley, which were brought together, bone to its bone, covered with flesh and sinews, animated with breath, and made to stand on their feet, an exceeding great army. "These," says the Almighty, "are the *whole* house of *Israel*. Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and will bring you to the land of *Israel*."

There are now great researches making by foreign missionaries for the ten tribes. And there have been discovered, in the East Indies, considerable bodies of people, who call themselves the sons of *Israel*, and who possess those parts of the Old Testament, which were written before the captivity of the ten tribes; but not those parts which were written later. These were captivated about 150 years before the kingdom of *Judah*, and therefore could not have had much of the Old Testament besides the books of Moses. That portion of the Bible, which they have, is written in an ancient Hebrew character.

The prophet next foretels, that the conversion of the *Jews* and *Israelites*, as well as of heathens, will be effected by the labours of missionaries. "They that be *wise*," or they that be *teachers*, "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that *turn many to righteousness* as the stars forever and

ever.—And many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.”

The gospel, we all know, was first spread in the world by missions ; and we are assured by prophecy, that the diffusion of it in the last days, and the conversion of Jews and heathens will be effected by similar means. And, indeed, it can be effected in no other way. “ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. How shall men believe in him, of whom they have not heard ? how shall they hear without a preacher ? and how shall men preach except they be sent ? ”

The missionary spirit of the present day bears a striking resemblance to the tenor of prophecy. Such a zeal for the spread of the gospel, as now appears, has never been known since the apostolic age. This is a new era, in the Christian church. There are in our nation many missionary societies, and the greater part of them lately instituted. Besides these, there are many tract, and bible societies recently formed for supplying the poor with the holy scriptures and other religious books. There is a remarkable spirit of liberality, patriotism and piety, prompting *Christians* to contribute to the important and noble purposes of these institutions.

The exertions in our nation, though they seem great, are small in comparison with those, which have been made, and are still making in Europe, especially in Great Britain. In that nation, notwithstanding the prodigious expenses of the war, and the support of a great number of charitable institutions for the benefit of the poor, immense sums are contributed for the spreading of the glorious gospel by the labors of missionaries and by the translation, printing and distribution of the inspired writings. Missionaries are sent into Africa and Asia, as well as into the unenlightened parts of Europe. The inhabitants of India, China, Turkey and Arabia, be-

gin to read in their own tongue the wonderful works of God. The Bible, in whole or in part, is translated and printed in ten of the Eastern languages, and is already commenced in the Chinese language. The good work is remarkably progressing. This is a substitute for that gift of tongues, by which the gospel was published in the Apostle's times. As the art of printing was then unknown the gift of tongues was necessary. This was both a mean of conveying the gospel, and, at the same time, an evidence of its truth. We have new evidence of its divinity, from the fulfilment of prophecy, and means of spreading it by the happy invention of printing.

No sensible and serious person, who considers what has been done and is still doing to enlighten ignorant nations and spread among them the tidings of salvation, can doubt but that it is a work of God which he will make to prosper.

Such a work the prophet foretels. It may meet with opposition, but it will prevail. As one says, "Let infidels despise the passion for missions, and laugh at the heroic passion for saving souls, we know assuredly, that it is the very same passion, which moved the breast of the Saviour, when he wept over Jerusalem; and which inspired the holy fishermen of Judea, and the zealous tent maker of Tarsus, when they went forth accompanied by the divine presence to spread abroad in every place the sweet savour of the Redeemer's name."

I have now opened to you a most interesting prophecy, relating to the times in which we live.

The improvement of it you may expect in another discourse.

SERMON XIX.



*Daniel's Prophecy relating to the time of the End,
opened and applied.*



DANIEL xii. 10.

None of the Wicked shall understand, but the Wise shall understand.

THESSE words refer to a preceding prophecy, in which Daniel predicts certain great events to be accomplished in the last times, or towards the end of that period of 1260 years, in which the papacy shall exist. These events he describes in such a familiar manner, that he says, 'Though men resolved to do wickedly will not understand them, the wise, who seriously attend to them, will understand them, and will see their accordance to his description, whenever they shall come to pass.

The events, which are the subject of the prophecy contained in this and a part of the preceding chapter, I have in a former discourse endeavored to illustrate. I shall now lead your minds to an improvement of the subject.

I. We have before us a clear and decisive evidence of the truth and divinity of the holy scriptures.

“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” They who lived in the days of miracles had evidence, which we have not, of the truth of revelation. But from the fulfilment of many prophecies since their days we have evidence which they had not. When, in the scriptures, events are foretold, which human sagacity could not have conjectured ; and when we see in history the exact accomplishment of these events, we must conclude, that the predictions were uttered by divine inspiration, and the events brought to pass by divine providence.

Some infidels, to confute the evidence from prophecy, have foolishly alledged, that the prophecy was written after the event. This has been objected particularly against Daniel's prophecies. To this objection we need no other answer than what we see with our own eyes. The prophecies are now fulfilling. Many events foretold in them have been accomplished in our own days and in the days of our fathers. And we well know the prophetic books to be of great antiquity. Porphyry made this allegation in the third century. We have his testimony to their ancient existence. We must therefore allow them to be given by divine inspiration ; for by the concession of infidels they have accurately described the predicted events.

The predictions now fulfilling must convince every man of ordinary intellect and common candour, that the scriptures are divine. Infidelity, in such a day as this, indicates an awful depravity of heart. The wise will understand. They, who will not understand, are bent on doing wickedly. Such men are not easily reclaimed. If an honest man has doubts concerning the authority of the scriptures, he certainly will wish his doubts removed ; he will

apply himself to diligent and prayerful enquiry, and in this way they will be removed. The man, who labors to strengthen his doubts, and to infuse them into others, will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived; but "the meek God will guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way."

II. The prophecies, which we opened in our former discourse, clearly show us the times in which we live. And they are certainly momentous times. We ought to realize our situation, learn our duty and attend to the means of our safety.

Calculation from the era, in which the papacy commenced, brings us down nearly to the time of its end. And the events of the present day are undeniably such, as the scripture assures us will appear at that time.

A power has arisen bearing all the discriminating signatures of that wonderful kingdom which was to appear in the last days. Its character, exploits and successes are the same.

Daniel and John, Peter and Paul have all described the last days as distinguished by the prevalence of infidelity in the Christian world. They have spoken of atheism as increasing with the decline of popery, until both coalesce into one. This we see verified. Atheism stands forth in Europe with greater effrontery than in preceding ages. The mummeries of the papal superstition are, indeed, more generally despised; but with them the pure and rational religion of the gospel is more generally rejected. Popery is declining, not so much from a regard to true religion, as from a disregard to all religion.

If we can form an opinion from credible information; from the open avowal of sentiments; from the zealous circulation and ready reception of licentious publications, and from the immoral lives of many, on this side of the Atlantic, we may con-

clude that our own country is deeply tainted with the corruptions, which have brought down divine judgments on a great portion of Europe. Many who would not choose to be called atheists, and who perhaps ought not to be called such, maintain and endeavour to defend the principles, which lead to atheism. There are those who say, "If a man acts according to his opinion, whatever that opinion may be, he acts morally right." What is this but to prostrate the difference between truth and falsehood—between right and wrong? It is implicitly to say, "There is no God, or he has no moral character, every man's opinion is the standard of truth and rectitude for himself, and no man is accountable to any but himself." On this principle religion is banished and society will be dissolved.

It is not uncommon to hear men say, "religion and civil government have no connexion, and consequently religion does not concern men as rulers, or concern men in the choice of rulers." What is this less than to say, "there is no such thing as religion?" For if it does not concern men in the relation of rulers, neither does it concern them in the relation of parents, or children, or tradesmen, or citizens. Whom then does it concern? Religion consists in a regard to all the duties of our various relations. If we exclude it from the relations of life, we exclude it from the world.

How many advocate the sentiment, that there is no future punishment, but good and bad men, if they exist at all, will be alike happy after death? The basis of this sentiment must be either that there is no difference between moral good and evil, or that God is not a moral governor, and has no right to punish. If this be a truth, we may all believe it, and may all act upon it; for we may be governed by truth. But if all men should act on this sentiment, we could not live in society. That cannot be

a truth, which, in its direct influence, would depopulate the world.

The Apostle Peter, speaking of the scoffers, who should come in the last days, says, "they will deny Moses' account of the flood, by which the world, being overflowed with water, perished." And we know that, in the present day, there are such scoffers both in conversation and writing. And these certainly must be infidels. Isaiah, Jesus Christ, Paul, Peter and the evangelists affirm a general deluge, which swept away the inhabitants of the earth. The man therefore who denies this, denies the authority of the whole scriptures.

Among the gloomy signs of the last days, one breaks forth of a different complexion. We see a wonderful zeal to spread the gospel by sending missionaries among unenlightened nations, as Daniel, John and others have foretold. We hear of their success in remote regions. We hear of new movements among the Jews, and of the discovery of people bearing strong marks of the ten tribes, who had for ages, been buried in obscurity.

From these appearances we must conclude that the end of popery and infidelity is swiftly advancing. There may be an awful conflict; but truth will prevail.

The end of these corruptions is what all christians have expected, because it is expressly foretold; but concerning the *manner* in which it would come, many have entertained incorrect ideas. They have supposed, that papal and infidel nations would be reformed by rational conviction—that light, breaking in upon them, would discover to them their errors, and turn them from the power of satan unto God.

But nations, having sunk into deep corruption under the advantages of revelation, are seldom reclaimed merely by gentle means. There will be a

concurrence of divine judgments. By these a great portion of the enemies of truth are destroyed; "and the remnant are affrighted and give glory to God."

III. If we are now in the last times, great troubles are to be expected. These will fall with greatest weight on the open enemies of the truth.

Daniel, speaking of the present day, says, "There shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." St. Paul also warns us, that "in the last days perilous times will come." And he tells how they will come. "Men shall be lovers of themselves, proud, blasphemers, incontinent, fierce, covenant-breakers, disobedient to authority, despisers of good men, false accusers, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God."—"They shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy."

Such a state of religion and morals is in its nature perilous. It subverts government, or renders it capricious and oppressive. It destroys all confidence in government, and mutual confidence among citizens. When the Jews regarded not God, but proceeded from evil to evil, the prophet warned them, "Take ye heed every man of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother."

Another cause of troublous times will be the malignant influence of insidious emissaries in disseminating licentious principles, in setting nation against nation, and in creating divisions and inflaming animosities in the same nation. John foretels, that in this period the spirits of devils will go forth to gather the kings of the earth together to the battle of the great day. In reference to the same period Peter says, "There shall be *false teachers* among you, who *privily* shall bring in damnable heresies, denying the Lord who bought them, and bringing on themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the

way of truth shall be evil spoken of. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, despisers of government, and not afraid to speak evil of dignities."

You will observe, that Peter speaks of these emissaries, not only as opposing religion and government, but as carrying on their nefarious designs *privily* and with *secret artifice*, so that many will *unsuspectingly* follow their pernicious ways, until destruction comes upon them swiftly. They will profess to respect rational religion and constitutional government; they will say, "There is no increase of infidelity or of anarchy, as some whimsical or dishonest men pretend; but only an increase of knowledge and liberality." Thus they will conceal the hand, that, when matters are prepared, they may more effectually strike the blow. But discerning men will see through the disguise and perceive the danger. Paul says of them who resist the truth, "The time will come, when they shall proceed no further, for their folly shall be made manifest to all men."

Those will be times of great trouble by reason of unusual wars and convulsions in the earth. A king will stretch forth his hand on the countries, and many shall be overthrown. The kings of the earth will be gathered together to battle. The mighty power which has cast down many, will, in his turn, come to his end. His dying convulsions and expiring throws will shake many nations.

The *present* is a time of uncommon trouble. Such extensive wars, numerous revolutions, wanton spoliations, and national distresses have seldom, if ever, been experienced.

But the end is not yet. Many countries are still to be overthrown. I fear that greater troubles than the past are yet to come; these may fall on nations which have hitherto escaped; perhaps on us.

The administration of government in the papal territories of Europe has long been rigorous and oppressive. We have expected a change. We have hoped that the change would be effected in an easy way, by increasing light and virtue among the people. We have sometimes, in our national pride, flattered ourselves, that by our example of virtue and liberty, union and happiness, we should contribute to a reform in the corrupt and despotic governments of the old world. But we now see our error. There is danger that our example will fail. The old corrupt governments will not be reformed by any example. They will be, or rather have been subverted by an invading power, and succeeded by governments more absolute and despotic. The latter probably will continue till the time, when a general reformation in religion begins. The gospel, when it has its proper influence, will meliorate the condition of men. Then they will lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.

The spirit of prophecy, when it warns us of troublous times, kindly informs us what it is that makes the times troublous. It is the wickedness of mankind. They who would escape the troubles, must avoid that wickedness, which is the cause of them, and use their influence to correct the false sentiments and reform the corrupt manners of all around them.

This leads us to add,

IV. If we, as a people, hope to escape the evils, which are come and coming on guilty nations, we must avoid an adoption of their licentious principles, and an imitation of their corrupt manners; and must cautiously shun all such connexion with them, as would naturally tend to introduce those principles and manners.

The angel says to Daniel, "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was—but the children of

thy people shall be delivered." If the converted Jews will be delivered, we may believe that Christian nations, who maintain the purity of their religion, will be delivered also.

John, describing the awful judgments of the last times, stops in the midst of his subject, to interpose an exhortation from the great head of the church. "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." And foretelling the catastrophe of mystical Babylon, he addresses an admonitory caution to the church; "I heard a voice from heaven, saying, come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues; for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities."

If there be in the world an antichristian power which is soon to fall, (and we all know there is such a power,) it is our wisdom to stand at such a cautious distance from her, as not to be crushed by her fall, and involved in her ruin. It is certain, that they who come into her embraces, will share in her catastrophe. On this subject the scripture is so plain and explicit, that every one who regards its authority, will feel the solemn importance of its warnings.

The warnings of prophecy are repeated and enforced by the voice of providence. The dreadful calamities of the times have fallen on that part of the world which is nominally Christian; and fallen with accumulated weight on the *papal* nations.

The heathen nations are comparatively in a state of tranquility. Hence they are in a condition to receive the messengers sent to carry the gospel among them. Such was the state of the world in the times of the Apostles. While the tumults and persecu-

tions in Judea rendered their residence there unsafe, peace among the gentiles encouraged their visits to them and facilitated their success.

I have said, the calamities of the times have fallen with principal severity on the *papal* nations. Some states *called protestant* have, indeed, shared in these calamities ; as the United Provinces, the Cantons of Switzerland and the dominions of Prussia. But it is the religion, not the name of *protestantism*, which will be a security. Some portions of those states have been professedly *papal* ; and here have been the hot beds of atheism and illuminism. " Holland has been the grand asylum of the infidelity of the north. Its polluted presses have teemed with the blasphemous productions of Voltaire and his associates. The Helvetic Confederacy was in name partly *papal* and partly *protestant*, but in reality tainted with atheism to its very core. And Voltaire boasted, that in Calvin's own town, Geneva, there were only a few beggarly fellows, who believed in Christ ; and from thence to Berne there was not a christian to be found." Frederick the great, the king of Prussia, patronized Voltaire, and co-operated with him in spreading the principles of atheism in his dominions. It is therefore no wonder, that the judgments of God have fallen in so awful a manner on those countries.

A writer of our own* observes, " that the French nation are made strong, as the Chaldeans were of old, to execute God's judgments on a guilty world. Though *they* mean not so, yet they appear at this day to be instruments in God's hand for this purpose."

It is remarkable, that *that* nation, which first openly renounced the Deity, was the first to feel his judgments, and then to be the principal executioner

* BACON.

of his judgments on others ; and that she has all along been a principal sufferer.

It will be natural to enquire, what *our* nation must expect in these troublous times. But I cannot tell, unless I am first told, how she will conduct.

Our nation is no where a *distinct* subject of prophecy. This country was unknown in the days of the prophets. If it was then inhabited, it was not in a state of civilization. The prophecies which respect us must be general, and the same which respect others of similar character.

We are a people who enjoy the gospel. God makes a difference between *heathen* nations, and *apostate* nations. So he evidently does at this day—so he has ever done in former days. He said to his ancient people, “ You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” If we put the gospel from us in principle and practice—if we so intimately associate with corrupt and infidel nations, as to be contaminated with their licentious principles and assimilated to them in their vicious manners, we shall most certainly share with them in the plagues, which are come and coming on them. But if, according to the express command of our Lord, we come out from among them, and are careful to preserve the purity, and extend the influence of the gospel, we shall enjoy a happy exemption from those dreadful calamities.

If, in this favoured and enlightened land, the time should come, when the people are content to live without a stated ministry ; or when the necessary support of the ministry is publicly withdrawn ; or when men of despicable education, licentious principles or corrupt morals are put in the place of gospel ministers ; or when open infidels and despisers of the gospel fill the several departments of government ; then we may be assured, that the judg-

ments of God are coming upon us, and they will not linger.

Our government is constitutionally republican. The maintenance of such a government depends on the virtue of the people; and national virtue depends on the influence of religion. And the national character is in nothing more clearly demonstrated, than in the choice which the people make of men to rule over them.

We are, by divine direction, to “look out from among us able men, men of truth, men who fear God and hate covetousness, and appoint *them* to be rulers.”—“He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.”—And it is the character both of a good ruler and a good citizen, that “in his eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoureth them who fear the Lord.”

If we believe the gospel to be true, and feel it to be important, let us openly profess and obey it, and declare to the world that we are not ashamed of it. This you will all acknowledge to be your duty, because you all know it to be expressly commanded. If I now call upon you to profess your faith in the gospel, I only lay before you a divine requirement. Why then do you neglect—why do you delay to do this?

You can assign no sufficient reason. You intend to perform the duty. But when? Is it not a *present* duty? If you delay to do that which you ought to do without delay, you live in continued disobedience.

But, then, “let every one who nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.” If you call Christ your Lord, and eat and drink in his presence, and still are workers of iniquity, he will appoint you your portion with unbelievers.

God's judgments are abroad in the earth; learn righteousness. His judgments threaten our land;

prepare to meet him. He still suspends the execution of his severest wrath. In the mean time, he hearkens and hears, whether any man speak aright ; whether any man repent of his wickedness, saying, what have I done ?

A general reformation will certainly prevent our ruin. A few good men by their prayers may prevail to avert divine anger, and by their example may do much to restrain the progress of iniquity. At least they will save their own souls.

When you hear from the word of prophecy, that times of great trouble are before us, you feel for your children, who probably are to live in troublous times. What then ought you to do ?

Maintain religion in your houses ; command your children to keep the way of the Lord ; instruct them in this way ; walk before them in it. Thus you will best prepare them for the times, in which they are to live, whether they may be troublous or prosperous. Thus you will best assist them in preparing for that world, where no adversary can come. Encourage them in the practice and in the profession of religion ; warn them against the instructions which cause to err from the words of knowledge ; guard them against the connexions which would seduce them from the ways of virtue.

My young friends ; we fear that evil days are before you. The times in which you live are corrupt ; those in which you are to live may be more perilous. " Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil," and may be more so. Be ye well established in the principles of religion, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, nor moved from the hope of your calling.

Whatever may be the state of the country in future years, one thing is certain ; death and eternity are before you. Therefore attend immediately to

the work of your salvation. This is what first concerns you. It concerns you on this very day. Let this be a day of repentance—a day of salvation. Now, before you leave this house, make a dedication of yourselves to God; form a humble resolution of future piety and virtue; lift up a petition to God for his grace to confirm this resolution, and to assist your execution of it; encourage one another, in time to come, in pursuing a religious life; shun the company of the impious and profane; become the companions of them who fear God; join yourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, which shall not be forgotten.

If we could see you of the rising generation generally devoting yourselves to God, we might conclude, that there is a blessing in store for the land. God spared Nineveh in behalf of the children, who were too young to discern between good and evil. Much rather would he spare a guilty nation, whose children, as soon as they could discern between good and evil, chose the good and refused the evil; for then there would be a prospect, not only of the existence of religion for one generation more, but of the transmission of it to many future generations. In such a pleasing appearance we might apply the promise of God communicated to the people of Israel by the prophet Isaiah, “Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the clustre, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it; so will I do for my servants’ sake, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my holy mountain, and mine elect shall long inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.”

SERMON XX.



*Death and Judgment. A Discourse at the Funeral
of a Young Man.*



HEBREWS ix. 27.

*It is appointed to man once to die ; but after this the
judgment.*

WHILE we continue in this world, we experience a great variety of changes. We pass from childhood to youth ; some from youth to maturity ; a few from this to old age. We see many changes in our condition : The vicissitude of sickness and health in our bodies, of disappointment and success in our business, of grief and joy in our minds, of pain and satisfaction in our relations, of darkness and light in our prospects, is incident to us all.

But there is one change before us more important than all which precede it ; the change mentioned in our text. “ It is appointed to men to die.” This we have not yet experienced ; but we have seen it in others ; and we know it to be great. Death breaks our mortal connexions, separates us from

our earthly interests, seals up our corporeal senses, divests us of our animal powers, and consigns our fleshly part to the grave. What next ensues, sense cannot inform us; reason can make no certain discovery. Revelation only has brought life and immortality to light. This assures us, that beyond death there is a state of retribution, and that there every man will receive according to the deeds done in the body. Death considered as the termination of a state of trial, and the introduction to an eternal state of retribution, is a change more momentous than we can imagine.

The apostle teaches us, that this change is *certain*; "it is *appointed* to man."

There are other changes incident to men; but we know not that they are *appointed* to us, and we hope to escape them. Death is an event, and the grave is the house, appointed for all living. Here the rich and the poor, the young and the aged, the great and the small meet together, and there is no distinction. The sentence passed on our offending progenitor, is a sentence on all his descendants, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

Men are generally attentive to their worldly condition. They foresee probable evils and hide themselves. Against the dangers which threaten their temporal interests, they guard with prudent forethought. But how thoughtless are they of death? Other events, in comparison with this, are small; the means which we apply to prevent them, are of doubtful success; and perhaps the evils which we fear are but the creatures of our fear, and never will be realized. But death is certain. It is appointed to all. Its importance is infinite. The means in our hands to render its issue happy, if faithfully applied, are of infallible success. Why then do we neglect these, while we so assiduously apply the former?

There may be many causes. Death is so solemn a change, that many choose not to think of it at all. They labor rather to forget it, than to prepare for it.

Others put far from them the evil day. They know it is appointed for them ; but they hope the time is distant. This self-flattery blinds the minds, and stupifies the hearts of the young. To realize death, in all its gloomy circumstances, sinks their spirits, and deadens their sensual joys. They desire to see many days and to rejoice in them all, and, therefore, consider not the days of darkness, that they shall be many.

Preparation for death is a work, in which the depraved heart is reluctant to engage. It includes serious meditation, fervent prayer, deep repentance, humble reliance on mercy, diligent application to duty, the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts, a life of righteousness, godliness and sobriety. These things are contrary to the prevailing habits of corrupt minds.

There are many, who either do not believe, or have no impressive apprehension of a future state of retribution. They imagine either that death will terminate their existence, or that the mercy of God will make all men alike happy, and that consequently nothing done, or to be done by them, will have any influence in regard to their state after death. And as death is in itself a gloomy change, they think it their wisdom to exclude it from their thoughts, that they may pass through life more cheerfully.

But, however men may flatter themselves, death certainly awaits them ; and the time is at hand, when they will feel its power, and experience its consequences. The artifices they use to divert it from their thoughts, or to make it seem uninteresting, will neither prevent its approach, nor diminish its terrors when it comes. Our true wisdom is

to consider it in that light, in which scripture and reason represent it, as a change which will fix our eternal condition in happiness or misery ; to make it the subject of frequent meditation ; to bring it near to ourselves ; and to be always ready for it. For, as the apostle observes, We are to die but *once*. “ It is appointed to man *once* to die.”

There are many cases, in which we may make repeated experiments. If we fail in the first trial, we may renew it in a different form. If we succeed not in one way, we may hope to do better in another. If we have erred in our measures, we may possibly correct our mistake in a future essay, and thus retrieve our loss. But in relation to our eternal interest, there can be no such remedy after death, for we are to die but once : “ He that goeth down to the grave, shall no more return to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.” He shall no more hear the offers of pardon, or the calls to repentance—no more feel the strivings of the spirit—no more be allowed to converse with the word of salvation—no more stand in the place, where mercy is proclaimed to guilty mortals. There is no work nor device in the grave.

Were we sure of another season of probation, still it would be folly to neglect this ; for we never ought to commit an error for the sake of correcting it. There might, however, in this case, be some hope, that the ill consequences of previous neglect would teach us future wisdom. But as this is the only season, the neglect of it is folly—is madness in the extreme.

The errors men commit in their secular concerns usually proceed from ignorance. What man in his senses will do that, which he knows to be inconsistent with the end in view ? But in the concerns of futurity we cannot plead ignorance in excuse for the errors of our conduct, because we are fully instruct-

ed, in the word of God, what our interest is, and how we may secure it. The man who pursues a course of sin in direct opposition to his own knowledge, and thus plunges himself into misery, when he knows there is no after remedy, discovers a perverseness of heart, which probably would prevent a reformation, even though another trial were allowed him.

All the hope we have of future happiness, is derived from the word of God; for no where else do we learn, that sinners can obtain mercy. The same word, which offers pardon, states the terms of it. These are repentance and new obedience. This word further teaches us, that now is the accepted time, and the day of salvation, and that if we neglect our salvation in this accepted time, there is no escape. It, therefore, concerns every one to know in this his day the things, which belong to his peace.

The Apostle leads us, in the next place, to contemplate the solemn scene, which will open upon us after death. "It is appointed to man once to die, and *after this the judgment.*"

It is this which gives death its most awful importance. Death considered as the termination of our present mode of existence, and as the dissolution of all earthly connexions, is a solemn event. But when we consider it as an introduction to a new and unexperienced state of existence, in which we shall be happy or miserable for ever, according to the character formed in life, its magnitude rises beyond all conception.

The scripture teaches us, that the body laid in the dust will in some distant period be raised again. At what time the resurrection of the dead will be, we are not informed. So much, in general, we are taught, that it will be as soon as the great plan of providence in relation to this world is completed, and the succession of mortals is finished.

At that time all mankind in their new raised bodies will be called to judgment, and every one will be punished or rewarded according to the works performed and the character acquired in their probationary state.

Before this grand solemnity, and immediately after death, the immortal soul, dislodged from the body, will be consigned to its proper place, and will there exist in a degree of happiness or misery, until the grand and tremendous day of the Lord.

That the soul will exist in a separate state, during the time which intervenes between the death and the resurrection of the body, is a doctrine plainly taught in divine revelation. When the dust returns to dust as it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it. Our Saviour speaks of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. This survives the mortal body, and is not subject to death. When the beggar in the parable died, he was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom. When the rich man died and was buried, he lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments. The different states of existence assigned to these two opposite characters, were immediately after death; for, at this time, the rich man had brethren on earth, who were in danger of coming to the same place of torments. They were, like him, infidels who believed not Moses nor the prophets. Paul expected, at his death, to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. This expectation reconciled him to death; for in the presence of Christ, he knew, he should enjoy a felicity far superior to all the good, which he could find on earth. If he was to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord, then he was to exist; for if the soul died or slept with the body, what could there be, to be absent from it, or present elsewhere?

The separate existence of the soul is agreeable to reason and experience. We find even now, that

many of its operations are independent of the body. It, indeed, receives its ideas by the medium of the bodily senses; but when it has received them, it can review them, compare them, make deductions from them, without the external senses.

We are not to suppose, that in this separate state, rewards and punishments will be dealt out in their full measure. Their exact adjustment to the different degrees of purity or pravity in different characters, will doubtless be reserved to the time of the resurrection and judgment. Then God will render to every man according to his works, and thus display his righteousness before the assembled universe.

The happiness of the pious and the misery of the wicked, in the intermediate state, will probably be only such as results from their own tempers, and from the connexions into which they fall. And this will be inconceivably great. The rich man was tormented, and Lazarus was comforted.

Sinners, in the present state, delay their repentance in hope of long life. And some, perhaps, flatter themselves, that if they should be surprized by death, and misery should ensue, this misery is at an unknown and inconceivable distance; for, they imagine, they shall lie insensible during the long period between death and the resurrection. And the terror of their possible misery is greatly diminished, and almost lost, in the hope that they shall finally escape it, and in the idea of its immense distance, even though it should eventually befall them.

But the scripture leaves them no foundation for such flattering imaginations. It teaches them, that as life is the only probation, so in the moment when the soul quits this mortal frame, its eternal state commences. Their own observation must convince them, that life is short and uncertain, and that

death may, at any hour, arrest them. They have therefore every possible motive to begin the work of their salvation immediately—to repent and secure their pardon without one hour's delay.

Under the afflictions of the present life, saints may console themselves with the belief, that these afflictions are working for them an eternal weight of glory; and that when they rest from their labors and sorrows, their glory will immediately commence.

How great soever the happiness of the just and the misery of the wicked will be in the intermediate state, there is reason to believe, that both the one and the other will be mightily increased after the general judgment. In the complete union of soul and body there will be an increased capacity of enjoyment, or of suffering. Then some positive rewards will be bestowed on the godly, and some positive punishments inflicted on the guilty. Then the virtues, graces and good works of the former will be brought forth as the light, and displayed as the noon day; and the vices and iniquities, the secret sins and vile intentions of the latter will be detected and exposed before the assembled world. The former will exult with joy in the approbation of their God; the latter will sink down in shame and remorse under conscious guilt and universal infamy.

Seeing we look for such things as these, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? It becomes us to withdraw our confidence and affection from the world. Our time in it is short, and the fashion of it is passing away. The things on earth are decaying; the earth itself will be given to the flames. In things which perish, man, who is immortal, cannot find a satisfactory portion. Were the earth permanent, yet to man it would be of little value, for he must soon depart.

The poor in this world, who are rich in faith may rejoice in the promise, that they shall inherit all things. Some there are who possess more than they. But time will place them on a level. Death will throw down all distinctions. In the grave the rich and the poor meet together. The only distinction worth regarding, is that which relates to another world. Let us not be solicitous to obtain treasures on earth, which are soon to perish; but seek in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Let the young habituate themselves to think of death and judgment. These are solemn events. You easily see that they ought to be much in the thoughts of aged people, the time of whose departure is at hand. But for yourselves you think, the time of death is remote, and *you* may seek pleasure; *you* may indulge cheerfulness.

My friends; you *may* seek pleasure; you *may* indulge cheerfulness. But tell me, I beseech you, how you expect to enjoy them. Can you enjoy them, while the terrors of death and judgment are before you? These, in spite of all your self flatteries, will sometimes glare upon you. True pleasure is the pleasure of religion; true cheerfulness is the cheerfulness of a good conscience and a good hope. Early secure an interest in God's promises; early ascertain your title to heaven; then may you be glad and rejoice all your days; then will death lay aside its gloom, and judgment divest itself of its terrors; then may you adopt the language of christian triumph, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

The young think, the aged ought to stand in daily readiness for death. The aged thought the same when they were young. Have they altered their opinion, since the nearness of death is become more certain? We hope not. Surely, in this period of life, when they feel themselves bending to-

ward the grave—when they see it opening for their fellow mortals, and generally for those who are younger than they, and often for youths, they will number their days, and apply their hearts to wisdom. They will review their past lives, examine their character, renew their repentance, and walk circumspectly redeeming the time. Thus they will make their remaining days comfortable, and the prospect of death pleasant. Thus they will look forward with joy, because their redemption draweth near. They who have had a long life should consider, that they have a long account to render. They have enjoyed many privileges, and enjoyed them for many years. If they have continued impenitent, their guilt, increasing from year to year, is awfully accumulated. Let them seek pardon by repentance, ascertain their pardon by fruits meet for repentance, and give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end.

As we are all pilgrims on earth—all travelling the same road toward the grave—all bound to the eternal world—all subject to like adversities and trials on our journey, let us have compassion one of another, be pitiful, be courteous. Let us bear one another's burdens, and by mutual counsel, example and encouragement, animate one another in the way to that heavenly country to which we all wish and hope to arrive. Great will be our happiness, when we shall enter into that blessed region. Greatly will that happiness be increased by seeing those with us, whom we guided and conducted thither. Charity essentially belongs to the religion of heaven. Charity on earth is a necessary preparation for heaven. Let us above all things have fervent charity among ourselves.

These sentiments, my young friends, are of solemn importance. Let them be deeply impressed on your minds. Let them be urged home to your feelings by the providence which has now called you into the house of God.

The death of this young man, whose remains lie before you, warn you, that life is uncertain. The state of his mind on his dying bed, and the counsels, which from thence he uttered to those who were near him, admonish you to make the salvation of your souls the object of your immediate and most serious attention.

As he could then speak to but few, I feel it my duty to speak in his behalf to the greater number now assembled.

It is not for us to judge his final state. But from the sentiments and exercises of mind which he expressed, we entertain the pleasing hope, that for all his sins, he experienced that godly sorrow which works repentance unto salvation.

With flowing tears he lamented his past neglect of his eternal interest ; his indifference to the religion of the gospel ; his disregard of the holy scriptures ; his vain and delusive imagination, that there is no future punishment for the workers of iniquity. This sentiment, however pleasing it may seem, while men are in health, he confessed to be utterly insufficient for their comfort in the near view of death. In this situation he condemned it—he renounced it—he ardently wished that none might embrace it. This was no longer his hope. Whatever hope he had, it was grounded on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, who came to seek and to save them who are lost.

My friends, indulge no such opinion. It is an opinion, which springs, not from the word of revelation, but from the corruption of the heart ; and which tends, not to purity and happiness, but to wickedness and ruin. Remember the advice of Solomon ; “ *Cease, my son, to hear the instructions which cause to err from the words of knowledge.*” Give no countenance to such instructions. Repel them with indignation. Refuse to *hear* them. Say

to evil doers, and to *evil teachers*, "Depart from us, for we will keep the commandments of God."

Do you believe, there is a God, whom you are bound to obey? Yes: You are not atheists. If you believe there is such a Being, then you know he has a right to punish your disobedience. Whether he will shew mercy, you can learn only from his word. His word teaches you, that he is merciful and ready to forgive. But *how* does he forgive? It is through the blood of Jesus Christ, who has borne our sins in his own body on the cross. And *whom* does he forgive? Not those who go on in their trespasses—not those, who, when they hear the words of his curse, bless themselves in their hearts, saying, We shall have peace, though we walk in our own imaginations, adding sin to sin; but those, and those only, who repent and turn to him, and do works meet for repentance.

This then is my advice; and you must acknowledge it to be just; immediately attend to the gospel of Christ; consider your concern in it; know your own state; implore God's grace to renew you to repentance; look to Jesus, who came to save them that are lost; hear his calls; accept his invitations; devote yourselves to him; walk in newness of life. Come now, this day, to a resolution, that you will seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation.

The advice now given to the young in general, I hope will be applied, in a particular manner, by the surviving brother and sisters of the deceased.

You mourn the death of your brother. You were deeply affected with his sickness—with the distress of his body, and with the anguish of his mind. We all pity you. We wish you consolation. The best consolation you can have will result from a compliance with your brother's dying coun-

sels. I heard what he spake to you. I saw how you were affected when he spake. Forget not his dying words. Forget not your own tears. Forget not those feelings and resolutions which swelled your breasts, when you stood by his bedside. Indulge not the sentiments which he so justly reprobated. Indulge not the neglect which he so bitterly lamented, and against which he so solemnly cautioned you.

God has sent this warning on purpose to awaken in you a more influential sense of the importance of religion. He placed a dying brother before your eyes, and gave him strength to speak in your hearing, that you might see and feel and know, how to make a sick bed soft, and a death bed comfortable. The God who has warned you is willing to accept you. Resort to him in prayer. Seek his grace in the name of his Son. Dedicate yourselves to him to be his wholly and forever. The Lord satisfy you early with his mercy, that you may be glad and rejoice all your days.

Ye who are heads of families; shall I speak a word to you?

You sympathize, in a degree, with the afflicted parents; especially with the father, who has had an uncommon portion of family afflictions. He has been in deaths oft. He has felt sorrow upon sorrow. A consort and seven children, and, of this number, several at adult age, have been by death removed from him under trying circumstances. He needs divine supports; pray that he may enjoy them. Pray, that these afflictions, which for the present are grievous, may yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

When you look on others in their afflictions, consider, that you and your children are also in the body. The time is at hand, when you will be separated from them by their removal or your own. Make

preparation for your own death; assist them in making preparation for theirs.

See, my friends, that religion be formed in your hearts, manifested in your lives, and maintained in your houses. You are all mortals—you are all probationers—you are all bound to another world, and soon to go thither. Is there one of you, whether young or old, who will dare to live without religion in his heart? Is there one head of a family, who will dare to live without prayer in his house? Shall a family of probationary mortals live without calling on God?

Instruct your children in the principles, and inculcate on them the duties of religion. Teach them the doctrines, which are according to godliness. Teach them the way of salvation through a dying Saviour. Teach them the native depravity of their hearts, the evil of sin, the nature and necessity of repentance toward God, and of faith toward the Lord Jesus. Teach them their dependence on the grace of God and the way to obtain it. Guard them against all those corrupt sentiments, which tend to quiet their consciences in a course of sin, and to banish their apprehensions of future punishment. Allow them not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor to stand in the way of sinners, nor to sit in the seat of the scornful. Encourage them to study the law of the Lord, and to meditate in it day and night.

Believe, that if they now banish from their minds the terrors of the eternal world, these terrors, at a future day, will come upon them as a whirlwind—will come with augmented violence. Should you behold the scene, your own souls will be penetrated by their anguish and distress.

If your children be removed before you, what greater consolation can you have, than to believe, that by the blessing of God on your pious instructions, they have walked in the truth, and to see that they have peace and hope in their death.

SERMON XXI.

Old Age Improved.

A Discourse delivered to the people of the first Parish in West-Springfield, by their Pastor, Oct. 31, 1811, the day which completed the 80th year of his age.

BARZILLAI the Gileadite, on a particular occasion, says to king David, in the second book of Samuel, xix chap. 35 ver. *I am this day fourscore years old.*

In a preceding verse he is called “a very aged man.” He assigns his great age as an excuse for not accepting the king’s invitation to go and spend the rest of his days in Jerusalem.

David, by the rebellion of his son Absalom, was compelled to flee from Jerusalem and pass over Jordan. He and his faithful followers encamped at Mahanaim, not far from the seat of Barzillai, who, being a wealthy man, and well affected to the king, contributed liberally to his support, while he con-

tinued there, waiting the event of the rebellion. After the rebellion was suppressed, David, at the request of his loyal subjects, decamped from Mahanaim, and commenced his march for Jerusalem. Barzillai accompanied him to conduct him over Jordan. The king, gratefully remembering the faithful services of this good subject, and desiring to render his old age as easy and pleasant as possible, said to him, "Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem?" Barzillai answered, "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old. Can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? Can I any more hear the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should thy servant be yet a burden to my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way with the king, and turn back again, that I may die in my own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother. Behold thy servant Chimham," who was one of Barzillai's sons, "let him go over with thee, and do to him what shall seem good to thee." David accepted the aged man's excuse, and complied with his request in behalf of this son; and afterward gave Solomon a charge to shew kindness to his other sons. He respected the family of a man who had served him faithfully to so great an age.

The example of the aged Barzillai will afford some useful instructions to other aged men.

1. He kept an account of his time. He remembered, to a day, how old he was. "I am *this day* fourscore years old." The greater part of those, who had commenced the journey of life with him, had fallen by the way. He was almost a solitary traveller; and he must soon finish his course.

We find the aged saints, who are named in scripture, often reviewing their past years, and anticipat-

ing their approaching dissolution. Thus did the patriarchs—thus did the apostles—thus ought *we*, who have arrived to that period, which nature, experience and scripture pronounce to be a great age. For such transient mortals as we are, to live thoughtless of the progress of time, is great folly; for the aged thus to live, is folly in the extreme. Nothing shocks a serious mind more than to see an old man, who is tottering on the brink of the grave, still retaining that levity and vanity, which we should condemn in a youth; and still discovering that worldly anxiety, which we could not excuse even in the vigor of maturity. Yet some there are to whom the Poet's description may be applied;

Tho' grey their heads, their thoughts and aims are green.
Like damaged clocks, whose hand and bell dissent,
Folly strikes *six*, while nature points at *twelve*.

2. It becomes the aged to review the *changes*, which they have seen in their long life.

Barzillai lived in an eventful period. In the course of 80 years there had been revolutions in the government; national wars; intestine convulsions; general prosperity; public adversity; generations passing away; and others coming in their place. We, who have arrived to his age, have witnessed equal changes. The political state of Europe, and of our own country is vastly different from what it was when we were young. In early life we could have no anticipation of the events which have occurred. Many of them are grand and interesting; and they stand in connexion with other events, which are to come in their proper time, but which we cannot now foresee, nor shall we live to realize. Our successors, however, will see them; and we may behold them from a superior station. They will probably be greater, and, I fear, more distressing than the past.

Let us look around among our neighbours. Where are they who lived here 60 or 70 years ago? They are generally gone from us, and will return no more. They who are now our neighbours and the acting members of society, had not an existence, when we were young. They have come forward in the place of the departed mortals whom we first knew, and like them are soon to depart.

Who now occupy the lands, and dwell in the houses, which we see?—A new race; some the descendants of former occupants, and some strangers. Our fathers, where are they?—Gone to their long home. Even of our brethren few remain; and some of our children and younger descendants are numbered with the dead.

We feel great changes in ourselves. We are not the men we were once. Our corporeal powers, and our mental faculties have sensibly decayed. Grey hairs are upon us; our limbs are feeble; our eyes dim; our ears dull of hearing. Our memory deceives us; our judgment fails. Our early pleasures have fled. We may say with Barzillai; “Can I taste what I eat or drink? Can I hear the voice of singing men and singing women?” We experience the justness of Solomon’s description of this evil day. “The keepers of the house tremble; the strong men bow themselves; those that look out at the windows are darkened; the daughters of musick are low; fear is in the way; we are going to our long home.”

3. The man who has lived 80 years must have known *many afflictions*.

There is a difference in the condition of different persons; but none pass through this probationary state without a share in its adversities. They who live to the greatest age usually have the greatest share; not only as they have longer time to experience them, but as in the latter part of a long life,

“woes cluster ;” afflictions are multiplied. Besides their increased infirmities, there are additional family sorrows. Many of their dear friends and relatives have gone to the grave before them. There is scarcely one in twelve, who reaches their age ; consequently most of their early friends must have left them.* When they take a retrospect of life, they recollect many sorrows of mind and pains of body ; many disappointments in business and losses in substance ; many dangers which threatened life, and many critical escapes from death ; many mournful visits to the house of silence there to deposite, and there to leave the dear relatives, who had been the comfort of former days, and who, they had hoped, would be the joy of days to come.

In this review let them examine whether their long experience of the vanity of the world has disengaged their hearts from it—whether they have grown more spiritual in their views and more heavenly in their affections—whether they can meet disappointment with more serenity and bear trouble with more patience. If after all their experience, the same worldly temper continues, there is cause for deep humiliation and serious concern.

4. As God *daily* loads us with *benefits*, in a long life great is their sum. They are more than can be numbered.

It becomes us frequently to look back and remember the years of the right hand of the most high ; to remember his wonders of old ; to talk of his works—his works of providence and his works of grace. When we were young, it was our desire to live many years. Our desire has been granted. We have lived many years and have seen much good. We have been distinguished from the great-

* Of 740, who have died in the parish in 55 years, about 60 had passed their 80th year.

er part of our fellow mortals. What numbers of our juniors have gone down to the grave before us? What supports, supplies, protections and deliverances have we received? What a merey, that we have all along enjoyed the gospel, and lived near to God's house? May we not add? I hope some of us can add, we have felt the transforming power of the gospel on our hearts, and have brighter prospects and firmer hopes, than we had when we were young. How precious have been God's thoughts to us—how great the sum of them! If we would count them, they are more in number than the sand.

Impressed with a thankful sense of such numerous benefits, let us devote ourselves more zealously to God's service, abstract our hearts more entirely from the world, bear our infirmities more patiently, and trust more confidently in the divine care. The spirit and language of pious old age, we may learn from the example of David. "By thee have I been holden up from my birth; my praise shall be continually of thee. I am as a wonder to many. Thou art my refuge. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise, and with thine honor all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth."

5. Let the aged man enquire, how his days have past; what use he has made of them; what he has been doing; whether he is prepared to render an account of so long a life.

If God will bring every work into judgment, how solemn must be the reckoning to which such a man will soon be called? He has had more time to serve God and his generation—more time to increase in holiness and prepare for glory, than most others. If he has misspent it, he is more guilty than they, and exposed to a more awful condemnation. Let him reflect, how many opportunities to do, or to get good he has neglected—how many sabbaths he has lost—

how many instructions he has heard in vain, or refused to hear at all—how unprofitably to himself and others a great part of his life has stolen away. In the reflection let him be excited to a more diligent improvement of the little which remains. Let him pray in the humble and penitent language of David; remember not against me the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember me for thy goodness sake, O Lord.

6. The aged man should seriously consider the *shortness* of his *remaining time*.

When king David invited Barzillai to reside at his court in Jerusalem, he returned a very proper and pertinent answer. "How long have I to live? I am this day fourscore years old. Can I enjoy the pleasures of a royal table? What are they to a man of my years? I have other things to mind." Moses observes, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." He therefore prays, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom."

If to the man of 80 years, the time past appears to be soon cut off, what will he say of the remaining time? He finds, on recollection, that the years seem shorter, than they did in early life. What are two or three years to come? They can hardly be called an addition to life. He may say in the language of ancient saints, "The time of my departure is at hand." "I must shortly put off my tabernacle"—"my breath is spent, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me." Let us, my aged friends, converse much with death and eternity, and converse with ourselves on our preparation for the solemn scenes before us. Let us not reckon our lives dear to us, that, having accomplished the work as-

signed us, we may finish our course with joy. If death is near, as we know it must be to *us*, it is high time to awake and enquire, whether we are ready to meet it. It is too late to remain at uncertainty on the decision of so momentous a question. Ours is an evil day, in which there are few earthly pleasures. We need pleasures of a better kind. To one filled with the joy of heavenly hope, old age cannot be very unpleasant, for "now is his salvation nearer than when he believed." Every infirmity reminds him, how near he is to heaven, and how soon he will be in that world, where is no more sin and temptation; no more sorrow and death. Let us never entangle ourselves in those earthly cares, nor indulge those earthly affections, which will obstruct a preparation for our change, or obscure our title to that glorious state, where purity, peace and love, the enjoyment of God, communion with the Redeemer and the society of saints and angels will be all the happiness. Barzillai, invited to a king's court, considered how old he was, and how short was his remaining time. He would not suffer his mind to be diverted, by such a new situation, from the business, which at his time of life more immediately concerned him. He chose to remain in his own mansion—in his own city—among his old neighbors and friends, and near the graves of his father and mother, where he would be under favorable circumstances to meditate upon, and prepare for the solemn scene which was just before him. "Let me turn back, that I may die in my own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother." Meditation on death and the grave was more proper for him, than to seek the pleasures of a royal table.

7. A review of life should excite the aged to promote religion among the succeeding generation.

They know how short and unsatisfying is human life. They lament their past follies and neglects. They from experience can tell the young what views they will one day have of life and of the world. They can address the young to better advantage and with more authority, than they could in former years. Their days can speak, and the multitude of their years can teach wisdom. It was David's concern, in the prospect of death, to leave a savour of religion in the minds of those who were coming after him. "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and grey headed forsake me not, until I have shewed thy strength to this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come." Moses, contemplating the mortality of man, the shortness of life, and the infirmities of age, prays that all, and particularly the young, might apply their hearts to wisdom. "O satisfy us *early* with thy mercy, that we may be glad and rejoice all our days. Let thy work appear to thy servants, and thy glory to their *children*. Let the beauty of the Lord be upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands."

The apostle "exhorts the aged to be sober, grave, temperate, and sound in faith, charity and patience, that they may teach the *young* to be soberminded."

The words of our text, and the reflections which have arisen from them, apply to us who are advanced in years, and particularly to the *Speaker*, who may adopt the same words. "I am *this* day fourscore years old." Much the greater part of this time has been spent among you and your fathers. My ministry, which has been more than 55 years, has equalled, in length, that of both my predecessors.* There are now, in this parish, but three

* Rev. John Woodbridge, was ordained June 1698. Died June 1718.

Rev. Samuel Hopkins was ordained June 1720. Died October 1755.

persons, whose age exceeds mine. I have accompanied to the grave a greater number, than lived within the present territorial limits of this society at the time, when my relation to it commenced. I have buried more than my whole parish. But the society still lives in a new race of mortals.

I have seen many *mercies*. Among these I reckon the *friendship* which I have enjoyed with you and your fathers, and the harmony which has subsisted among you from the beginning of my ministry to the present time. I pray that nothing may occur on your part or mine which shall interrupt the peace, for which this church and society have from the beginning been distinguished.* I recollect many favors which I have received from you and your fathers, from the society and from individuals. *Injuries*, I remember *none*.

I have seen afflictions. But among the causes of sorrow and humiliation, the fear of an unprofitable ministry has not been the smallest. I hope, however, it has not been wholly unprofitable. How far the want of success is to be imputed to my unfaithfulness, or to your negligence, is an enquiry which concerns us both. Let us try ourselves at the tribunal of conscience, knowing, that there is a higher tribunal before which we must all stand, and some

The present minister was ordained August 25, 1756.

In this church there have been 11 deacons, of whom nine have deceased. Their longevity is remarkable.

John Barber was chosen 1700, and died 1712. Aged 70.

Ebenezer Parsons was chosen 1700, and died 1752. Aged 84

Joseph Ely, Died 1755. Aged 92.

John Ely, Died 1758. Aged 80.

Samuel Day, Died 1773. Aged 75.

Joseph Merrick, Died 1792. Aged 88.

Nathaniel Atchinson, chosen 1759. Died 1801. Aged 92.

Jonathan White, chosen 1759. Died 1805. Aged 95.

John Bagg, chosen 1782. Died 1809. Aged 79.

* Such has been the harmony in this church from the time of its incorporation to the present day i. e. for the space 113 years, that there never has been occasion for an ecclesiastical council, except for the purpose of ordination.

of us soon. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God; and may hope to appear before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

My aged brethren and friends, the time of our departure is at hand. The duties incumbent on us I have stated in this discourse. Let us seriously and prayerfully attend to them. Let us review our lives, examine our hearts, renew our repentance and self-dedication, and give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end.

There are some of my aged brethren, who, though they have long since professed the religion of Christ, have not taken a seat at his table. Why do they delay? Why will they not now exhibit this testimony of their faith in Christ and love to his gospel for their own consolation, and for the benefit of those who are coming after them? The door is open. If there is any hinderance, it must be within themselves.

Let the aged maintain religion in their houses. The time may soon come, when they will be unable to lead in the family devotions. Let them perform this duty while they are able; and thus encourage the sons, on whom they must soon lean for support, to succeed them in the sacred service.

May all heads of families, not only the aged, but those in earlier life, attend to this duty. The preservation and transmission of religion depend on no one thing more than on this. Let all your houses become churches. Let them all become little sanctuaries of God. You will soon stand on the list of the aged, unless death should strike off your names. In your advanced age you will have no greater joy, than to see your children walking in the truth, and to reflect that you early lent your hand to guide them in the way.

There is, I believe, an increased attention to re-

ligion among our young people. Encourage hopeful beginnings ; strengthen tender minds. “ Break not the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax,” lest to you the bruised reed should become a rod of iron ; and the smoking flax, a consuming fire. Beware lest you incur the denunciation of our Lord against those, who enter not into the kingdom of God themselves, nor suffer those who are entering, to go in. The young, when they are beginning the religious life, need assistance, and they expect it from those who are older than they ; especially from their parents. If they can find none to assist them, they are disappointed—they are discouraged, and perhaps turned back. Cast no stumbling blocks in their way. “ Whoso shall offend one of Christ’s little ones, it were better for him, that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depth of the sea.”

In regard to yourselves, your families, the young in general, the society at large, I request your diligent attendance on the ministrations of the sanctuary. These you know to be divine institutions, which cannot be neglected without guilt and danger.

Whenever there shall be a vacancy in the ministry, let it be soon supplied. A long continued vacancy will be attended with many evils. On so delicate and important an occasion, as the resettlement of the ministry, you will need to exercise a condescending and accommodating spirit. Seek not merely to please yourselves, but each one to please his neighbour for his good to edification. Regard not a tinsel glitter, but solid worth. Choose a man of learned education, competent abilities, evangelical sentiments, a pious character, a candid spirit and a discreet behaviour. That you may proceed with safety take good advice, and be at peace among yourselves. And may the man, whom who shall choose, be more useful in his place, and more wor-

thy of your esteem, than your present minister has been.

I shall probably leave among you a considerable part of my family. I hope they will continue to be attached to your best interest ; and I doubt not that they will share in your friendship. And if the person, who has been my worthy companion, and your cordial friend for more than 52 years, should survive me, I trust she will receive from you all that attention, which a state of solitude and infirmity may require.

The day is approaching which will dissolve the relation between you and me. Let it be our joint concern and prayer, that we may meet in a better world, and in a more pure and exalted connexion.

And now I beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not shaken in mind from the faith and profession of the gospel ; but that ye work out your salvation with fear and trembling in humble reliance on the power of divine grace—that ye do all things without murmurings and disputings—that ye be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, striving together in your prayers for yourselves, for the church of Christ, and particularly for your pastor, that, while he is continued among you, he may labor with faithfulness, and may not labor in vain, and that after he has long preached to others, he may not himself be a cast-away ; but that we may all meet in the presence of Christ, and he may joy and rejoice with you, and ye also may rejoice with him.

I have often of late, as well as in former years, spoken to the young. And I know not how to close this discourse without addressing a few words to this important and beloved class of my hearers.

My dear friends ; you think the man of 80 years, and particularly your minister, “ who is *this day*

fourscore years old," should consider how old he is, and how soon he must leave you. The thought is much in his mind ; and now under its serious impression he advises you to admit the same reflection.

You choose, perhaps, rather to think how *young* you are. You are impatient to push forward to a more advanced stage. Time seems to move too slowly. You anticipate distant pleasures, and wish to possess them. But believe what *they* say of life, who have already tried it. It is probable, you will not find it more pleasurable, than *they* have found it. Meditate on its vanity and uncertainty. Apply it to its proper end.

Life is a pilgrimage. You are not at home, but bound for another country. Much depends on your setting out right. One false step may lead to another till you are bewildered and lost. There are many devious tracts and seducing objects. Hear not the instructions, which cause to err ; but enquire what is the good way ; take and pursue it. Keep your eyes on the heavenly country ; observe the way-marks ; press on toward it in the strait and narrow path. If you turn aside at the beginning, perhaps you will never regain your ground ; or if you do, you must tread back the false path by the wearisome steps of repentance.

When you reflect how young you are, you imagine there is much time before you. Be it so ; yet all is not too much for the great work which lies on your hands. But it may be otherwise. Few arrive to old age. It may be your lot to die in youth. What your hands find to do, do it with your might.

When you are pleasing yourselves with the prospect of years to come, stop and consider ; " If a man live many years and rejoice in them all, the days of darkness will come ; " and many years spent in vanity and vice will render the days of darkness more dismal. A short life devoted to God in piety

and virtue will be followed with glory. A long life lost in sensuality and wickedness will terminate in misery. "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know, it shall be well with them who fear God; but it shall not be well with the wicked."

You think how young you are. But have you attained to that knowledge of religion—to that love of God—to that acquaintance with the Saviour—to that constancy in duty—to that fortitude in resisting temptations, which for the time might have been expected? Have you not wasted a great proportion of the little time you have had? If God should mark your iniquities, could you stand? If he should contend with you, could you answer him for one of a thousand? But there is forgiveness with him. Under a conviction of your sins, resort to his mercy through the great Redeemer—fall down before him in deep repentance—seek his grace for your present renovation and future direction.

You are aspiring after maturity in age and strength. Forget not to stretch upward to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. Be ambitious rather to grow in wisdom and in favor with God, than to increase in corporeal stature and strength. For the latter you must wait the process of nature. To the former you may contribute by your own application and diligence.

How beautiful it is to see a child outgrow himself in wisdom, virtue and goodness. There is no danger of such a disproportionate growth in these members, as to look monstrous and deformed. Virtue is comely in itself; and it never appears with more captivating charms, than in youth. May the beauty of the Lord be on you. Satisfied early with his mercy, you will be glad and rejoice all your days; and in the future life you will rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

To conclude ; let us all of every age learn wisely to improve this transient life. Let us employ our remaining days in the service of God, in the care of our souls and in preparation for death and eternity ; not spend them in such a poor and trifling manner, as will give us cause, at the close of life, rather to wish that we had never been born, than to rejoice that we shall live forever. Let our time be all devoted to God, that in the end we may have peace in the review of life, and may rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

