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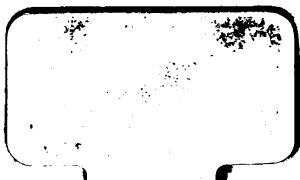
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SERMONS

PREACHED AT

THE TEMPLE CHURCH:

AND BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

DURING THE

MONTH OF JANUARY, MDCCCXXXVIII.



BY THE

REV. THEYRE T. SMITH, M.A.

ASSISTANT PREACHER AT THE TEMPLE,
AND SUNDAY EVENING LECTURER AT ST. LAWRENCE'S, JEWRY.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Sermons in this volume were preached before the Congregation assembling at the Temple Church; and, in offering them to general perusal, the author cannot omit the opportunity, thus afforded him, of expressing his sense of the kindness and attention which he has uniformly received from that Congregation, during the several years in which he has held the office of Assistant Preacher. He is encouraged to hope that the ensuing Discourses may be, not unacceptably, recalled to their memory; while they may be read, he trusts, with some interest and advantage by others into whose hands they may happen to fall.

The publication of the Sermons which were preached before the University of Cambridge is in accordance with the desire of several members of that body who heard them.

Of the substance or scope of these Discourses it cannot here be necessary to say much. Such compositions are presumed to consist, for the most part, of observations which are scarcely, if at all, open to dispute; and which it is mainly important to press on the consideration of those who hear or read them: such is the character of not a few in this volume. In others, the author has entered into discussion and controversy; and, with respect to these, he will merely allude to one or two of the subjects to which he has principally directed his attention.

In the first three Discourses, he has argued the expiatory virtue of the sacrifice of Christ; though, in truth, that important doctrine has been so largely, and, as he conceives, satisfactorily established by divines, and more especially by Archbishop Magee, that it can stand in little need of farther defence or confirmation. He has, however, considered an objection which some have alleged against its reasonableness and credibility; and, more particularly, has endeavoured to bring to a decisive test certain explanations of the language of Scripture, which have been proposed with a view to supersede or disprove it.

In another series of Discourses, he has

attempted to ascertain the import of the term "faith" when used to designate the instrument of our justification, with the view of exhibiting a necessary consistency between the special demand of *faith* in the Scriptures, as the means of our justification before God, and the obligation to practical religion and virtue, or the necessity of personal holiness. To make out such a consistency is manifestly important, both as it affects the claims of the Christian religion in general, and the agreement of the sacred writers in the doctrines which they have delivered to us. At the same time, this subject has been handled so frequently, and is so continually under discussion, that the author would hardly lay before the reader an argument upon it extended through several pages, if he did not hope to draw a somewhat closer attention to particular passages in the Scriptures than is frequently or commonly applied to them; or than they have heretofore, so far as he knows, received.

He will refer to one topic more, which the reader will find discussed in this volume—namely, the import of the answer which our Lord gave to the inquiry of his disciples respecting his use of parables. There is, in general, some feeling of perplexity in the

perusal of this part of the Scriptures, which it may be possible to alleviate, if not entirely to remove; and, certainly, the controversy raised upon it may be brought within a much narrower compass.

In dealing with these or other subjects, the author has at least endeavoured, with whatever success, to fix the attention exclusively on the questions at issue, divested of associations unfriendly to the investigation of truth; and while he has strenuously maintained his own views, he is not conscious of having failed in a just appreciation of the opinions of any from whom he may have occasionally differed, or in a scrupulous accuracy in stating them. He would at all times bear in mind that there is, there ought to be, but one object in inquiries of this nature—to assist, in however small a measure, in promoting correct and comprehensive views of the Christian religion—in extending, by the Divine blessing, the guidance and comfort of the Gospel.

CONTENTS.



SERMON I.

[Preached before the University of Cambridge.]

THE EXPIATORY SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.

PAGE

ROMANS iii. 25, 26.—Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus	1
---	---

SERMON II.

THE EXPIATORY SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.

HEBREWS x. 4.—For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins	28
---	----

SERMON III.

THE ADVOCACY OF CHRIST.

1 JOHN ii. 1, 2.—And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world	55
--	----

SERMON IV.

THE HOPE OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS.

- ROMANS xiii. 11.—And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed 81

SERMON V.

THE HOPE OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS.

- ROMANS xiii. 11. — For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed 104

SERMON VI.

[Preached before the University of Cambridge.]

THE LOVE OF THE WORLD.

- 1 JOHN ii. 15—17.—Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever 130

SERMON VII.

[Preached before the University of Cambridge.]

THE NINE LEPERS.

- LUKE xvii. 17, 18.— And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger 157

SERMON VIII.

SUFFERINGS A PROOF OF DIVINE GOODNESS.

HEBREWS xii. 9—11.—Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us ; and we gave them reverence : shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live ? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure ; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby . . . 181

SERMON IX.

REPENTANCE IN AFFLICTION.

DEUT. iv. 30, 31.—When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice, (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God,) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them 209

SERMON X.

THE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE TERM FAITH.

JOHN vi. 47.—Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life 231

SERMON XI.

THE DOCTRINE OF ST. JAMES ON JUSTIFICATION.

JAMES ii. 18.—I will show thee my faith by my works . . . 262

SERMON XII.

THE DOCTRINE OF ST. JAMES CONSISTENT WITH THAT OF ST. PAUL.

ROMANS iii. 28.—Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law 289

SERMON XIII.

THE INCULCATION OF WORKS AS NECESSARY TO JUSTIFICATION.

MATTHEW vii. 21.—Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven : but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven 314

SERMON XIV.

THE DESIGN OF OUR SAVIOUR IN THE USE OF PARABLES.

LUKE viii. 10.—And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God : but to others in parables ; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand 345

SERMON XV.

THE DESIGN OF OUR SAVIOUR IN THE USE OF PARABLES.

LUKE viii. 10.—And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God : but to others in parables ; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand 376

SERMON XVI.

[Preached before the University of Cambridge.]

THE RENEWAL OF THE MIND IN CHRISTIANS.

2 Cor. v. 17.—Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new 406

SERMON XVII.

THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

MATTHEW xxii. 39.—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself 446

SERMON XVIII.

THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

LUKE vi. 35.—Love ye your enemies 474

SERMON I.

ROMANS III. 25, 26.

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

THESE words, in common with many other passages of Scripture, seem very obviously to affirm the vicarious nature, or the expiatory virtue, of the death of Christ. There are theologians, however, who reject this doctrine; not absolutely or properly on the authority of the Scriptures, but on grounds independent of divine revelation. They deny the reasonableness or necessity of a satisfaction to divine justice, in order to procure the acquittal of the guilty; and judge it more consonant to our reason that the Almighty should absolve the sinner in the absence of a propitiatory

sacrifice—by a simple declaration of forgiveness. They accordingly regard the principal benefit of our Saviour's mediation, with respect to our justification before God, as consisting in his having taught us the efficacy of repentance to obtain the pardon of our sins, and the availability of a sincere though defective obedience. They are content, moreover, to describe the death of Christ as merely an attestation to the truth of his pretensions; or as affording us a pre-eminent example of patience and resignation. But we deem this a very partial and inadequate view of our obligation to Jesus Christ, entitled as he is, the Saviour of the world; and in maintaining the more prevailing doctrine on the subject, we shall endeavour to establish the two following propositions:—

First, There is no sufficient ground, on the authority of human reason, to pronounce upon the *modes* in which the Almighty exercises mercy, or absolves the guilty.

Secondly, It is a doctrine of the Scriptures that the penitent are exempted from the punishment of their sins, not on account of any relaxation in the law which they have violated, but in virtue of the expiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In the first place, we propose to show that

there is no sufficient ground, on the authority of human reason, to pronounce upon, or to pre-conceive the mode in which the Almighty exercises mercy, or acquits the guilty.

There are some, it was remarked, who deny the reasonableness and necessity of a satisfaction to divine justice. They condemn the belief of it as injurious to the free agency, and the absolute sovereignty of God. In thus prejudging the conduct of the Deity, and the nature of his government, they are guided, you perceive, by the precedent or analogy which is furnished them in the administration of justice amongst mankind. Human rulers are invested with power to mitigate the rigour of established laws ; to remit the exactions of justice at their pleasure ; and to exercise a prerogative of mercy in behalf of the guilty and condemned. And can the mercy of the Almighty, it is sometimes asked, be subject to any condition or qualification ? Can the Ruler of the Universe require the intervention of a sacrifice, or any other means of reconciliation, as a pre-requisite to the pardon and acceptance of the penitent transgressor ? What more can be necessary, on the part of God, to the absolution of the guilty, than a simple announcement of forgiveness ?

This reasoning, though not a little plausible, is, we suspect, but ill-considered and superficial. It overlooks this most important fact—that imperfect knowledge, or defective wisdom, is the principal—the only reason why human laws are made capable of yielding; and that the penalty of crime is not certain in its infliction. In all cases of remission or commutation of punishment, there is either some doubt of the criminality of the condemned person, or an opinion is entertained that the punishment impending over him is more than adequate to the offence of which he stands convicted. It is assumed or conjectured that there exists some valid ground for an acquittal from the charge of guilt, or for a mitigation of its penalty. In truth, it is no more proper to human than to divine justice, to remit the sentence of law when guilt is palpable and unequivocal, and evidently equal to the punishment which it has incurred. That a compassionate sympathy with the condition of the criminal, or a reluctance to inflict pain or death, should operate to his escape from punishment, would, it is obvious, be accounted a fault in the judicial administration, and be universally deprecated as tending to the subversion of society. Our religion, it is true, instructs us to suppress the spirit of retaliation

towards those who have injured us ; but, notwithstanding, as members of the social body, and bound, as such, to aim at the promotion of the common good, we aspire to a character of inexorableness towards the violators of right and law. We rigorously uphold, however we may deplore, the sentence which dooms the guilty to suffer or to die ; and we account those to have been examples of heroic virtue, who, in this respect, have sacrificed the claims of kindred and friendship on the altar of political rectitude.

There appears to be no pure, intelligent principle of forgiveness in the judicial wisdom of this world. Human legislation discovers no other elements of mercy than its weaknesses and imperfections. What is called a discretionary power, and lauded as a prerogative of mercy, is simply a right of determination on grounds which the law is unable to anticipate, and consequently cannot decide upon. It is impossible, beforehand, to describe all the circumstances which may diminish the guilt of a particular offence ; and hence it is expedient to leave ample scope for the supply of deficiency, or the correction of error ; or, in more flattering, but, as it would seem, less accurate language, to place in the ruling power a right of dispensation, or

prerogative of mercy. Moreover, as men are so liable to error in their decisions, it becomes a principle of natural equity to incline to the side of clemency and remission. Unquestionably, however, in proportion as crimes become more clearly discriminated, the penalties annexed to them better selected or proportioned, and the rules of evidence more satisfactorily ascertained, punishment is more rarely remitted. In other words, the more comprehensive the wisdom of the legislature, the more certain is the execution of its enactments.

Now imperfect knowledge, or defective wisdom, appertains not to the Divine Being; and, consequently, that relaxation of law which is common to human societies—that mercy which is exercised on principles with which we are conversant—can have no place in the government of God. No such causes as those which incline a human judge to forbear the execution of penal law can act upon the All-perfect mind, and withhold the uplifted arm of the Almighty. With Him there is no faulty or suspicious evidence; no distance of time or place; and no obscurity or complication of circumstances. He is the faithful witness, as well as the incorruptible judge. Nor could any event have escaped his prescience, that might render an

amelioration of his law expedient or desirable. He could not, for example, have been surprised into forgiveness by the repentance of mankind, or influenced by any new or unexpected motive in their favour. His thoughts of mercy must have been coeval with his being; his design to spare the guilty must have been from everlasting. Yet is his law announced in most absolute terms, as cited by St. Paul,—“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law to do them.”*

So far then from assuming that the unerring Legislator of the universe would recall the sentence which had issued from his lips, or remodel the law which he had promulgated, it would seem a more rational conclusion, that mercy and forgiveness on the part of God, would proceed on some reconciling and harmonizing principle, wide from the scope of our analogies, and without the range of human intelligence.

We have not offered these remarks, you observe, in order to infer what the Scriptures only can determine, the necessity of some vicarious interference in behalf of the transgressor,—of some desert or plea of justification

* Gal. iii. 10.

to accrue to him from the agency of another being. We were concerned to show only that there is no foundation for the bold denial of such a necessity, and that no objection to this part of the Christian economy can be justly derived from the conduct and policy of mankind. Accordingly, we have deemed it important to remark, that the remission of punishment which takes place in human jurisdiction, can furnish no explanation of the pardon vouchsafed the guilty by a Being of perfect knowledge and wisdom, as well as benevolence. It may be a dictate of natural religion to supplicate forgiveness from the Father of our spirits, and to anticipate the pardon of our offences when conscious of the sincerity of our repentance : and certain is it, that the spirit of the Gospel is in all harmony with this prevailing impression of the divine benignity and compassion. But our preconceptions of the mercy of God have no warrant in the judicial wisdom of this world, inasmuch as the remission of punishment is no acknowledged or contemplated object of legislation : the growing perfection of laws, tending, as we have already observed, to the certain conviction and punishment of the offender, and, consequently, to preclude the exercise and

hope of forgiveness. How little analogous, we may add, is such a system to the constitution of the Christian economy, which contemplates the amendment of the transgressor in place of his punishment, and while it grants entire absolution to the guilty, reanimates and uplifts the spirit of obedience!

We forbear examining more particularly, the grounds on which the doctrine of justification, through the medium of an atoning sacrifice, is exploded by the professors of a theology which appropriates to itself the epithet *rational*. What has been said, however, may serve to intimate how little mankind are qualified to predetermine the judicial procedure of Almighty God, and how inconsistent it would be that any prepossessions of our unassisted reason concerning it, should take precedence of a divine revelation, or—which is very much the same thing—should determine our construction of its language. We proceed to our second proposition.

It is a doctrine of the Scriptures, that the penitent are exempted from the punishment of their sins—are justified, or dealt with as if they were innocent—not in consequence of a relaxation or a repeal of the law, which they have violated, but in virtue of the expiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

A great change and amelioration is acknowledged to have taken place in the conditions on which acceptance with God and eternal happiness are attainable by mankind. We indulge the hope of immortality, not because we are innocent or meritorious beings, but because "we truly repent, and unfeignedly believe the Gospel." We anticipate the happiness of the future, not as the due reward of our righteousness, or obedience of the divine law, but as a reward which God, in pure mercy and beneficence, has annexed to our prevailing desire, and habitual endeavours to obey him. It is made a question, through what medium he has admitted us to these lenient, practicable terms of salvation. They who object to our describing the sufferings and death of Christ as a satisfaction to divine justice, and an atonement for human guilt, are satisfied to assert, that the law which demanded a perfect righteousness, and subjected the world to condemnation, was *itself* annulled and superseded by easier terms of acceptance with the Almighty. They contend, as we have already intimated, that the substantial benefit of our Saviour's mediation consists in this—that whereas the law which was originally binding on human beings, exacted unblemished recti-

tude as the only ground of justification with God, Christ has assured us of the efficacy of repentance to obtain the forgiveness of our sins, and the acceptableness of a sincere though imperfect piety. But there is one fact which appears decisively to refute this opinion—a fact which merits a particular observation; namely, that the law which convicts the whole world of sin against God, so far from appearing to have been rescinded or altered in the progress of the divine communications, seemed to assume a more determinate and unchangeable character as the Christian system became more clearly revealed.

In the Old Testament, the promises of forgiveness to the penitent (for it should be observed, that the assurance of pardon to the repentant transgressor is no peculiarity of the Christian dispensation, the disobedient in every age having been admonished to repentance, and encouraged to confide in the fulness of divine mercy)—in the Old Testament, we say, the promises of forgiveness to the penitent are held out in general terms, without any particular reference to the immutability of the law. As it was not distinctly revealed in what manner God would be just, and yet the justifier of the guilty, it was consistent that the seeming

incongruity of exact justice with abundant mercy, should not be urged on the contemplation of the penitent. To know that a real and adequate satisfaction was demanded for the violations of the law, and yet not to have ascertained with distinctness the means by which it was to be rendered, would, it is obvious, have placed the Jewish people in an awful predicament of uncertainty; would have mingled distrust and fearfulness with their hopes of pardon; and have disturbed their prevailing confidence in the mercy of God. But, in the growing light of revelation, the hand-writing of condemnation against us became more awfully legible; and the features of eternal justice more *visibly* fixed and immovable. Every reader of the Bible must have remarked, that the rigour of the law is never so much enforced as in connexion with the more immediate announcement of the gospel; and that its unmitigated character is a prominent subject of discourse in the writings of a great apostle. We have already adverted to the hopeless tenor of his language respecting it:—“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”*—“By the deeds of

* Gal. iii. 6.

the law shall no flesh be justified.”* We lay stress on this consideration; for no reason can be assigned why the law should have appeared more than ever invested with its formidable attributes, after the coming of our Saviour, if, instead of having been fulfilled and ratified by his mediation, it had been formally abrogated; and if the sentence which it records against us, instead of having taken virtual effect in the sacrifice of Christ, had been retracted and expunged out of the statute-book of God by the hand that wrote it. Why—we cannot refrain from inquiring—in a dispensation of mercy, is the attention kept incessantly awake to the idea of inflexible justice? Why, in the midst of gracious invitations to repentance, does a violated law reiterate its maledictions? Why, but that while we rejoice in the plenitude of divine goodness, we may stand in awe of the judicial majesty of God, and appreciate the necessity and value of that sacrifice for sin, in which his broken statutes have received ample vindication and satisfaction?—The text expressly asserts that he “hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins . . . that *he might be*

* Rom. iii. 20.

just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus :”—the words imply a fitness or necessity that God should maintain the law which he had enacted : they assure us, that he actually and designedly adhered to the claim of justice ; and that, in the offering of Christ, that claim was effectually discharged.

We do not follow in the track of those divines, who, not satisfied with the reality and sufficiency of the atonement of Christ, apply themselves to the investigation of its details : pronouncing, for example, on the extent of human guilt, in order to establish the necessity of so immense a sacrifice ; propounding in what manner the sufferings and death of Christ could have constituted an equivalent for the redemption of the world ; and aiming, in various ways, to make out an equal account between God and his creatures. We should be loath to encumber an inscrutable subject with inconclusive reasoning ; and, more particularly, to obscure and disfigure the simplicity of the gospel by any hypothesis of our own invention. The imagination, we suspect, is far more active than the rational faculty in these dark and interminable labyrinths of speculation. The simple fact of Christ's propitiation in our behalf, would seem the amount

of our certain knowledge of this mysterious transaction. In attempting elucidations of it, we are breaking silence where the apostles held their peace ; we are hazarding assertions where superior beings are reduced to form conjectures ; for “into these things the angels desire to look ;”—as though we could discern the track of the Almighty’s footsteps, in paths where higher orders of intelligences cannot “find him out.” Principles may be involved in this stupendous matter, as remote from our comprehension as is the being or nature itself of the Divinity—the mode of his subsistence. With regard, however, to the reality of Christ’s vicarious agency in our behalf, and the efficiency of his sacrifice to procure the absolution of the penitent,—all that is needful to be known and believed,—the language of the sacred writers is surely most distinct and unequivocal. They expressly and repeatedly refer the fact of our being accounted righteous, to an efficacy in the death of Christ to justify the guilty ; and teach us that it is strictly because he has fulfilled the law, by expiating the guilt of disobedience, that we can approach the Creator with confidence ; associate the hope of pardon with the feeling of contrition ; derive encouragement to the obser-

vance of his precepts; and anticipate the benefit of our faith and holiness, even in the shape of honour and reward.*

We must not tarry on this extensive field of subject, but it may be proper to notice that view of the death of Christ which is most commonly taken by those who dispute its atoning virtue. They regard it principally as an attestation to the reality of his pretensions. But, strictly speaking, the consent of Christ to suffer death could not substantiate his pretensions: his *resurrection* might and did. His death, however, could attest only the sincerity of his purpose, not the veracity of his sayings. A voluntary submission to the last extremity, as a witness to the truth, exempts a man from the suspicion of imposture, but not from the imputation of enthusiasm. The single event,

* "The doctrine of the gospel," Bishop Butler observes, "appears to be not only that Christ taught the efficacy of repentance, but that he made it of the efficacy that it is by what he did and suffered for us: that he obtained for us the benefit of having our repentance accepted to eternal life: not only that he revealed to sinners that they were in a capacity of salvation, and how they might obtain it; but that he put us into a capacity of salvation, by what he did and suffered for us: put us into a capacity of escaping future punishment, and obtaining future happiness."—*Analogy*, Part II. chap. 5.

however, of the death of Christ, independently of his resurrection, forms a leading and pervading topic in the writings of his Apostles :— a fact which were not a little extraordinary, if the principal effect and purpose of his dying had been to demonstrate the rectitude of his intentions.—For could the glory of martyrdom have shed a peculiar and distinguishing lustre on the memory of Jesus ? Could it have magnified the name of one who had uttered his words—wrought his deeds—lived his life ? Was it the capital fact in the history of such a personage ?—of one who had so far transcended the men who had preceded him as inspired instructors, or who by their miracles had illustrated the power of God ?—of one who, by leaving us an infallible rule of conduct, an unblemished example of rectitude, and a certain assurance of immortality, had improved indefinitely the character and prospects of the human race ; and thus had been exalted above all who had ever lived, and placed alone in the records of the world ? Would the disciples of such a Master—if we may suppose them to have been living in a later age—have judged it essential to his fame, that the taper which burned near the tombs of martyrs should glimmer in the precincts of his sepulchre ?

But farther—it has been alleged, and we think with reason, that this view of the death of Christ would but ill account for his profound dejection, his “exceeding sorrow,” at the period when his labours and sufferings were drawing to a close. Our nature, we presume, is capable of what may be called, without exaggeration, a contempt of suffering, and an alacrity to die,—a comparative deadness to external impressions, at periods when the mind is absorbed in its own peculiar objects, and its energies drawn out in high resolves, and fervent aspirations. There is a state of the mind in which the instruments of pain and death seem to have as little power to penetrate its feelings, as to come into contact with its essence: a state which may arise, it is true, from a variety of causes, but which is especially supported by an undoubting consciousness of rectitude, a scorn of man’s judgment, a disesteem of the world—thoughts of God and futurity. Now, however some may depreciate the person and office of our Saviour, there is assuredly but one conviction of the spotlessness of his character, and his sublime abstraction from the interests of the present state. He was peculiarly the minister of the world that is to come; and stood without an equal

in the friendship of the Eternal. It is not for beings like ourselves, so alienated from God by the evil that is in us, to sympathize with the mental equanimity of one who "knew no sin," and performed unerringly the will of Heaven. We can ill conceive the energy of his confidence towards God—his grasp of the future—his converse with the invisible. But, assuredly, if ever there was an individual capacitated to triumph over death in the power of truth and innocence, Jesus was that individual. If ever the dissolution of the frame might have been described as a liberation of the animating spirit, it was so, above all comparison, when the body of Jesus was nailed to the cross. In relation to such a being, the matter for wonder and sympathy, was that he had entered the world, not that he was about to quit it,—that a mind so pure and unearthly should have shared the portion of fallen beings,—should have endured the consciousness of a mortal nature, and the sufferings of a human life,—should have been associated to want, and toil, and afflictedness,—not that so anomalous a connexion was to be dissolved, and perfect innocence eternally united to perfect happiness. There was nothing, it would seem, in death, bear what aspect it might of cruelty and

revenge, that could severely try the fortitude of a mind like that of Christ, and awake within it an anguish of strange intensity, and unwonted symptoms. There was surely an ingredient worse than mortality, in that cup which he had consented to drink ; or his hand would not have trembled in receiving it. Could the dread of laying down the life of this world have caused so deep a recoil in that incomparable Person, strained his powers of endurance, and made it an effort—an agony to proceed and “ finish the work of Him that sent him ?” Could any thing so bitter and revolting to his nature, have grown out of *his* exigencies, or have been engendered by *his* doings?—“ Surely he hath borne *our* griefs, and carried *our* sorrows.” “ He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; *and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*”

We must not dismiss this subject without directing your attention to the goodness which God has manifested towards us, in thus setting forth Christ “ to be a propitiation for our sins,” —goodness which the sacred writers contem-

plated with utter astonishment, and have urged upon us as a motive to unlimited confidence, gratitude, and obedience. We have been considering the inviolability of the laws of God; but need any present be reminded, that it is on the basis of inviolable laws, that he is eternally enthroned in the affections of mankind? It is his inexorable justice which properly illustrates his invincible goodness, and lays open the depth of his compassion; since, rather than that men should reap the fruit of their iniquities, the Son of God himself discharged the penalty of disobedience. He who is revealed to us as claiming equality with God, became "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," submitted to the imputation of our sin, and bowed his head to the stroke of death in the manner of one that was accursed,—accounting our exemption from the stroke of retribution, a sufficient motive, an ample recompense—"the joy that was set before him." Truly, this vindicated the judicial rectitude of the Deity; but it no less demonstrated his supreme benevolence, and testified of Him that "he is" preeminently, characteristically "love." And here we are tempted to remark, as a most reasonable conclusion, that the goodness which prompted this amazing concession

to the wants and exigence of our fallen nature, must be universal in its objects : that no portion of the human race can have been excepted from the merciful design of the Almighty, or not included in his purpose of redemption. We can conceive no such limitation to that goodness which reached the extremity of sacrificing the Son of God for the behoof of the guilty ; but are carried at once and irresistibly to the conclusion, that we are here contemplating a principle of benevolence corresponding to the immensity of the Divine nature,—infinite and incomprehensible as the mind of God,—commensurate with his essential perfections, — which, like the power that originated the universe, can have no bound to its exercise but incongruity and contradiction ; and must have made all adequate provision for the eternal welfare of every human being.

The conclusion is corroborated by the inspired writings ; for St. John declares of Christ that “ he is the propitiation for our sins ; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”* And if his sacrifice had relation to the whole world, can it be doubted that so likewise had the gift of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of that sacrifice ; and that all, without exception,

* 1 John ii. 2.

are assured of that divine assistance which they so much need, to render them acceptable servants of God, and the qualified heirs of immortality? But, indeed, the Apostle directly asserts that "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;"* and what spirit is it, we would ask, but the spirit of impartial, universal benevolence, which breathes in all the admonitions, expostulations, and warnings of Holy Writ?—which led the inspired penmen to celebrate the slowness of the Almighty's anger, and his delight in mercy?—which caused that reproachful lamentation of frustrated, rejected goodness, which broke from the lips of Jesus, when he visited the devoted city?—"Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!"†

Doubtless, we must consent to the method and purpose of the divine goodness. We must acquiesce in the design of Christ's mediation, relying on his atonement as the meritorious cause of our acquittal before God, in a devout and penitent mind, and in the spirit

* 2 Pet. iii. 9.

† Luke xiii. 34.

and purpose of obedience. The virtue of that atonement, as we well know, is inseparable from its reforming influence on the character ; and the faith which justifieth is an active, growing principle of piety and virtue. Surely, you discern in this sacrifice for sin a great *moral* purpose, and will derive from it a powerful moral influence. You perceive that it has added an irresistible weight and confirmation to the law of universal righteousness ; enforcing the divine commandment with a wondrous majesty, and an infinite pathos. You will feel, in the absolution of your guilt through such a mediation, the force of new and peculiar arguments for obedience to the will of God, and will iterate your efforts after an amendment of life, and a rectitude of spirit. You will make progression in all excellencies of character, “adding to your faith virtue ;* and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly-kindness ; and to brotherly-kindness charity.”† You will conceive no partial and limited ideas of your moral obligations ; but you will nourish an appetite for all goodness, and meditate perfection. Like your great philosopher, who,

* Courage or fortitude.

† 2 Pet. ii. 5.

in his own words, “took all knowledge to be his province,” you will take all virtue to be your province; omitting no helps or opportunities to improve your better nature, and to honour the religion of your Saviour, “who was delivered for your offences, and was raised again for your justification.”* And to fortify your holy resolutions, we exhort you to revolve the invaluable assurance, that God, though just, is the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus, and imputeth not to him iniquity—to ponder the worth of so great an immunity, that you may obtain from it that independence and tranquillity of mind which properly belong to it. You are assailed, it may be, by the reproaches and calumnies of your fellow-mortals; but of what account is the judgment of man against us, if we have no quarrel to agitate with the Supreme, and can live on terms of reconciliation and friendship with the Author of our being? What, if men despise, abhor, malign, or execrate us, if God be merciful and forgive! Were it possible that the just and the good could be universally defamed, how idle and impotent were the condemnatory judgment of all mankind, to the man who could lift up his head at the bar of eternal justice, and confront

* Rom. iv. 25.

his accusers with the challenge of St. Paul—
“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of
God’s elect? it is God that justifieth. Who
is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died,
yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even
at the right hand of God, who also maketh
intercession for us.”* What indeed is there
in existence that could vanquish and crush us,
could we appropriate and heartily unite in that
sentiment of the Apostle? What losses—what
disasters could then break down our fortitude,
or overmatch our consolations? In the large
variety of human suffering, there is strictly no
evil which is incurable or intolerable but the
sense of unexpiated guilt,—the remorse of a
troubled, desponding conscience; and if that
be drained off from the cup of mortal wretched-
ness, the ingredients which remain may be
taken with a firm aspect, and an untrembling
hand. For no other evils take deep and
abiding hold upon us. They touch not the
life of our immortal mind; and if death have
no sting, and the grave no victory, then is
that mind essentially unhurt and invincible
—inaccessible to fatality or ruin. Yes! the
absolution of our sins is the soothing of all
sorrow—the awakening of all hope—the anni-

* Rom. viii. 33, 34.

hilation of despair. Are we faithful to the privileges of the Gospel acknowledged and professed amongst us? Then is it no fiction of enthusiasm, but a dictate of the calmest reason, that all pains of body or of mind—sickness, poverty, ingratitude, desertion, bereavement—all ills—may be borne. For they press not on a fearful, defenceless conscience; they betoken no wrath in heaven, and augur no coming retribution; but are means of abstracting us from the hopes and prospects of an inferior life—modes of gracious discipline instituted by our heavenly Father—and together with this unstable world, this merely introductory season of our being, will, at no distant period, have ceased for ever.

SERMON II.

HEBREWS X. 4.

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

ST. PAUL, in his Epistle to the Colossians, in a direct allusion to the religious ceremonial of the Jews, imposed upon them through the ministry of Moses, appears at once to have determined its typical, prophetic character, by comprehending its various institutions under the single title of "a shadow of things to come."* Now, Sacrifice was the principal ordinance of the Jewish ritual, and one in which the sacred writers recognise a type of the death, the sacrifice of Christ. To this rite, therefore, as illustrated and applied in the New Testament, we may justly refer for the true import, in which our Saviour is said to

* Heb. ii. 16.

have laid down his life in behalf of mankind. It deserves, then, our especial consideration, that the author of the Epistle from which the text is taken, attributes to the sacrifice of Christ a peculiar virtue *to take away sins*, which the Mosaic offerings are understood to have merely suggested to the apprehension, or to have indicated by a symbolical representation. This single fact, we apprehend, is sufficient to prove that the death of Christ was strictly vicarious, in procuring the remission of sin, because, unless our Lord died as a substitute for the sinner, and thus effected in reality that which the victim on the Jewish altar presented in a symbol, and of which it could only excite the idea, it must appear impossible to determine that specific property of the blood of Christ *to take away sins*, in which the blood of bulls and of goats was deficient; since it is in the precise condition of a victim that this peculiar and eminent quality is ascribed to Him.

Those, however, who reject the received doctrine of the Atonement—besides endeavouring in other ways to reduce, as much as possible, the dignity and importance of the sacrificial rite—are unwilling to admit that it was appointed as a type or prefiguration of

the death of Christ. They contend that the allusions so often made to it in the New Testament,—as, for example, in the Epistle from which the text is taken,—are merely figurative ; suggested by certain features of resemblance between the death of Christ and the Mosaic sacrifices ; and made for no other purpose than to give a more lively and affecting description of the former. In maintaining this opinion, considerable stress has been laid on the Jewish education of the Apostles ; which, it is alleged, would naturally incline them to this particular species of imagery. It is essential then to the scope of the present argument, to expose the fallacy of this opinion, and to make it evident that the sacred writers have represented the rite of sacrifice under the law as an ordained type of the sacrifice of our Saviour.

With regard to the presumption, that the education of the Apostles would naturally dispose them to take their manner of description or illustration from the institutions of Moses, we are not left to collect the meaning which their language was intended to convey, from considerations of so general and inconclusive a nature.—Though, indeed, we may fairly demand why the education of a Jew should

weigh more in our estimation than the inspiration of an Apostle—why the sacred penman should have been permitted to make allusions, which, presuming them to be merely figurative, are not only strained and insipid, but extensively delusive; to employ illustrations which, on that presumption, are calculated, as we conceive, to degrade and impoverish rather than to exalt our conceptions of the death of Christ, and—which is mainly to be considered—to lead the bulk of their readers into essentially erroneous opinions concerning it.—But concede what we may to the bias of a Jewish education, the concession is of little moment: for, in the first place, the particular design of the Apostle in making the allusions in question is utterly foreign to the nature—inconsistent with the scope of figurative-language; and, secondly, the fact that the rite of sacrifice under the law was appointed as a type or prefiguration of the sacrifice of Christ, is supported by direct assertion in the Scriptures.

I. In a simile or metaphor—in any species of figurative illustration, the design of the comparison is to suggest some property which is *common* to the things compared—some property which belongs to that, whatever it may

be, which is the subject of the comparison, and the image or object by which it is illustrated. Thus, if we may offer an example of a fact so obvious, when Jesus Christ is entitled "the chief corner-stone" of the church, the intention is manifestly to point out a certain property, namely, that of giving support or completion,* as common both to our Lord and a chief corner-stone:—to our Lord, with relation to the church, and to a chief corner-stone with relation to a building. But, unless we have utterly mistaken the meaning of the Apostle, his design in alluding to the rite of sacrifice instituted by Moses, and comparing it with the sacrifice of Christ, is not to suggest a property common to both, and constituting a resemblance between them, but to infer the non-existence of a peculiar property in the sacrifices under the law, which was inherent in the sacrifice of Christ. Thus he alludes to "the blood of bulls and of goats," for the express purpose of inferring that there was a virtue to take away sin, which *did not* and *could not* exist in the blood of bulls and of goats, but which *could* and *did* exist in the blood of

* The precise meaning of λίθος ἀκρογωνιαίος, is explained by the Bishop of London—"the head or top corner-stone." (*Sermons*, p. 83.)

Christ;—"for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin."—"We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* In like manner, he alludes to the high-priest of the tabernacle, and compares him with Jesus, our High-Priest, for the purpose of showing that the former possessed in appearance only, and not in reality, the essential qualification for the priesthood; namely, the power of effectually interceding with God; and that this was the exclusive and unchangeable attribute of Christ, who, as he writes, "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"† . . . "who needeth not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did once when he offered up himself."‡ The Apostle then alludes to the Jewish high-priest, in order to direct our attention to the priesthood of Christ, in the same manner as a person might point his finger to a statue, with a view to bring to our thoughts the individual whom it represented. The high-priest, in the fulfilment of his office, suggested a prevailing

* Heb. x. 10.

† Heb. vii. 25.

‡ Heb. vii. 27.

power of intercession with God, which, however, he did not actually possess, and which the Apostle attributes to no other than Jesus; just as the statue suggests those attributes of mind, which, in the living man, are united to that external form, or visible appearance, to which it bears a resemblance. In like manner, he alludes to the animal sacrificed, as a person might allude to the wings of the cherubim which overshadowed the mercy-seat, in order to remind us of the swiftness with which the angels of God attend his bidding, and fulfil his pleasure; for, as it will more fully appear in the farther prosecution of our subject, he accounts the animal slain at the altar to be significant merely of that property to take away sin which he ascribes to Jesus; just as the wings of the cherubim could denote only the celerity of angels. In allowing such allusions then to be purely rhetorical, or figurative illustrations merely, we should overlook the specific purpose of the Apostle in making them; for, if *this* be matter of attention, we cannot but perceive that they are explanatory references to the institution of sacrifice—to the priest officiating at the ceremony, and the animals offered on the altar—references made with the intention of turning our reflections to

the significance of that institution, and the ulterior purpose for which the Almighty had appointed it.

We repeat, it is not the particular design of the Apostle, in making the allusions in question, to illustrate the sacrifice of Christ by suggesting a property belonging to it in common with the offerings under the law. It must be useless then to allege any circumstances of resemblance between them, with the view of maintaining the purely figurative character of such allusions. It must be useless to argue that there was a property in the Mosaic offerings, analogous in its nature, however inferior in degree, to a property in the sacrifice of Christ; namely, that of removing a legal or ceremonial defilement from the individual who offered it.* It must be equally

* "The sacrifices of the law, considered *merely* as the performance of a ceremonial duty, could operate only to the reversal of a ceremonial forfeiture, or the remission of a *temporal* punishment; that is, they could propitiate God only in his temporal relation to his chosen people as their Sovereign; and for this plain reason, because, the ostensible performance of the rite being but an act of external submission and homage, when not accompanied with an internal submission of mind and a sincere repentance, it could acquit the offender only in reference 'to the external law, which exacted obedience to God as a civil prince.'"—

unavailing to adduce any particulars relative to the animal that was offered in sacrifice, as illustrative of the character of Christ; the circumstance, for example, of its being "without blemish and without spot." These, and other circumstances of resemblance, are assumed on all hands, and their existence admits of no question. Indeed, if the design of the Apostle be to show that the rite of sacrifice was a symbol and prophecy of the sacrifice of Christ, it must be perfectly obvious that such circumstances are of essential importance. The argument which we are insisting upon, and offering to the examination of our opponents, is, that the main purpose for which he brings the rite of sacrifice into a comparison with the sacrifice of Christ, by means of certain features of resemblance or conformity existing between them, is not to set forth their agreement in the possession of a common property, but to fix our attention upon an essential difference in the one from the other; and, consequently, that he

Magee, Vol. I. p. 323. We may add, that when "the ostensible performance of the rite" was "accompanied by an internal submission of mind," there was no inherent virtue in the sacrifice itself to procure the acquittal of the offender; for the Apostle assures us that "the law can never, with those sacrifices which they offered, year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect." (Heb. x. 1.)

cannot, in such a comparison, be employing metaphors merely, or similes, or any other figures of speech. He is urging an argument, one which exhibits the unvarying purpose of God towards our species, while it establishes on the firmest basis our hopes of life eternal. Assuming—we shall presently observe with what propriety—assuming that the rite of sacrifice was symbolical of a vicarious agency, an expiatory virtue—to whomsoever pertaining, or wheresoever existing—in the pardon of sin, he argues, from the nature of things, that no such virtue could reside in irrational, involuntary victims; and, consequently, that it existed elsewhere—existed in that real and effectual sacrifice for sin, which, having been fixed in the divine appointment, Christ had virtually offered as the atonement for past as well as future transgressions. His aim is to assure us, on the authority of an Apostle, that the whole ceremony of the Jewish sacrifice was nothing more than a gorgeous symbol, a majestic shadow; incapable of existence without the substance from which it was derived—the offered body of Christ.

We have said that he *assumes* the rite of sacrifice to have been symbolical of a vicarious transaction, or the substitution of an inno-

cent being in the place of the guilty ; for it is observable that he does not appear to have supposed that any doubt existed on that point —that any question could be raised as to the fact, that the rite of sacrifice was adapted to signify the imputation of the guilt of the offender to another and an innocent being; whether to the animal itself which was sacrificed, or some other being whom the animal represented. Indeed, the peculiar manner in which the rite was performed, and the very terms in which that manner was prescribed, appear to have placed this conclusion beyond any reasonable doubt. For example, on the great day of annual atonement,* when a sacrifice was offered for the whole congregation, the high-priest, it will be remembered, was commanded to offer a bullock and a goat; the former for his own sins, and the latter for the sins of the people : and after having sprinkled the blood, in the form prescribed, before the mercy-seat, he was farther directed to lead forth a live goat, *as a part and continuation* of the same ceremony,† which was then to

* For a particular explanation of this and all the Jewish sacrifices, see "Outram on Sacrifices."

† Magee, Vol. I. p. 66.

proceed as prescribed in the following language :—“ And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited : and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.”* It seems obvious, from these words, that the imposition of the priest’s hands upon the head of the goat was intended to signify a transfer or imputation to the animal, or to some being represented by the animal, of the sins which had been confessed over its head, and for which a sacrifice had been previously offered ; and, moreover, that the sending of the goat into the wilderness, represented the removal of all the guilt of the children of Israel. It will be farther remembered, that the scape-goat is described as having been defiled by this imputation of accumulated iniquity ; since the man who had led it away into the wilderness was looked upon as contaminated by that act, and underwent, in consequence, a purifying ablution.

* Lev. xvi. 21, 22

It appears then to have been most reasonably *taken for granted* by the Apostle, that the sacrificial rite, whatever additional purposes we may suppose it to have answered, was formally instituted to signify that the remission of the punishment of the transgressor against God, was the effect of an imputation of his guilt to some other living being substituted in his place: for it is difficult to conceive, that the idea of such a mode of acquitting the sinner could have been conveyed in a more determinate form of symbolical action. Thus much, we have said, was assumed by the Apostle, either as a fact already known to those for whom he was writing, or as a fact which would be perceived the instant it was suggested, and assented to without question.* What particular ideas, indeed, the Jews themselves had connected with the rite of sacrifice, we can only gather indirectly from his language, and it is not essential to a Christian apprehension of the purport of that rite to determine. Inasmuch, however, as the law, in its office as a schoolmaster†

* There is evidence, however, that the Jews attached a "vicarious import" to the rite, as is shown by Outram, (lib. i. c. xxii.)

† Gal. iii. 24. The *παιδαγωγός* was no more than a domestic slave, who had the charge of his master's children; and if he was so called from his accompanying them when

to bring men to Christ, taught its pupils by types and shadows only, the instruction which it conveyed must have been necessarily partial and obscure ; and was more so, it is probable, than in the plenitude of our knowledge we are apt to imagine. The import of the prophecies in the Old Testament, we well know, was, in a great measure, a secret at the time they were uttered : so might have been the types under the ancient dispensations. To us, however, the typical significance of the sacrificial rite has been clearly illustrated, as well as embodied in the sacrifice of Christ, and thus it has lent to his pretensions the confirmation of prophecy. But to proceed with the argument of the Apostle—

Assuming the rite of sacrifice to signify that the guilt of the offender was imputed to another, and expiated by the death of the they went from home, whether to school or elsewhere, and was a distinct person from the διδάσκαλος, the teacher of the children; (Schleusner), the term "schoolmaster," it appears, cannot properly describe the office of the law as introductory to the Christian dispensation. The import of the passage, "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ," seems to be, not that the law communicated any knowledge respecting Christ, but merely that it was adapted to bring men into such a state of mind as would predispose them to listen to his instructions, and, more particularly, to embrace the offer of pardon through his mediation.

substitute, the Apostle, as we have already stated, argues, from the nature of things, that the import of that rite could not have been substantiated in the rite itself: that the substitution which it symbolized could not have taken place in the sacrifice of an irrational creature :—“ It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” Moreover, he alleges that the inherent inefficacy of such sacrifices (whether known or not to those who offered them) and their consequent allusion to some other sacrifice, was deducible from the fact, that they continued year after year to be offered. He argues that “ the worshippers, once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.” Accordingly, he regards the law, in enjoining those sacrifices, as having foreshown and prefigured only the privileges which it had the appearance of conferring, and not as having in reality bestowed them—in his own words, “ having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things.” *

* Heb. x. 1. By not having “ the very image” (*ἀντὶν τῆν εἰκόνα*) is clearly meant not having the reality, the substance of the things of which it was “ a shadow.”

II. And here we are led to observe, that the prophetic character of the ceremonial law in general, and the appointment of sacrifice in particular, as a type or prefiguration of the sacrifice of Christ, are directly asserted in the sacred writings. In proof of this, we shall cite the whole of the passage, to which we adverted at the commencement of this discourse:—"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."* Now you will observe that the Apostle, in this passage, points to no circumstances of resemblance between the particular ordinances to which he refers, and those of Christianity; but, clearly, instructs the professors of the Gospel to account them as no longer binding, for this reason—that, as they were originally appointed to be "a shadow of things to come," and had received their realization and fulfilment in Jesus Christ, they had answered the end for which they had been instituted, and had ceased to be of farther use. Language could hardly have been more decisive of the general fact, that the external ordinances, or the ceremonial

* Col. ii. 16.

part of the Jewish religion, was typical in its constitution and design. But more—we have, in the following passage, a circumstantial and striking illustration of the fact, that the particular rite of sacrifice was designed to be a type of the sacrifice of Christ :*—“ For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. *Wherefore* † Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.” Here it is, in effect, affirmed that the death of Christ was divinely appointed to take place without the city of Jerusalem, which was considered as corresponding with the camp in the wilderness, in order to produce a closer conformity between the sacrifice under the law and that of Christ. For what other reason, however, such a conformity should have been ordained, than that the former was intended to prefigure the latter, we are wholly unable to imagine.

We have alleged some of the numerous proofs which might be collected from the sacred writings, that the rite of sacrifice was significant of an expiatory virtue, operating

* Outram, (lib. i. c. xviii. § 6.)

† Διὸ καὶ Ἰησοῦς. . . . Heb. xiii. 11.

to the absolution of the guilty; and that, as such, it was an ordained type of the sacrifice of Christ:—that is, that our Saviour sustained the imputation of human guilt, and died as a substitute for transgressors. But, now, if this be disputed, we ask, In what manner is it possible, or can it be conceived, that the sacrifice of Christ *in contradistinction to the Jewish offerings* could take away sins? It is contended by some, that sacrifice was merely expressive of the devotional sentiments of the persons who offered it: but if this was the whole of its import, we look in vain for that virtue to take away sins, which was wanting in the blood of bulls and of goats, and which was supplied in the blood of Christ. If the rite of sacrifice was instituted for no other purpose than to be symbolical of the ideas and affections of the worshipper of God, it could have been deficient no otherwise than as an act of piety in the offerer; whereas, it is not the offerer of “the blood of bulls and goats,” but “the blood of bulls and goats” itself, which the text asserts to have been wanting; and wanting, be it observed, as the result of necessity: it being “not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats”—whatever might be the piety of the offerer of it—it being “not possible

that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." This important distinction has been strangely overlooked by opponents of the established creed on this subject: as, for example, by a divine of the last century,* whose opinions afford perhaps the most specious view of the sacrifice of Christ, at variance with the doctrine commonly received, that has been offered, or could be conceived on the subject.

That author makes the important admission, that the sacrifices under the law were types of the death of Christ, and maintains, with whatever consistency, the mediatorial agency of the Son of God; but he will not allow the symbolical transfer of sin to the animal sacrificed, nor the actual imputation of it to Christ in his submission to the accursed death of the cross. He defines sacrifices to be "symbolical addresses to God, intended to express before him the devotions, affections and desires of the heart by significant and emblematical actions." Thus he conceives that the act of pouring out the blood of the sacrifice at the foot of the altar, denoted, to use his own words, "the readiness or resolution, or,

* J. Taylor, in his "Scripture Doctrine of the Atonement examined."

however, the duty of the person who offered the sacrifice, to lay down his life in adherence to God." Again, he argues "that the victim being without spot and blemish, denoted that the sacrificer ought to perform the service or to lead his whole life with the utmost sincerity and sanctity of heart." Farther, he supposes that "the victim represented the person who offered it, and showed the demerit of sin in general, and how the sacrificer ought to slay the brute in himself, and devote his life and soul to God"* (a most infelicitous explanation this, of the act of slaying a lamb without blemish and without spot!) Accordingly, this writer explains the sacrifice offered by Christ for the sins of the world, to have consisted in his perfect obedience and goodness, which was manifested through the whole of his life, but especially at his death. "The blood of Christ" he therefore considers as an elliptical, compendious expression for the perfect rectitude of Christ. Now, apart from many other objections to this explanation of the sacrifice of Christ, which it were remote from our purpose to allege, the author, as we observed, has failed to remark the essential fact, that it is not the defective obedience of the person

* Chap. ix.

offering the animal in sacrifice, which, in the text and elsewhere, is affirmed to be ineffectual to take away sins, but the animal itself which was offered,—that it was *the blood of bulls and goats that was shed* by the offerer, which shadowed that efficacy to take away sins which was realized in the sacrifice of our Saviour. This essential fact, we say, he has failed to remark, for it is manifest that the streaming blood of the animal sacrificed could not have symbolized that unblemished rectitude of character which was wanting in the persons who offered it—could not have prefigured the spotless purity of the Son of God.

There are, doubtless, other ways of accounting for the influence of the death of Christ in “taking away sins,” besides that of ascribing to it an expiatory virtue. It may be said, for example, that the death of Christ operated to “take away sins,” inasmuch as it confirmed the truth of his doctrines and the authority of his precepts; delivered as both were to counteract the depravity of our nature, and to amend and sanctify the human character. But the question still remains unanswered—In what manner did the shedding of Christ’s blood avail “to take away sins,” as contrasted with the inefficacy of the blood of bulls and goats? If, on the

one hand, we regard the animal slain in the sacrifice as the passive, involuntary subject of a ceremony, which indicated nothing more than the devotion of the person who performed it, and if, on the other hand, we understand by the efficacy of the death of Christ to take away sins, the testimony which it bore to the reality of his mission from God as a teacher of religion,—what is that point of comparison between the sacrifice of the animal and the sacrifice of Christ, which constituted a ground for pronouncing the inferiority, the inefficacy of the former, and the perfection, the sufficiency of the latter? We perceive, it is true, a *resemblance* between the animal offered in sacrifice—the lamb without blemish and without spot, and our Redeemer in his voluntary submission to the death of the cross: they were both unoffending and innocent sufferers. But the language of the Apostle directs our attention to an opposition, a *contrast* between them, and instructs us to look for the reason of that contrast—the reason why the blood of bulls and goats was necessarily inert and powerless, and the blood of Christ all-sufficient to take away sins. Can that reason be any other, than that the former could not expiate the guilt of the sinner, and the latter could?

It should be added that, if the argument which we have taken on this subject be well-founded, it must expose the futility of those attempts which are made to explain away the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction to divine justice in behalf of mankind, by alleging a variety of possible constructions of the original phraseology of Scripture. To take an example—when Christ is said to have died *for us*, it is argued that the phrase may signify that he died *on our account*, or *for our benefit*, as well as *in our stead*:* but if such alterations were as allowable as the opponents of that doctrine could possibly desire, the great fact, that in the death of Christ there was a property to take away sins, which was signified by divine appointment in the institution of sacrifice, but which was necessarily wanting in the blood of irrational creatures, restrains us to the conclusion, that, in dying for our benefit, he bore the imputation of our sins, and suffered in the place of the guilty: though, indeed, this conclusion could scarcely have been impressed upon us in language more direct and unequivocal than is used by the sacred writers; as in the following passages:—“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on

* On this proposed emendation, in rendering the Greek prepositions, see *Magee*, vol. i. p. 227.

the tree;" "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;" "Who gave himself a ransom for all;" with numerous others, which may be presumed to be familiar to every reader of the Scriptures.*

We have prosecuted an argument in support of a most essential doctrine of Christianity; and so long as attempts shall be made to expunge it from the public formulary of our faith, so long as our belief of it shall be in danger of being destroyed or unsettled, a minister of the Gospel can want no inducement to apply his attention to its defence and confirmation. Not

* It seems, however, that there is a prior objection to this doctrine, which it is not in the power of language to remove. At least, when the author of "the Scripture-Doctrine of Atonement examined," asserts (p. 95) that "the Scripture never speaks, *nor, in any consistency can speak*, of Christ satisfying the demand of law and justice," can we believe that, had the Scripture *literally* affirmed, that our Lord satisfied the demand of law and justice, that author would have allowed the imputation of sin to the Messiah to have been taught in the Scriptures? If there be such a prior objection to the doctrine—of which, in truth, we are left in no doubt by the language of its opponents—the contrariety of opinion on the subject of the sacrifice of Christ affords, in itself, no proof of an ambiguity in the Scriptures, or of the precariousness of language, as a medium of transmitting from generation to generation the substance of divine communications. The dispute *may* be maintained on an entirely different ground:—such, for example, as that on which we were engaged in the former part of the preceding discourse.

only so—to examine or review the evidence of this or any other tenet of our religion—to repeat the act of belief in it—to renew our impressions of its truth and reality, is one means—not the least essential—of retaining a just sense of its importance and value, or of establishing its influence on the affections and conduct. *This*, we would remind you in conclusion, is the proper end of all inquiry into the sense of the Scriptures. We must be too well persuaded that in religion, as in every other kind of knowledge, it is one thing to perceive the reality of a fact, or the truth of a proposition, and another to appreciate the magnitude of that fact, or the import of that proposition. The difference may be almost as great as that which there is between a belief of the authenticity of a work, and an accurate acquaintance with its contents. We may, every hour of our lives, believe, or, rather, we may never for a moment doubt the existence of God; but we are rarely, it may be, arrested by the immensity of that conclusion,* or impressed with ideas of the wisdom, the power, the goodness—in a word, the perfection and infinity of those attributes which are proper to the Creator and Preserver of all things. In

* “ It is an immense conclusion that there is a God.”—*Paley's Nat. Theol.* ch. xxiv.

like manner, we may, at all times, be far from disbelieving the reality of our Saviour's atonement for the sins of mankind; but we may be feebly, if at all, affected by those momentous conclusions which it must of necessity involve, and force upon the consideration of every reflective believer—the utter incongruity which all iniquity must bear to the character of the Divine Being, and the happiness of his creatures—the inconsistency which there must be between wilful and unrepented sin, and a well-founded hope of his forgiveness—the immense debt of gratitude which binds us to the Deity, and the infinite encouragement afforded us to serve and obey him — we may be but rarely affected by considerations of this nature, and, consequently, derive from that one sufficient sacrifice which was offered by Jesus Christ for the sins of the whole world, but little, if any impulse to our religious affections—but little, if any inducement to holiness of life.

It may be, happily, far otherwise. We may be employing our powers, discharging our duties, and expending, or, rather, “redeeming” our time, under a deep and abiding impression of that manifestation of the Deity which is made to us in the atonement of our Saviour—of his abhorrence of evil, and his compassion for trans-

gressors. But let the great possibility, the lamentable frequency of being, or of becoming, a thoughtless, and, therefore, an unfeeling, inactive believer in the Redeemer's sacrifice, induce us to reflect upon it, again and again, that, by the blessing of God, we may rightly estimate its incomparable value, and be effectually stimulated to secure that absolution and life eternal which it has placed within our reach ; which, indeed, nothing but our own indolence and perverseness can prevent us from obtaining. So we shall not be looking forward to an uncertain futurity—as though, at death, we were going we knew not where, or, at the great day of account, were to be judged we knew not on what principles ; in the fear, rather than the hope, of immortality. But in humble confidence, we shall anticipate the full result and consummation of the love of God, so wonderfully revealed and pledged to us in the gift of his Son, to be the propitiation for our sins ; taking to our hearts the divine testimony—“ As it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment : so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many ; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time unto salvation.”*

* Heb. ix. 28.

SERMON III.

I JOHN II. 1, 2.

And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

THE office which is here ascribed to Jesus Christ, and which he is elsewhere, in numerous passages in the Scriptures, represented as sustaining—that of our Advocate with the Father, or Mediator between God and man*—adds a powerful, and, indeed, decisive confir-

* The title of Mediator is, strictly, of more comprehensive import than that of Advocate; but the distinction is of no moment to the argument in this discourse. It may here be proper to remark, that a student of the Scriptures should be very cautious in affixing a precise, restricted signification to the words which he finds in them; as, unquestionably, some of the most important are used in more than one sense. That they are so, is commonly acknowledged; but then it follows, and this is frequently overlooked, that an accurate knowledge of the doctrines of Scripture is not to be sought, or conveyed, by stringent definitions of its terms.

mation of the strictly vicarious and expiatory nature of that sacrifice, or propitiation, which he is declared to have offered for the sins of the whole world. To make this evident, we can hardly take a more effectual method than that of laying before you, and subjecting to examination, the reason assigned for the appointment of Christ as our Mediator and Advocate, by those who reject the commonly received doctrine on the subject. Indeed, we may take occasion to observe that there is scarcely any thing better calculated to confirm our conviction of this article of our religion—and, it might be added, of some others also which our own Church, and the generality of Christians, regard as essential and distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel—than those expositions of the Christian system, which are offered as substitutes for the established creed, and amendments upon it. If the question be, strictly, whether those doctrines be deducible from the Scriptures, there is often no better counterpoise to the objections brought against them by our opponents, than their own explanations of the language which is cited to prove and illustrate them.*

* The weakness of a cause is not unfrequently judged to have been made more apparent by the ability of its advocates.

That Jesus Christ *is represented* in the sacred writings as our Mediator and Advocate, that we are instructed to offer our prayers to God in his name, and encouraged to expect for his sake, the acceptance of our worship and obedience, are facts which cannot even be disputed, and which it would be superfluous to insist upon. Now, we perceive a substantive ground, an adequate reason for such a representation of Jesus Christ, in the vicarious nature of his humiliation and sufferings; in their inherent virtue to atone for our sins, and the consequent efficacy of his mediation. But in what manner do our opponents account for the designation of Christ as our Mediator and Intercessor with God? What is the cause which they allege for the representation which the Scriptures have given of the part which he fulfils in the Divine economy; and by which they endeavour to supplant our persuasion that our sins were imputed to him, and expiated by him—that he suffered and died as a substitute for the guilty?

One of the most intelligent, if not distinguished of their writers,* explains it in the following manner:—“ In human transactions, “ it is usual to employ some intermediate

* Dr. Cogan. Works, vol. v. p. 251.

“ person to promote a reconciliation between
“ discordant parties. . . . Where great offences
“ have been committed, which are calculated
“ to excite strong resentments, such an Inter-
“ mediate is disposed to act as an Advocate
“ and Intercessor in favour of the offending
“ party. . . . We may farther remark, that it
“ is frequently deemed a maxim of prudence,
“ in a mind possessing warm benevolence, to
“ render reconciliation apparently difficult ;
“ and to impute its immediate success to the
“ interference of a friend. This has a natural
“ tendency to render the adverse party more
“ cautious in the future. Benefits too easily
“ conferred are seldom estimated according to
“ their value; but the most obdurate trans-
“ gressor would perceive, that reiterated
“ offences are insults committed against the
“ persons principally offended, and his friendly
“ mediator. The Being whom all men have
“ offended cannot be moved by entreaties, nor
“ can his eternal purposes be changed. He
“ it was that sought reconciliation. It was
“ his own act to send his only-begotten Son
“ to be a propitiation for our sins. Yet, in
“ his conduct towards his moral offspring, he
“ represents himself as conforming to the
“ principles and dispositions of human agency,

“ by way of accommodation to the weakness
 “ of our perceptions, and to produce a more
 “ impressive effect on our minds. The
 “ universal Father, while he was determined
 “ to show mercy, was determined also to
 “ check presumption.”

Such is the explanation which this author offers us of the office which Christ sustains as Mediator between God and man ; and many passages of equivalent import might be cited from the writings of others, who deny the expiatory virtue of his sufferings : passages, in particular, which assert the importance of “ guarding and qualifying the pardon of sin.” * Indeed it were not easy to imagine any other or more plausible account of the mediatorial office of Christ, if we reject the vicarious nature of his sacrifice, or its intrinsic efficacy to atone for the sins of the world.

Now, in the first place, it should be observed that this method of accounting for the mediation of Christ, proceeds on reasoning which

* “The governor who consults the *public* good ought
 “ to guard, qualify, and circumstance his pardons in such
 “ manner, as not to propagate, but, if possible, to extir-
 “ pate a spirit of disorder and rebellion, and to spread a
 “ loyal, well-affected temper throughout the whole com-
 “ munity.”—*Scripture Doctrine of Atonement examined*,
 p. 105.

lends direct support to the doctrine which it is intended to disprove. For in what manner do we commonly vindicate our belief of Christ's satisfaction to divine justice from the imputation of unreasonableness? We have already endeavoured to show, in a preceding discourse, that the human mind is incompetent to prejudge the mode in which the Supreme Being would exercise mercy to the guilty, or to predetermine the conditions which appertain to his absolution of the transgressor. But moreover, in the defence of this doctrine it is usual, and justly so, to insist upon the practical effects of the atonement of our Saviour: to maintain that the pardon of sin, in virtue of a satisfaction for the violations of the divine law, is adapted to exert a most salutary, a most reforming and sanctifying influence on the mind; that it awakens the most enlarged and affecting conceptions of the justice and the goodness of God, the turpitude of sin, and the obligation to gratitude on account of its forgiveness; thereby supplying us with additional and most powerful inducements to moral rectitude, and drawing closer the bonds of our subjection to the Deity, "the King eternal, immortal, and invisible." In exactly the same strain, the author cited ob-

serves, "that it is frequently deemed a maxim of prudence, in a mind possessing warm benevolence, to make reconciliation apparently difficult" that "this has a natural tendency to make the offending party more cautious in the future" that "it holds him trembling at a distance in the very act which facilitates his approach." In the same strain we are reminded of the importance "of guarding and qualifying the pardon of sin." Yet theologians who thus expound and justify the ways of God to man, can impugn as fanciful and irrational, the prevalent belief that Jesus Christ sustains the office of our Mediator with God, in virtue of a satisfaction which he offered to divine justice for the transgressions of mankind; albeit such a mediation tends, in a most effectual and impressive manner, to render reconciliation with a benevolent God *apparently difficult*, and to *guard and qualify the pardon of sin*.

But farther and more particularly, this reasoning, alleged to account for the mediatorial office of Christ, must—on the presumption that he has *not*, in reality, satisfied the justice of the law which we have broken, and verily expiated our guilt—fall to the ground. In other words, such reasoning becomes entirely fictitious, and can be supported no otherwise than by an effort of the imagination.

Undoubtedly, the Almighty has guarded and qualified his pardon of sin : he has done so by other means besides that of the appointment of a mediator ; for example, by demanding the repentance and faith of the sinner. But how can it be said, with any reason, that he has guarded and qualified the pardon of sin *through the mediation of Christ*, unless this has supplied a necessary judicial ground for the acquittal of the guilty ? If the humiliation and sufferings which our Saviour is declared to have endured for our sakes, were not essential to illustrate the justice of God in the bestowment of mercy, how can his mediation have rendered our reconciliation with the Almighty “apparently difficult ?” What opposite claims has he answered ? What diverse purposes has he prevailed to accomplish ? What seemingly incongruous principles has he combined and established ?

It is indeed most true that, in the Scriptures, the pardon of sin is represented as subject to a peculiar qualification ; and it is made *apparent* that, to devise the means of reconciliation between God and man, would have been *difficult*—nay, impossible, to the highest created intelligence. Accordingly, we conclude that there was an adequate cause for such a qualification, and that it was the work of infinite

wisdom to effect such a reconciliation. But if we abandon this conclusion, and embrace the opinion that Christ was appointed our mediator with God for the specific purpose of making reconciliation with Him apparently difficult, and that the Deity is thus "represented as conforming to the principles and dispositions of human agency," in order "to produce a more impressive effect upon our minds," what becomes of that apparent difficulty in the reconciliation of the sinner to God, and the consequent "more impressive effect" which the appointment of a mediator was designed "to produce?" Is it not obvious that, in order "to produce a more impressive effect upon our mind" by the appointment of a mediator, we must be induced to believe that God appointed him for *some other reason* than to "produce a more impressive effect upon us;" and that he who succeeds in convincing us that this was the *only* reason, effaces the impression which that method of saving us was designed to create, and must, of necessity, appear to have frustrated the purpose of God in employing it?

Indeed it deserves especial observation, that those theologians, whose opinion we are disputing, have proposed an explanation of the scheme of our redemption by Jesus Christ,

involving the extraordinary conclusion, that they have drawn aside the curtain which the Divine Being had deemed fit should be let down before his throne and tribunal ; that they have dispelled the darkness, unravelled the mystery—nay, scattered the illusion, in which he had designedly enveloped his dealings with his creatures, and concealed the principles of his conduct as the Governor and Judge of the world. For they have discovered that the mediation of the Son of God on the part of the guilty, with its prefigurement in types—its celebration in prophecy—the air of wonder and rejoicing and profound adoration with which it was announced and contemplated by the ministers of the Almighty, human and angelic—they have discovered that all this — and how much more!—was devised for no other purpose than to aid the “pomp and circumstance,” if we may so speak, of human salvation ; and that the announcement of absolution through the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, is but a more imposing form of proclaiming the mercy of God, and declaring the simple act of forgiveness !—But this is not the only instance in which the speculator, whether in theology or metaphysics, while endeavouring to penetrate the designs of the Deity, and to reach the utmost limit of human intelligence, has

precipitated himself into the conclusion, that he had detected something which God had intended should remain a secret. The author of the "Essay on Truth"* has pointed out a similar specimen of reasoning among certain Necessarians, and taken advantage of its naked, defenceless exposure to confutation and derision. "There are," he observes, "fatalists who acknowledge that the free agency of man is universally felt and believed: that though man, in truth, is a necessary agent, having all his actions determined by fixed and immutable laws, yet, this being concealed from him, he acts with the conviction of being a free agent.—Concealed from him!" exclaims this writer, "Who conceals it? Does the Author of nature conceal it,—and do these writers discover it! What deference," he adds—with a satire which would scarcely become the function of a minister of the Gospel—"what deference is not due to the judgment of a metaphysician, whose sagacity is so irresistibly (I had almost said omnipotently) penetrating!"

Who does not perceive, in the fact that God *appears* in his word to have harmonized the claims of justice and mercy in the appointment of Christ to be our Mediator, and, in so doing,

* Dr. Beattie. Part II. ch. ii.

to have laid the world under an infinite obligation to love and serve him, a proper and sufficient proof that he *has* harmonized the claims of justice and mercy, and that he *has* laid the world under infinite obligation? What other or stronger evidence can we have of truth and reality, than is conveyed to us in the impression which the word of God is framed to produce? what other authority for our faith, what other test of belief?

In urging the impression which the language of Scripture is adapted to convey on this subject, we must submit that it bears upon a question mooted even by those who believe that our Saviour atoned for the sins of the world as a substitute or surety for the guilty,—the question whether the sacrifice of Christ originated in absolute necessity and the nature of things, or whether mankind might have been saved by any other provision of divine wisdom. Bishop Butler suggests the possibility that there may be a very great impropriety in such a question.* Its impropriety may consist in its casting a doubt on the infinite value of Christ's satisfaction for sin, and thereby disturbing our sense of obligation to Almighty God for the inestimable fruits

* Analogy, Part II. ch. v. § 5.

of his mediation—that sense of obligation which it is the main purpose of the sacred writers to impress upon our minds. *They* represent our condition as sinners, irrespective of the interposition of our Saviour, as one of imminent peril, and the most pressing emergency, or, rather, of irremediable guilt and condemnation; and they speak of that interposition with the joy and gratitude of men who had obtained by it a deliverance from the worst and incalculable evils. Whether they record the declarations of our Lord himself, or deliver truths which God had immediately “revealed to them by his Spirit,” they teach us to regard our exemption from the penalty of our sins as the final cause, and properly the result of his mediation in our behalf; and to account an interest in the efficacy of his sacrifice and intercession, to be no less needful to the safety and well-being of the immortal soul, than food to the nutrition of the body, or than air and light to vitality and enjoyment.

[Such a representation of the work of Christ in our redemption, by the inspired teachers of our religion, ought surely to be taken as a conclusive answer to the question, whether his atonement for our sins was strictly necessary

to our spiritual restoration. Inasmuch, however, as this question may be judged debatable on other and speculative grounds, we would suggest the inquiry, whether the *fact* of our Saviour's atonement be not itself a demonstration of its necessity—so far as necessity can appertain to an act of the Creator, and be regarded otherwise than as a condition of the creature, or the limitation of an imperfect and dependent being? It is commonly and most justly observed, that we may safely assert of the conduct of God, in this as in other instances, that it was the most consistent with his character, and the best adapted to his creatures: but may we not reasonably add, that it was *therefore* a necessary part of his moral government?—we say *necessary*, because we suspect that to substitute *most fit*, or *most expedient*, would be merely to change the term. We are fearful of limiting the resources of the Deity, and of restricting him in a liberty of choice. But may not this be a fallacious imagination, induced upon us by the inferiority of our nature? Is not a liberty of choice, in all human experience, a mark of mental imperfection? Is not the capability—as we should call it—of adopting any other line of conduct but one, a proof that we are

ignorant of the best ; and our freedom of choice, therefore, a witness to our liability to error ? Can there be in the All-perfect mind any opposition of views, or any conflict of motives ? and if not, must there not, consequently, be an absolute unity of purpose ? We would make no assertions on a subject which appears inaccessible to finite intelligence ; but as we consider the question concerning the necessity of Christ's atonement for our sins, to be one, which, to say the least, can serve no useful purpose, we may venture to submit whether, in the belief that God is a being of supreme intelligence to *know* " the best," and of perfect rectitude to *choose*, as well as power to accomplish it, such a question can have any rational existence. We might indeed conjecture what the Almighty would do in particular circumstances, and be borne out in our anticipations by the discoveries already made of his character and will. But when we acknowledge that he has revealed his purpose, and constituted a particular economy, all discussion respecting the possibilities of the case appears to be properly at an end. The agency of God has surely determined the question, and illustrated the nature of things. By aiming in our inquiries to penetrate beyond

the known manifestations of the Almighty, and to ascertain, on abstract and independent grounds, what we call "the nature of things," we seem to resemble, not those philosophers only who substituted theory for experiment and observation, but those likewise who turned aside altogether from sensible properties, and the real phenomena of nature, and sought to grasp the shadowy abstractions of "form" and "essence."]

Having exposed, as we conceive, the fallacy of an explanation of the mediatorial office of our Saviour, propounded by those who dispute the expiatory nature of his sacrifice, we shall offer some observations on the particular import of the representation given of him in the text as our Advocate with the Father; and suggest the nature of those feelings which it is calculated to inspire.

While we reject such a view of the mediation and advocacy of Christ, as that which has been brought under examination, we should be careful so to understand the necessity of his advocacy with the Father, and so to confide in the efficacy of his intercession, as at the same time to retain a full and unvarying impression of an unity of purpose in the Divine

Being. In the representation of Jesus Christ, as our "Advocate with the Father," there is, unquestionably, a certain accommodation to the weakness of human conception. Indeed, we are fully apprised that the word of God is largely and most graciously adapted and conformed to our modes of apprehension, on the subject of Christ's mediation as well as other topics of divine revelation. But this accommodation does not respect the reality or extent of Christ's mediation in our behalf: it does not respect the certainty or amount of the obligation under which we lie to him for our eternal deliverance; but it regards the mode only in which the interposition of Jesus Christ as our Saviour can most readily enter into our comprehension, and take possession of the heart or affections. Hence the work of Christ, in saving us, is illustrated by transactions which, in human experience, are associated with the most lively ideas of obligation, and the strongest sentiments of gratitude; for example, by the redemption of a captive—a transaction which can only virtually, and not in its circumstances or particularity, represent the mediation of our Saviour; and thus, in our text, the undiminished value, the permanent sufficiency of

his atonement is impressed upon our minds by the representation given of him as our Advocate with the Father, and as "ever living to make intercession for us."

We derive from this representation of our Redeemer, an express assurance—certainly a most comforting and animating assurance—that all that he did and suffered for us continues to operate with unabated power and efficacy on our spiritual and eternal interests: that his sacrifice is held in everlasting remembrance by the Deity, and supplies an immovable, unfailing ground of justification to the guilty. As, however, when the Scripture speaks of the anger and pity of the Almighty, we readily dissociate and reject from our idea of such principles in God, those changes and commotions of mind which belong to the anger and pity of human beings—conformably not more with the conclusions of our own reason than the authority of the Scripture itself, which assures us, that in God "there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"*—in like manner we receive the declaration before us, that "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." We do not—we cannot conceive,

* James i. 17.

that the advocacy of the Son of God in our behalf originated a change of disposition or purpose in the Father of our spirits ; converting his determination to inflict the sentence of his law into a willingness to remit it ; or that it is the continual intercession of the Son of God which inclines the Father to look with pity and forgiveness on the penitent transgressor. It is true, that Christians, in their zeal to demolish the self-confidence of the sinner, and to enforce the necessity of faith in the mediation of Christ as the basis of our justification, have been betrayed into the use of language which, if literally understood, would convey such an impression of the Eternal Father, and the office of our all-prevailing Advocate ; and we could cite instances in which such language, even though shielded by the license of poetry, has been caught up and commented upon by our opponents, as strictly proper to, and entirely warranted by the common belief of the atonement of Christ for our sins. But, surely, if we would put upon that language a candid and liberal construction, we must acknowledge that those who employ it do but intend to urge their persuasion, that we cannot approach the Almighty in virtue of our own righteousness ;

and that unless the merits of Christ be imputed to us through faith, we must inevitably sink under deserved condemnation. At the same time, we do not undertake to justify such language ; but rather regret that the use of it should have supplied a pretext for opposing and deriding an essential article of our faith ; nor do we deny that, in some instances, such language may have been suggested by, or have occasioned, a misconception of its import.

We must remark, moreover, that it is an undue excitement of the imagination which impels us to dilate upon the images or similitudes, employed by the sacred writers to illustrate the facts which they declare and the doctrines which they inculcate—to expand them into detail and particularity. Such a custom grievously militates against the apparent consistency of the Scriptures ; as it would, indeed, against that of any writings abounding in figurative and descriptive language. Thus, to imagine and depict the Son of God as in the act of meeting the demand of the Father for the condemnation of the sinner, by appealing to his work and sufferings for our sakes—to represent him as exhibiting the prints of his wounds, the memorials of his passion, to appease his awakened wrath, and

to stay his arm uplifted to destroy us, is an undue excitement of the fancy upon the illustration before us — that office of our advocate which St. John has ascribed to the Son of God. For there is nothing in the Scriptures which warrants such a conception of the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is nothing in the demand of a satisfaction for the violation of the divine law—nothing in the necessity of a mediator through whom we might have access to him as the suppliants of his mercy and the expectants of his bounty, which stands opposed to that parental relation which he is revealed as sustaining towards us, or which should, in the smallest degree, discourage and embarrass our highest confidence in Him as the Father of our spirits.—Nay, the fact that there is a satisfaction for sin—that there is a Mediator, is everywhere represented to us as the effect and manifestation of his paternal goodness and compassion, and the wonderful plan of his own infinite wisdom; whereby he at once attests the rectitude of his laws, upholds the honour of his government, and, notwithstanding, exempts the guilty from the desert of their transgressions, being “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” But we need

not insist upon a fact so abundantly asserted in the word of God. It is undeniable that, while the Scriptures assume a distinction of Persons in the one God, and distinguish between the offices which they severally sustain in the economy of our salvation, they teach us to regard our redemption as equally the act of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However they may exceed and baffle our comprehension by the use of language implying a plurality of persons—intelligent subsistences possessing attributes of a person—in the mysterious, inscrutable being of the one God, they leave us in no perplexity with regard to the absolute unity of his will and purpose—the unity of his will *to save us*. The same Apostle who represents the Son of God as our Advocate with the Father, comprehends the whole of the Divine character under the single attribute of love—“God is love.” We are taught, then, to apply the subject before us as a ground of unmixed confidence and satisfaction in the Deity; and assuredly, on reflection, we cannot but perceive that it holds out to us a most needful encouragement in our approaches to his footstool, and is fraught with peculiar consolation to every penitent believer in the Gospel.

The individual who implores any favour from another, naturally casts about for some plea of *merit* to allege in his behalf. Especially if he seeks to avert a punishment which he dreads, or sues for forgiveness, he naturally looks around for some circumstance of excuse or palliation—that is, for some remaining portion of desert, however scanty; so that his petition may not appear altogether extravagant and presumptuous. And does not this desire of assuming an appearance of justice and consistency in the requests which we prefer to a fellow-creature, attend us in our supplications to Almighty God? Do we not commonly deem it of importance that we should have some plea to allege in our behalf, in order to procure his favour and compassion? We may be conscious, it is true, that we are not innocent or meritorious, but sinful creatures, and cannot, in rectitude, demand any benefit at his hands, whether needful to our welfare here or hereafter;—yet is it not natural, when we approach His footstool, to fix upon some redeeming trait in our character—to task our memory for some pious and virtuous actions which we may have performed—to look for something which may be pleaded in mitigation of his displeasure, and may support the hope

of his forgiveness? Now, this great requisite in our prayers to God—a sufficient plea in our favour—one for which we may securely and confidently trust we shall be heard, is offered us in the mediation and advocacy of Jesus Christ; and it may well excite our wonder, that, devoid, as we confess ourselves to be, of personal or inherent worthiness, we do not feel more deeply the inestimable privilege of being permitted to plead, in our prayers for pardon and life eternal, that name by which we are called. The remembrance of a life comparatively virtuous and holy, or the consciousness of a prevailing regard to the precepts of the Gospel, is indeed most consolatory and valuable to the suppliant for divine mercy; inasmuch as it demonstrates his experience of the practical effects which the mediation of Christ was designed to produce; and is consequently indispensable to his actual participation of its benefits.* Accordingly, St. John, immediately after declaring the advocacy of Jesus Christ, affirms an obedience of the divine commandments to be the certain and only test of a true, availing knowledge of God:—“Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his com-

* The connexion of “works” with “faith” in our justification is treated at length in this volume.

mandments." Nevertheless, as on the one hand, our works of holiness—of piety towards God and benevolence towards our fellow-creatures, could in themselves have no virtue of merit or atonement; so, on the other hand, our want of them in past time cannot disqualify us, if sincerely penitent, for pardon and acceptance with a just God. We have a more powerful Advocate, a more prevailing Intercessor—One who, in seeking our acquittal from the sentence against us, and "all things that pertain unto life and godliness," asserts his right to them as the desert of his own immaculate righteousness—the just purchase of his propitiation for our sins. For "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

The question, then, which it mainly concerns us to resolve, arises from ourselves. Are we sincere and earnest in the confession of our sins, and our prayers for forgiveness? Do we in our hearts repent of our offences, and resolve in the help of God to forsake them? The willingness and the sufficiency of our Advocate with the Father we may entirely believe, and account to be above all question,—yes, though

our past life may have been defiled with wilful and heinous sins, or all devoted to our own pleasures and objects—wholly unproductive of “the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God,”—that life which was entirely due to the Lord, who bought it with the price of his own. Still may we assure ourselves of the all-prevailing advocacy of our Saviour, to obtain for us the liberty of serving God acceptably, and without the torment of fear.* For what end did He interpose as our Mediator with God, but to obtain for us that best, that perfect liberty? For what else did He quit the throne of heaven, tabernacle in our flesh, and endure the cross? And his power is equal to the extent of his benevolence, and the greatness of his purpose: “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”†

* 1 John iv. 18.

† Heb. vii. 25.

SERMON IV.

ROMANS XIII. 11.

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

THE precise import of the term "salvation," in these words, is not material to the purpose for which we have cited them. We receive it, however, in its more frequent and comprehensive sense, as signifying the final redemption of believers in the world to come. But some eminent commentators understand "salvation" in this passage, to import a deliverance which the Christians were about to experience from the persecution of the unbelieving Jews, in the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. Without undertaking a particular examination of the reasoning adduced in support of this opinion, we are unwilling to pass it by unnoticed, lest

it be supposed that the more general acceptance of the text is wholly incapable of sustaining the test of criticism; and our application of it to the subject of this discourse may seem to be a mere accommodation of the words of Scripture.

The application of the passage to an expected liberation of the Christians from their Jewish persecutors, is judged to be agreeable to the context; inasmuch as the Apostle had been admonishing his brethren of the duty of forbearance towards their enemies, on the ground that it was the prerogative of God only to inflict retribution: a duty, it is added, which, as the wrath of heaven was about to fall on their adversaries, it was especially necessary that they should be prepared to practise.* Now, in reply to this construction of the text, we must observe that the injunction, "Avenge not yourselves; but rather give place unto wrath"—occurring, as it does, at no less a distance than ten verses preceding the words in question—is one of a long series of commands and prohibitions, of the most general nature, and diversified application, comprising, we might almost say, a synopsis

* This application of the passage, however, is maintained on ground somewhat different by *Whitby*.

of the Christian morality, and having as little reference to a peculiarity of existing circumstances, or an approaching crisis of a temporal nature, as it were possible to conceive. The exhortation preceding the text is one of the utmost comprehension :—"Render, therefore, to all their dues ; tribute to whom tribute is due ; custom to whom custom ; fear to whom fear ; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing ; but to love one another : for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." The reference of the text, then, to an approaching deliverance of a temporal nature, can hardly be supported by the connexion in which it stands.

Moreover, the history and writings of the first Christians offer little ground for the supposition, that they anticipated a conjuncture when the opportunity would be afforded them, as a community, of retaliating on their adversaries, whether Jews or Pagans : when their enemies, fallen into their power, and prostrate at their feet, would either tempt their vengeance, or prove their lenity and forbearance. The passages in the writings of the Apostles, relative to their persecutors, are rather exhortations to fortitude and patience, than dissuasives from revenge ; bespeaking a

condition of actual suffering from their malice, or a continual dread of their power: a condition from which no salvation appeared to await them but in the grave; or, rather, in that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," to which the grave would conduct them.*

We shall only add that, in understanding the text to refer to the final salvation of believers, we do but class it with a number of other passages in the writings of the Apostles, who, to animate the hopes of their brethren, or to stimulate their diligence in their holy calling, were continually reminding them of the shortness of that time which separated them from a better and an enduring state of existence. "But this, I say," writes St. Paul on another occasion, "the time is short: it remaineth,

* It should be stated that, in applying the passage to a temporal deliverance, considerable stress has been laid on the classical signification of the phrase *εἰδότες τὸν καιρὸν*. *Καιρὸς*, it is said, expresses a particularity of time, and when used with reference to the future, alludes to some event immediately about to take place. But however the import of that term may be limited in classical usage, it bears no such specific and restrained signification in the New Testament. For example, it is applied to the space allotted to repentance, the season of probation (2 Cor. vi. 2; Ephes. v. 17); and more particularly, it occurs in the passage cited as parallel to the text, which obviously refers to the close of life.

that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it"*—an admonition by which, it is evident, he intended to prepare his readers, not for a temporal vicissitude merely—not for a change of one scene for another in the drama of life, but for its final close; "for," he adds, "the fashion of this world passeth away." The phraseology, however, "knowing the time," is confessedly peculiar, and might possibly warrant the conclusion of Locke, that St. Paul was in expectation of the second advent of Christ in his own life-time, had he not apparently disavowed such an expectation in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians.†

But, as we have intimated, it is not essential to our purpose to establish that sense of the term "salvation" in the text, which we have preferred to affix to it. The fact to which we would direct attention, is, that in common

* 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. The last clause appears to have been much better translated, "and they that use this world as *not* using it."

† Chap. ii.

with numerous other passages in the apostolical writings, it exhibits an attitude of the mind, or a state of the feelings with relation to a future existence, which was eminently characteristic of the first believers of the Gospel, and which Christians very rarely attain in our own time—never, it is probable, in an equal degree. We allude to their more lively and energetic hope of immortality; amounting, as it would seem, to an actual desire of an early transition from the present world—a feature of character abundantly worthy of inquiry and reflection.

The words of the text, you perceive, were not properly words of fearful warning, or solemn admonition: otherwise, indeed, than indirectly, or by implication, to any who might have been living in disobedience of the Gospel.* On the contrary, they must have been

* We take the words “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep,” to be a rhetorical manner of speaking. They can hardly be understood to infer that there was a prevailing insensibility to the Gospel among those who professed the belief of it: an inference which were in ill keeping with the suggestion, “Now is our salvation nearer.” In the same manner, we cannot suppose the language which follows to imply that the converts to Christianity were addicted to “rioting and drunkenness,” &c.; but that the Apostle aimed to support their virtuous resolutions, by contrasting

conceived in a spirit of delighted and even triumphant expectation, and are in unison with tones of encouragement and gratulation. The Apostle did not call upon his fellow-christians to reflect upon the time which had passed since the Gospel was made known to them, with a view to admonish them that the space allotted to the reformation of the guilty was drawing to a close; that the period was imminent, when the offer of an all-sufficient atonement for the remission of their sins, and of a sanctifying power to succour them in the work of their salvation, would be eventually withdrawn; and when their destiny would be irreversibly fixed for happiness or misery. Nor did he remind them—and to notice this is more pertinent to the purpose for which we have called attention to his language—nor did he remind them of the lapse of years, to suggest the reflection

the holiness to which the Gospel had called them with the degrading excesses of the heathen—excesses which, on embracing Christianity, and emerging from “the night” of Paganism, they had doubtless abandoned. We may state distinctly, that by “the night” in the words “the night is far spent, the day is at hand,” we understand the ignorance of true religion which preceded Christianity. “The day” had dawned upon the Christians in their knowledge of the Gospel, and the hopes which it had inspired; and was advancing to its meridian brightness in the fruition of the heavenly state, their final salvation.

that they must soon expect, in the course of nature, to be called to resign their life into the hand of Him who gave it; and that, therefore, it was the part of wisdom to detach their affections, as far as practicable, from the present world, and so to break the shock of separating from it for ever. No—he called upon them to look back on the time which had passed since they had first believed the Gospel, in order to excite and fill their minds with the animating persuasion, that the accomplishment of their salvation was proportionately nearer—that the term of their sacred warfare was at hand, and the crown of righteousness well nigh won. He called upon them to behold in the vestiges of the past, the tokens of their approaching immortality; and apprised them that the dawn of the everlasting day had already broken upon them, awaking the hopes as well as the virtues of mankind. He announced to them, as matter for rejoicing, that their connexion with this world was coming to an end; for that soon they would exchange it for that life which had been redeemed from sin and the grave by the humiliation and sacrifice of the Son of God—a life for ever disburthened of the consciousness of guilt, and the dread of retribution—for ever discharged of pain, grief,

want, and fear—of all evil, bodily and mental—a life of which the most enlightened, capacious, and well-ordered minds, even in the hour of their purest satisfaction, in their highest consciousness of knowledge, and rectitude, and security, and power, can attain but a faint conception—unknown to the experience, and surpassing the imagination of mortal man.

That life—the end and scope of salvation—the Apostle announced to be nearer to the Christians than when they first believed the Gospel; and in urging this reflection, as a most encouraging incentive to renewed and persevering exertions in their holy calling, it cannot be doubted that he adapted his strain of exhortation to the prevailing temper of the Christian mind—that by far the greater number of those to whom he addressed it, participated in the spirit with which he himself was animated. It merits observation, therefore, that this and other passages in the Epistles, expressing an ardent hope, and exulting anticipation of the heavenly state, describe with unexaggerated truth the feelings of the Apostles and their contemporaries. We do not mean merely that they made no pretension to an elevation of sentiment to which they were strangers, or that they were guiltless of hypocrisy—of this their

history precludes every reasonable doubt—but that they were wholly uninfluenced in the expression of their sentiments by any prevailing strain, or established form, of religious discourse and conversation; and that their writings were simply and exclusively transcripts from their own feelings under existing circumstances. Their language, therefore, is not to be classed with that which is customary with preachers of subsequent and our own time; who, in exalting the tone of their discourses to the height of apostolical argument and exhortation, more frequently deliver such sentiments as they desire to feel and awaken, than those which they actually feel or have the power to awaken—beyond, at least, the excitation of the hour.* The earliest Christians wrote and uttered what they did feel. They made known their individual and actual experience, when they declared “the lively hope” to which they had “been begotten by the resurrection of Christ from the dead:”† when they rejoiced in the

* We would not here be supposed to intimate that such a tone of discourse is otherwise than useful. It may be greatly useful, to enlist and fortify the judgment, and to fix the determination in the practice of religion.

† 1 Pet. i. 3.

nearness of their salvation, and spoke of "a joy unspeakable and full of glory." As the "sons of God," and the "heirs of salvation," they as sensibly desired and anticipated their heavenly inheritance, as the heir of an earthly estate looks forward to the termination of his minority, the period when he shall appropriate and fully enjoy his inheritance. Their posture of mind towards the future, was, indeed, "an earnest expectation of the creature waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God."*

Now it were presumptuous to pronounce on the feelings of Christians universally, relative to the remainder of their days on the earth, and their nearer approach to the eternal world, some of whom, we can well conceive, may have attained an assurance, and may enjoy a foretaste of their state in glory, far above the experience, and even the observation of the preacher. But, we apprehend, it will be readily acknowledged, that with this hope of the earliest Christians, so "full of immortality"—this vivid presentiment of the state of heaven, the generality of believers are unapt and unable to sympathise. We do not speak of those who are Christians in name and profession only—not in spirit and determination ;

* Rom. viii. 19.

who, so far from rejoicing that their salvation is nearer, are careless to fulfil the conditions on which it is offered them ; and can endure to live in uncertainty of its final attainment—nay, in actual danger of its forfeiture. We speak of those who are practically concerned in the prosecution of eternal life, and whose peace of mind is mainly dependent on the hope of its attainment. However, such may value the promise of immortality recorded in the pages of eternal truth, and with whatever satisfaction they may appropriate that promise, yet, surely, the increasing proximity of the life to come produces no sensible augmentation of their happiness ; and indeed no one would think of suggesting to the most earnest of his fellow Christians, as a topic of gratulation, or even of comfort, the certainty or probability of his speedy translation into the world of spirits :—unless indeed that Christian were torn with bodily anguish, or his spirit sorely pressed with the load of life.

The considerations which the retrospect of the past forces upon our minds are of a pensive, if not of a melancholy nature. We reflect, in sadness, that the larger and fairer portion of our days is consumed ; that the tide of our pleasures and enjoyments is ebbing ; that age

is fast approaching; that death is less distant;—not that “our salvation is nearer.” We are tasked to habitual and intent meditation on the objects of our faith, to be enabled to contemplate, without regret and mournfulness, the transitory nature of our life—the inroads of time upon our frame—the symptoms of a perishable being—the decay “of our earthly house of this tabernacle;” albeit “we know” that “if it were dissolved, we have a building with God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”*

We are far, we need hardly say, from inferring that the hope of immortality hath forsaken us; but were the sculptor to attempt a faithful representation of that attribute of our mind, could he animate the marble beyond the expression of vitality? Could he erect the brow, dilate the eye, and present the figure in the act of stretching forward—lightly touching and scarcely resting on its pedestal? Could he indicate any higher degree of hope than is visible in the composed features of patience and resignation? In truth, it is not so much the prospect of immortality that occupies our thoughts, as the stern necessity of dying; and conscious, as we are, of a

* 2 Cor. v. 1.

natural recoil from dissolution, and an instinctive tenacity of life—pertaining, it would seem, to its continuance and preservation—reflecting how, under the maturing influence of habit and custom, the affections implanted by nature strike, and twist, and spread their roots in the earthly soil, we deem it well, if we can receive the summons of death in a spirit of submission to the Supreme Being; as to one whose will concerning us we believe to be merciful—we desire to obey—we abhor to dispute.

It was not so to the first generation of Christians. They were not thus loath to quit their hold of life. They did not fold so closely about them this mortal garment—"the vile body," as they called it, "which was to be changed and fashioned like unto the glorious body" of their Saviour. They feared no blow to their affections—no disruption of the ties of friendship—no violent shock to their habitual feelings and associations. The sight, the bent of their minds, was directly heavenward. They antedated all good, foretasted all happiness, in the future state. Their faith was "the substance" of *all* they "hoped for," and in embracing it they felt at once the inspiration of a new and an immortal life. Receiving,

in its full import, the promise of their Redeemer, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," they banished the idea of death, dropped the usage of the word, and saw in the aspect of their lifeless friends the face of sleep. Truly it was the language of experience, the utterance of their own feelings—"Our Saviour Jesus Christ *hath abolished* death;"* having left not a trace of his dominion, not a fragment of his sceptre, and only the memory of his name. It seemed that already "the last enemy" was "destroyed"—the terror of him gone—"swallowed up in victory."†

Now, if there be, in reality, this difference between ourselves and the first Christians, it is, certainly, our duty and our wisdom to inquire into the causes of it: to ascertain whether, and how far it is the effect of a difference in external circumstances, and in what degree it must be ascribed to a defect in the conduct of our own minds, as the subjects of a kingdom which is not of this world, the heirs of a heavenly inheritance. Inasmuch as that desire and lively expectation of an immediate transition into the heavenly state, which distinguished the first Christians,

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

† 1 Cor. xv. 54.

was the growth of peculiar circumstances, it is undeniably proper and needful that we should be apprized of the fact, lest the consciousness of our own comparative insensibility—the quiescence of our feelings, when contemplating that perfection of our nature which awaits the true believer in the life to come—contemplating it, as we have intimated, not as the basis of a deliberate preference, or as supplying the governing motive of conduct, but as the immediate object of desire and anticipation,—lest this consciousness, we say, should engender an unreasonable disquietude, or doubt of the integrity of our religious principles. On the other hand, inasmuch as there may be ground to believe that this comparative inertness of our feelings towards the heavenly state, is resolvable into strictly moral causes, it must needs suggest a reason of self-reproach and humiliation, and should excite us to a more diligent preparation for a future life. How indeed, as believers in the Gospel, can we look upon that attitude of mind in which the first Christians expected their final change—their more than fearlessness of dying—their waiting, as “mortal” men, to “put on immortality,” as “corruptible” beings, “to put on incorruption”—how can we contemplate this

loftiness in human spirits, without desiring to approach it, as nearly as a difference in our condition or endowments may allow?

We can hardly ascribe that expectant ardour which distinguished them in the pursuit of immortality, to the fact that the Gospel was a recent communication to the world, thereby inferring that the assurance of a future happiness was new to the human mind. For, to say nothing of the belief of a future state previously existing, we may readily gather from the writings of the Apostles, and from other sources, that, speaking generally, the same cast of thought, the same tone of feeling, distinguished themselves, and their fellow Christians, from their first conversion to the religion of Christ to the end of their earthly pilgrimage: a period long enough for their knowledge of the Gospel to have become familiar to their apprehensions, if this could have quenched their aspirations after a purer life, and the charm of novelty had lent a radiance to "the day-star that had risen in their hearts."

Nor should we easily accede to the opinion that they looked for the second glorious advent of our Redeemer during their own lives: not only for the reasons already adverted to—namely, that St. Paul expressly

disclaimed the intention imputed to him, of fixing the time of our Lord's second coming, and St. Peter expected to quit his tenement of flesh before that great event and crisis*—but because a continual reference to the specific period of their Lord's coming—to the question whether it would take place a few years—say thirty, or even a hundred—sooner or later, appears to be a habit of thought inconsistent with the scope of their minds; accustomed as they were to merge such ideas of comparative duration in the eternity which lay before them, and the momentous nature of that last alternative which awaited all the generations of men. We find it difficult to conceive that that Apostle could have been occupied from week to week, or month to month, or year to year, with the imagination that he would be living on the earth to witness the second coming of our Redeemer—that Apostle, who, to fortify the minds of his brethren against a particular objection of unbelievers and scoffers at their creed, aimed to impress them with this sublime and affecting conclusion:—“ But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord

* 2 Pet. i. 14.

is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*

There was, however, one peculiarity in the experience of the first Christians, which may account, in a very great measure, for the unusual tendency of their feelings towards the world to come. They embraced Christianity with the resolution and the prospect of sacrificing, in a peculiar degree, the happiness of the present state; and were consequently prepared to entertain a more lively as well as habitual impression of a future life. But this important fact demands a more particular consideration than can be included in our present limits; and we shall therefore resume the subject in a second discourse.

In adverting, however, to that sacrifice of the present world which the first believers of the Gospel made in obedience to the claims of their Redeemer, we cannot but be reminded of those moral causes, those qualities of mind, which operate at all times, and under all circumstances, to loosen the bonds which attach us to this world, and to supplant the fear of death with the hope of immortality. We

* 2 Pet. iii. 8, 9.

cannot but perceive that they must have derived an assurance of their title to the eternal inheritance "reserved for them in heaven," from the efficacy of the Gospel on their own principles of conduct: from their voluntary exposure to the worst persecution as the followers of Christ, and the decisive change of character in general, which they underwent in becoming Christians. It is manifest from the words "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed," that they had a clear persuasion that their course of life was such as, if persevered in, would ensure their salvation: that their faith in the mediation of their Saviour was of a vital, availing nature. They had actually noted the auspicious era when, for the first time, they felt and exemplified the power of their religion, and passed into a new, a holy life, from a death of "trespasses and sins." Moreover, in proportion as they were actuated by a principle of obedience to God, they must have been acutely conscious of that innate corruption, that proneness to sin, which resists the dictates of an enlightened conscience, and renders the practice of holiness a continual labour, and an unceasing warfare. That they were very much alive to the pollution and degra-

dation of all wickedness, in thought as well as in deed, to the remains and working of a corrupt nature, is conspicuously evident in the apostolical writings ; and we cannot doubt that this must have induced a certain impatience of the present life, and promoted their desire of that state, where “ the spirits of the just are made perfect,” and where, in the unbroken service of God, there is “ perfect freedom.” Thus far they were indebted for the unearthly character of their minds to principles, which it is the aim of all religious exhortation to inculcate ; and our common vocation and privilege as Christians to attain and cultivate.

In concluding this subject for the present, we should remember that St. Paul reminded his brethren that “ their salvation was nearer,” principally for a practical purpose : to incite them to a more determined self-denial, a firmer control of their appetites and passions, and a more devout and assiduous discharge of their various duties. Now although, for whatever reasons, we may not be prepared—even the most zealous and conscientious amongst us—to felicitate ourselves in the thought that we are continually advancing towards the invisible state ; yet, surely, we must deem it inex-

pressibly important, that we should all be supplied with a constant and growing incentive to that holiness—that rectitude of purpose towards God and towards man, which is the essential preparation for life eternal. Such an incentive is pressed upon us in the reflection—which the more frequently it has been urged upon us, the more important it is now to entertain—that the lapse of time—the tide of years—of days—of hours is incessantly bringing us nearer and nearer to that period, when our salvation—our deliverance from the guilt of sin, with all the evils which it has brought, or threatens to inflict upon mankind, shall be finally secured, or become eternally hopeless—when the prize of an immortal happiness shall be for ever lost or won:—that that awful moment is nearer when the character shall have taken its last and indelible impress from all those objects which tempt our integrity, divide our choice, and contest the dominion over us in this probationary state of existence; and when God will pronounce of him that is unjust, “Let him be unjust still”—of him that is filthy, “Let him be filthy still”—of him that is holy, “Let him be holy still.”* With this

* Rev. xxii. 11.

reflection habitually in our minds, we cannot but be prompted to a more provident care of our spiritual interests, and "a greater diligence in making our calling and election sure." And, doubtless, in attaining that assurance, we take the most effectual means of acquiring that actual and growing satisfaction with which the first Christians contemplated the end of their days upon the earth; regarding it no otherwise, it would seem, than as the accomplishment of their final deliverance from death and sin. Assuredly, that "good hope" will afford us a profound consolation in the afflictions, be they ever so many and severe, which may await us in this life, and sustain our fortitude in the most trying—the mortal hour. Even now we may banish the fear of death as the penalty of sin, and confiding in the mercy of that Being who "knoweth our frame," and compassionates our weakness, be enabled to say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."*

* Ps. xxiii. 4.

SERMON V.

ROMANS XIII. 11.

For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

IN the last discourse, we took occasion from these words, to direct your attention to the peculiar circumstance, that the increased proximity of a future state of existence should have been regarded by the first Christians, not merely as an argument for applying a more earnest attention to the precepts of the Gospel, or for withdrawing their affections from the objects of a fugitive world, but as a topic of gratulation; and remarked that it evinced a state of the feelings relative to the life to come, a liveliness of hope and expectation, which Christians rarely attain in our own time. However we may be solaced in our departure from this world by our faith in the Gospel, and however reconciled to the com-

mon necessity of dying, it is not our wont to felicitate ourselves or our fellow Christians on our approach to a future and superior condition of existence; and however concerned and successful in ensuring our final salvation, we are not habitually conscious of an additional degree of satisfaction, in the reflection that "our salvation is nearer," by a certain space of time, "than when we believed." Without attempting a full and conclusive exposition of the causes to which this characteristic of the first Christians might be traced, it is proposed to consider the peculiar views and anticipations relative to the present world, with which they assumed the profession of Christianity. The subject is not one of speculation merely; but may tend to the comfort of some, who lament their inability to participate in *their* feelings, and is surely applicable to the spiritual improvement of us all.*

It would argue, we apprehend, a somewhat superficial knowledge of the constitution of

* The topic may be of use on another account—to remove an imputation on the sincerity or self-knowledge of Christians: for we *have* heard their defect of such feelings, spoken of as though it betrayed the absence of a true belief of Christianity, or a doubt of the reality of a future happiness.

our nature, to suppose that the perfect and enduring happiness of the heavenly state, however firmly believed and expected by the Christian, would, in itself considered, be sufficient to excite his desire of immediately entering upon it, and create an increasing satisfaction in the thought that he was continually approaching it. In order that he should thus contemplate the exchange of his earthly condition for the state of heaven, it were not sufficient that he entertained the expectation of an indefinitely greater happiness in the world to come, than he had experienced, or could hope to realize, in the present state—it were not sufficient that he should be actuated by a desire, common to all mankind, of enlarging the scope of his enjoyments, or of bettering his condition : he must have surrendered the world “that now is,” and have overcome the love of life. For the strength, the tenacity of this principle, the love of life, is not strictly proportioned to the happiness which our life is felt to confer—not properly determined by a reasonable estimate of its value. The aged are not always alienated from the love of life by a blunted sense of its pleasures, or an acuter feeling of its pains and infirmities ; nor do the wretched

find a certain consolation in the knowledge of its brevity, or the prospect of its end. On the contrary, our life may have been to us an incessant scourge ; a series of ineffectual efforts, and disappointed hopes ; every page of the volume of our earthly destiny may have been perused in sadness, and blotted with our tears, and each successive page we may tremble to unfold ; yet do we pore and linger upon that volume, and are loath that it should be for ever closed :—in the hope, undoubtedly, that happiness is yet before us—but to sustain that hope, with such a memory of the past, how importunate, unreasoning, and unteachable is the love of life !

It is too true that many of us, and most if not all at some seasons, must confess to the accusation of the great poet and observer of mankind—for an accusation it is to a Christian—that we are moved by “the dread of something after death,” and “would rather bear those ills we have, than fly to those we know not of” — that “conscience makes cowards of us.” But if this be the great and universal cause of our cleaving to life in the experience of its evils, we have nothing farther to explain in the character of the first Christians: for, assuredly, they had no such dread

of something after death, of unknown ills in futurity. They owned a firmer belief in the Gospel of their salvation : they prized it more highly, and obeyed it more conscientiously. But the comparison is not so condemnatory of our character as professed believers of Christianity. Our attachment to a troubled life is equally a principle of our nature, as the affection which lingers in the breast of a parent towards an obdurate and impracticable child. That child interrupts and essentially impairs—not increases—the happiness of those who nourish and protect him ; there is, it may be, no worse disturber of their peace, no equal cause of sorrow and vexation ; yet not until disobedience shall have become insupportable, and reformation hopeless, will parents, in general, disown their offspring ; and not until life exceeds the powers of endurance, do we ordinarily prefer the alternative of dying, and turn a wishful eye to the sepulchre as an asylum from despair. But, pursuing this topic no farther, we may justly conclude that the check which the believer experiences to his desire of a better state of existence, or his unreadiness to rejoice at the apparent nearness of his salvation, is, in a considerable measure, the effect of a natural, spontaneous

attachment to the life of this world ; and cannot, of necessity, infer a want of preparation for the heavenly inheritance, or a disesteem of its blessedness and value.

But the love of life, however generally and palpably disproportioned to the happiness which life communicates, is far from being independent of the control of the judgment. In common with other affections of the mind, it is not only susceptible of restraint from considerations of a general nature, but may be actually, and even permanently suspended by the force of a master-motive. The religious principle, for example, or the sense of obligation to Almighty God, connected as it is with the dread of his displeasure, and the desire of a happiness extending through the whole duration of our being—a being never to be annihilated—is all-sufficient to burst asunder the complicated ties which bind us to this world, and to exterminate in the reasonable mind the love of life ; for “ what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ? ” * Such was the ruling principle, and such the peculiar effect of its ascendancy, in the minds of the

* Matt. xvi. 26.

first Christians. *They* were especially prepared to entertain the desire, and to rejoice in the expectation of a future state, because the successful prosecution, the actual attainment of their salvation, involved the necessity of sacrificing the present world, and abandoning the hopes of life.

The Christian religion, on various accounts, exposed its earliest professors to the certain enmity of their fellow men, exasperated even to an unsparing cruelty, and a deadly animosity. Whatever intervals of quiet they might have enjoyed from the persecution of their adversaries, or whatever might have been the amount of their actual suffering, it is unquestionable, that in assuming the name of Christ, they were premonished to *expect* the worst afflictions that could befall them; and, as far as any hope of happiness in "this life only" could attach to them, to be, as St. Paul indeed described them, "of all men most miserable."* They were called upon to make a mental, prospective surrender of whatever confers a value on our merely earthly existence; to renounce their mortal self; to forego the welfare and the consolations of this world. Our Saviour expressly and peremp-

* 1 Cor. xv. 19.

torily demanded in his disciples a readiness to resign their entire property, to separate from their nearest connexions, and to lay down their lives for his sake. He exacted a disregard, a contempt of life altogether — (an exaction which, it may be justly inferred, must have exposed his pretensions to a rigorous scrutiny)—“ He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.* He that findeth his life shall lose it : and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”—The *spirit* of these declarations is for all time. The principle of allegiance to Christ must be supreme and absolute in the minds of his disciples, and can suffer no abatement in its force. That principle, however, operated in the first Christians under especial circumstances, and therefore in a peculiar manner. The sense of obligation to their Redeemer was necessarily associated with a feeling of exposure to violence, imprisonment, to torture, and to death ; and consequently tended to suppress the growth of earthly

* John xii. 25.

attachments, and to extirpate the love of life.

It is possible so to preconceive and antedate the doom of mortality, as to surmount the fear of it, and even to spurn the instinct of self-preservation: as was exemplified in a plague of this city, when numbers, looking on themselves and their neighbours as inevitably foredoomed to die, sunk into an utter and profound insensibility to the world and its concerns—abandoned all defensive precaution against the pestilence that was raging around them—sought no help, and offered none—but tarried on the earth like spirits lingering near their unburied remains. There are passages in the Epistles which seem to manifest a similar excision of the affections from all merely sublunary objects; and to be the expressions of a mind to which the world was accounted, in no qualified sense, to have been “crucified.” It is to be accounted as “crucified” to all believers, inasmuch as it is their inalienable obligation to forsake and abhor the evil that is in it—the sin which was at once expiated and condemned in the crucifixion of their Redeemer. But for the reason which we have stated, the world was crucified to the first Christians, not in its sinful

pleasures only, but in its lawful pursuits and most innocent enjoyments. Hence they were singularly capacitated, not merely, in common with ourselves, to appreciate the necessity and value of their redemption by Jesus Christ, but to welcome its nearer approach, and to hail every harbinger of a glorious immortality. They saw the repose and beatitude of the heavenly world in complete and most alluring contrast with their earthly state and prospects, and were enabled with the full stretch of the soul's desire after happiness, with the entire grasp of their affections, to "lay hold on eternal life."

But farther, as it was in virtue of the promise and expectation of their reward in heaven, that they had voluntarily consented to this abandonment of temporal interests, the strength and liveliness of that expectation, or the prospect of its speedy accomplishment, was essentially necessary to sustain their determination, and enable them "to endure to the end." They stood in urgent need of the assurance that "their salvation was nearer than when they believed;" for what was to encourage them in their great, but lone and perilous enterprise?—to assuage the remembrance of all which they had parted from—

to dull the edge of human regrets—to fill up the gaping, frightful void in their imagination? They had left behind them the old and known world, and were embarked in quest of distant lands, steering an untried course—devoted voyagers of faith and hope—and what reflection was there to support their fortitude, to refresh their spirits, and preserve their fidelity, but the thought that the troubled sea on which they were tossed was bearing them to a fairer region? And what could captivate their eyes, and raise their shouts of joy, but the tokens of their approaching it—the plants of its soil which at length were seen to float upon the surges?

It may be added, that so complete a sacrifice of earthly happiness, and devotion to a life of suffering, must have lent an incitement to that holiness of character, and that determined resistance of corrupt propensities, which constitutes the proper ground of Christian assurance, the only sure prognostic of our salvation. Having, at once and for ever, renounced the world, and accounting its pleasures and enjoyments as irrecoverably gone, they fought the evil that was in it at a great advantage. An historian remarks of the heroes of Thermopylæ, that “they smote their ene-

mies like men who fought in revenge for their death."* The first soldiers of Christ were inspired with a kindred spirit in their conflict with the world. Dead to it in their own persuasion, they warred against it with a single determination to vindicate the cause of truth and righteousness, to uphold the honour of the Christian name, and to cover themselves with eternal glory.

If the distinction pointed out between the circumstances of the first Christians and our own, be correct and substantial, we have, together with a signal, triumphant testimony to the power of our religion, a considerable explanation of the disparity of our feelings, as compared with theirs, in the prospect of immortality. Our governing principles of action must be identical with those by which they were swayed: we must decidedly prefer the service of our Redeemer to any pleasures or advantages which the world can yield us: we must mainly pursue our future and eternal welfare. But if the prospect of suffering and dying for the cause of Christ, imposed upon them the necessity of very greatly relaxing

* . . . Cædunt, sternuntque omnia; ut qui sciant se pugnare non spe victoriæ, sed in mortis ultionem. — *Just.* lib. ii. c. 11.

their earthly attachments, or, rather, of dis-severing them altogether—of spurning and trampling under foot the ordinary objects of desire and expectation; then it was a natural consequence that their feelings, with regard to a future life, should have been of a more determined and fervent character than our own. Such a condition of obtaining salvation must have brought with it a powerful impulse to the natural desire of immortality, together with an urgent sense of the opposition to be overcome in order to its realization; inspiring an unusual ardour in the prosecution of the Christian warfare; giving rise to an era of religious achievement and daring—to what may be termed the heroic age of Christianity. It must be obvious, that if we be not required to meet that particular test by which they were tried in the service of our Redeemer—to be in immediate and constant preparation for the endurance of suffering, and the willing sacrifice of our lives—if the pursuit of our salvation be consistent with the comforts and endearments of our earthly state, then the love of life will, of necessity, exert and strengthen itself as a part of our nature, adhere to us by the force of habit, and divide our affections with the hopes of a better world.

It is still, and ever must be, the part of wisdom to tutor the mind, as much as lieth in us, to an indifference to the world "that now is:" but, in the first Christians, this principle was put into active operation at the commencement of their religious course; was continually wrought into the habit of their minds by the conduct imposed upon them; and was consequently strengthening every day of their lives. With us it is left, in a very great measure, to be acquired by studious and habitual reflection.

We have dwelt upon this peculiarity in the circumstances of the first Christians for two reasons:—

In the first place, the consideration of it should allay any inquietude of conscience towards God, any doubt of his gracious acceptance of our worship and service, which may have been awakened, not by the commission of known sin, not by a practical disregard of religion, but by the mere apprehension of a defect of liveliness in the hope of immortality, or the want of that joy at the nearer approach of our salvation, which, it might seem reasonable to conclude, those would feel who were sincerely concerned to obtain it, and really believed themselves

warranted by the word of God to expect it ; and which was in reality experienced by many, whose steps we profess to follow, and who now "through faith and patience inherit the promises." It is surely important that such a state of our minds, relative to a future life, should be ascribed to its true source, and that no imaginary barrier should be interposed to the most ready communion with the Father of our spirits, and the firmest assurance of our eternal salvation.

At the same time it is essential to observe, that we should greatly misconceive this difference between ourselves and the first believers of the Gospel—we should give it a most undue and pernicious prominence, were we to deduce from it any excuse for that impatience and dejection, that want of fortitude and resignation to the will of God, which, it must be confessed, so many of us betray, when called to endure affliction ; to bear the loss of wealth or friends ; to suffer pain of body ; or to face the apparently near approach of death. It is admitted and indisputable, that the complexion of thought induced by a profession of the Gospel, at the period of its first promulgation, was of such a nature as to nourish an actual desire

of another and a better state; and to cast a radiance on the aspect of futurity, which to our minds it cannot, speaking generally, be expected to exhibit. So much must be allowed and pointed out to inform the conscience of the Christian; and, it might be added, to rebut the imputation, not unfrequently put upon the preachers of the Gospel, that we give the reins to our imagination, and indulge in mere declamation. Accordingly, it is no reason of surprise or reproach, and infers no disparagement to the power of our religion, that the most pure-hearted of Christians, the most rich in faith and charity, should feel an affection to this life and its enjoyments, and at thought of parting with them "should drop some natural tears, but wipe them soon;" should be rather engaged in disciplining and preparing themselves for their departure, at whatever period, from this world, in a resigned and hopeful spirit towards God, than borne up and elated with the prospect of immortality, and the increasing nearness of their salvation:—"God knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." But if, while we are naturally careful to preserve our life, or improve our earthly condition, we demur to relinquish, at the bidding of our

Maker, that happiness which he has heretofore bestowed upon us; if we repine and murmur at, and muse discontentedly on the ills befalling us, and the lot appointed to us here; if we seek to evade the conviction of our mortality, and cannot look on death but with terror and dejection; if, as the sources of our happiness on the earth are wasting and drying up, from whatever causes—calamitous reverses, or wrongs inflicted on us by our fellow-creatures, or their hard, unkindly usage, or a morbid frame, or the weight of years, and the approaching term of life—we do not realize a substantial and growing consolation in the belief of those “exceeding great and precious promises” which are given us in “the word of life,” “the Gospel of our salvation;”—then, indeed, we are not, properly speaking, exemplifying the operation of circumstances different from those of the first Christians—we are not yielding to a necessity of our complicated frame—but, so far as we are thus clinging to things sensible and present, we are betraying a deficiency of the *principle* by which they were mainly actuated—we “lack the spirit” they were “of.”

In truth, the main consideration for us all, suggested by the example of the first Christians,

is, that when we look at their comparative indifference to the business and pleasures of this world, we are looking at an attribute of mind, which was the fruit and recompense of a great and sustained act of obedience to the will of God, and devotion to his service: obedience which involved a degree of self-renunciation never surpassed, if equalled. Consequently, we are forced to reflect, that if, at the bidding of their divine Master, and "for his name's sake," they "forsook houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands;"* and if it be, as it undeniably is, the essential duty and exalted privilege of all Christians to imbibe their spirit, and attain an affinity to their character; then must we ourselves be prepared at the same command, and for the same end, to consent to the sacrifice of property, friends, health, and life, in a satisfying persuasion of the divine goodness, enabling us to say "Not my will, but thine be done." It is no reproach, we repeat, that we are subject to a mental conflict in thus submitting to the Divine commandment. Who shall tell the inward struggle which such a sacrifice as Christ demanded must have cost his faithful followers at the first publication of

* Matt. xix. 29.

the Gospel? Their distinction was, that they were led into that conflict at once, at the outset of their career; and afterwards pursued their course, as though they had but to secure and complete their victory. But, sooner or later, we must expect a trial, we know not how severe, of our fortitude and devotion to the will of God; and be it then our timely and constant endeavour, with earnest prayer, to be imbued with that life and energy of faith, which, in "a great fight of afflictions," "made them more than conquerors, through Him that loved them."* With a view to this great end, it remains to suggest an important admonition, relative to the conduct of our thoughts, which may be derived from the experience of the first Christians: an admonition which it is a manifest object of the sacred writings in general to impress upon our minds.

A prevailing sense of danger, and exposure to the severest trials of their fortitude, rendered them peculiarly susceptible of the attractions of a future state, and urged them, we may well conclude, to a more earnest preparation for their heavenly inheritance. The fact suggests that mood, or habit of reflection, with regard to our future destiny in this world, which we

* Rom. viii. 37.

should more especially cherish as the servants of Christ, and candidates for that "life and immortality which he hath brought to light through the Gospel." We are not indeed required to maintain the profession of our faith at the hazard of our earthly possessions, and in imminent danger to our persons and lives; nor, surely, as we trust, is it a necessary or common effect of a conscientious obedience to the precepts of our Saviour, to provoke the frowns or contempt of our fellow-creatures. But, should we indulge ourselves in anticipations of prosperity in this world? Should we deliver up our imagination to the visions of pleasure, or the prospect of power or distinction? Should we expect a series of successes, or auspicious conjunctures of events, to distinguish our career? Should we look for nothing but justice and generosity from our fellow-men?—In a word, should we assure ourselves of a course of happiness in the world that now is, and nourish the energy of hope in the pursuits of this life? By such a conduct, or rather misguidance of our thoughts, we should, of necessity, incur the peril of regarding this life as our only or sufficient portion, and of despising "a better and an enduring substance." For we are

inadequately moved by the single, unaided love of holiness: the desire of happiness is interwoven in our frame with the love of rectitude, so finely and complicately, that the human intellect is continually feeling for the place of their connexion, and is tempted to believe their identity. To encounter with success the power of temptation, to withstand the onset of the passions, we should seek to be fortified with a persuasion of the insufficiency of this world to our capacities and desires, and, especially, of our exposure to manifold adversity. We should direct our forethought to the ills which beset and threaten us, the troubles "to which man is born as the sparks fly upwards." We should forebode disappointments and calamities, and think of inherent diseases, and inevitable death. "We should dwell," as a great monitor of "holy living" has written, "in the suburbs and expectations of sorrows." Whether our actual experience *in this world* would be the worse or the better in this habitude of thought, we leave to your philosophy to determine. It is the province of the preacher to present this life in the aspect which it bears towards that which is to come: as a school of religious wisdom, a preparation for immortality. Regarding it as such, how-

ever, we all know that affliction is our appointed preceptor—an essential means of chastening and purifying our spiritual and immortal nature. But as rational, prospective beings, we cannot suppose that the discipline of affliction is limited to the period of its actual experience—to the weeks, or days, or hours, in which we are immediately sensible of pain and trouble. We are, at this moment, every one of us, under the chastisement of the Almighty, whereby he manifests his paternal character, and consults for the welfare of his intelligent offspring. For he has instructed us all to expect and prepare to suffer. He has exposed us all to calamitous reverses; made us all accessible to disease; and subjected us all to the stroke of death. Thus has he qualified us all, and at this moment, to feel the want of that faith which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Thus has he ministered a present, universal, and most powerful motive to the prosecution of our Christian calling—to our active preparation for a world, where there is no sense of insecurity, and no dread of suffering, and where they die no more.*

* Luke xx. 36.

It may be thought, perhaps, that we have too freely assumed the prevalence of those feelings towards a future state, which we have ascribed to the first Christians; inasmuch as we find, in the Epistles addressed to them, not only exhortations to fortitude, but many admonitions and warnings against immoral conduct, and an undue attachment to the objects of this world. But, undoubtedly, such admonitions were necessary, if not especially so, at the original publication of Christianity: for besides that worldly pleasures and concerns would present the great obstacle to the *first* step in a Christian course, it should be remembered that the morality taught in the Gospel was not only greatly above the common practice and example, but of a far higher order than had been previously inculcated by the professed teachers of virtue. And though we may well conclude, that persons who had so little to hope for, and so much to dread in *this* world as the first Christians, would be powerfully stimulated to a scrupulous obedience of the Gospel; yet it is quite possible—indeed, it must be inferred from passages in the Epistles, that there were *some* amongst them who were disposed to attach an unreasonable importance to an intrepid *profession* of their faith: to derive from it an apology for vicious excesses, or serious omissions of Christian duty. Moreover, we do not forget that they were less exposed to persecution at some periods than at others, and had seasons of comparative rest and security from their enemies; when it might have been more needful to warn them in general against the common temptations to evil and the seductive pleasures of the world. It is observable, indeed, that in some of the Epistles, there is little or no allusion to their persecutors.

But it cannot be doubted, we presume, that the *sincere* and *resolute* followers of Christ actually experienced those

feelings with relation to a future state, which we have ascribed to them, with whatever mixture or interruption. It is enough, then, if we have rightly assigned a principal cause of those feelings. We have not attempted to present a portraiture of the primitive Christian character in all its features, and under every change of external circumstances. In remarking the fact itself, that the first Christians were peculiarly characterised by lively impressions of a future state, we are in no degree singular. Paley, in particular, has taken notice of it, (*Evidences*, chap. vi. § 6,) and refers it to "a miraculous evidence coming with full force on the senses of mankind." His observations on it, however, are incidental to his discussion of another topic, and can hardly be supposed to express his conclusive judgment on the subject. Had it been his particular purpose to account for that impression of a future state, which he ascribes, in strong terms, to the first Christians, however much he might have attributed to a miraculous evidence, he surely could not have overlooked altogether "those labours, dangers, and sufferings," which, in the first chapter of his invaluable work, he shows it to be probable from "the nature of the case," that they underwent in the profession and extension of the Gospel. It is surprising, indeed, that a mere glance at their posture of mind towards futurity did not bring their peculiar circumstances before him.

We do not dispute the effect of a miraculous evidence on the first Christians; but in justice to the tenor of the preceding discourses, we must contend that their impressions of a future state are far more satisfactorily explained by their afflicted and exposed condition in this world. What the effect of miraculous evidence actually was, must to us be very much matter of speculation and conjecture. It does not appear, however, that it would promote the impression of a future state otherwise than by establishing a confident expectation of it. It could not, as we conceive, impress the belief of a future life with any peculiar force on

the imagination; except in the case of the Apostles, who saw the risen body of their Master. But however this be, and without inquiring whether there be not thousands in our own time, who believe the reality of a future state as firmly as the first Christians, certain it is, that if we be Christians in more than the name, our faith in the Gospel must be of such a nature, so firm and steadfast, that it would enable us, at the manifest command of Christ, to imitate the first Christians in a voluntary resignation of all that we possessed or hoped for in this world. But the first Christians actually made such a resignation, and Christians in our time do not. To what then shall we ascribe that more ardent expectation of a future life, which took possession of the hearts of the former?—to a superior degree of strength in the conviction of its reality, or to a frame or habitude of mind induced by a sacrifice of earthly enjoyments? There can scarcely be two opinions on the question.

Had the external circumstances of the first Christians occurred to the recollection of Paley, he would not have cited *their* experience, as a ground for concluding that the impression of a future life may be “overdone;” that it may so seize and fill the thoughts, as to leave no place for the cares and offices of men’s several stations. If they embraced the Gospel with such a prospect in this world as our Saviour had distinctly and repeatedly set before his disciples,—a prospect which, it is evident from their history, was, in no small measure, realized—we can hardly wonder if they felt “no anxiety for worldly prosperity, or even for a worldly provision,”—if they felt this concern in no degree comparable with men of other times and other circumstances. Whatever place in their thoughts was allowed them for the desire of a worldly provision, “the stimulus of secular industry,” in intervals of quiet and freedom from their persecutors, these were seasons which they had not been encouraged to look for, and were probably too brief

and uncertain to alter very materially the cast of their reflections. The path "through much tribulation" lay still before them "to the kingdom of heaven."

In *ordinary* circumstances, the feelings, we apprehend, are so powerfully attracted and preoccupied by present objects, and the attachment to life is so strong, that were the belief of a future state of happiness as firm and constant as any conviction of which the mind is capable, the impression of it could scarcely be "overdone" in the minds of Christians; or rather, as that phrase seems open to question, the desire of realizing their expectation of a better life could scarcely become so urgent as to create an impatience in waiting for the period of its accomplishment, and dispose them to neglect the duties of the present state—could scarcely be such as to afford them occasion for that resignation to a protraction of life which was expressed by St. Paul. (Phil. i. 23.)

SERMON VI.

I. JOHN II. 15—17.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

THE force and propriety of this admonition are sufficiently obvious. We are not prompted to a disobedience of our Maker by a distinct inclination and purpose to offend him; nor are we endangered in our spiritual welfare by a general indifference to our own happiness. We are enticed away from the service of God by the solicitation of some desire or propensity, which seeks its gratification in an object of this world; overcoming our reverential awe of Him, setting aside the dictates of a prospective

wisdom, and leading us to postpone our duties and interests as accountable and immortal beings. If then a preference of the world, in some shape or other, be the proximate or exciting cause of sin and disobedience, the great preservative from evil must be sought in a diminished regard to the world, and “the things that are in the world.”

The words of the text, moreover, impute to mankind in general, a disposition to make this lamentable preference, and so egregiously to magnify the pleasures and advantages of this life, as to hazard for them the favour of God, and the happiness of a future state. Hence the weight and urgency of the precept, “Love not the world:” for, obviously, in proportion as we are naturally inclined to pursue the objects of the world with an immoderate ardour, is it imperative on us to restrain our inclinations towards them—to regard them with distrust and watchfulness—to apply our chief endeavours to the attainment of a future and eternal good; for—

Finally, we are exhorted by the Apostle to propose to ourselves, as the great end of our existence, the fulfilment of the will of God; for this plain but most momentous reason, that, while all other desires and their

gratifications must terminate with the world that engenders them, the principles of religion are motives of action, and sources of happiness, which defy the waste of time, and live, like the soul, for ever:—"The world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

To make a just application of the words of the Apostle, it is essential, in the first place, to ascertain and discriminate that love of the world which they so impressively forbid us to entertain or allow. — Though it seems a most reasonable conclusion, that none of the natural appetites and passions, or of those desires which attach us to this world, are essentially or absolutely evil; yet we must be too well convinced by the common experience of mankind, as well as the testimony of the Scriptures, that they have all contracted a tendency to inordinacy and perversion. It must be manifest, indeed, that the lusts which the Apostle stigmatizes as not of the Father, are excesses of natural propensities: the propensities themselves enter into the original constitution of our nature, and as such *are* of the Father. But they are condemned as the offspring of the world, inasmuch as they exceed the measure which

the Father hath prescribed to them: inasmuch as they supplant or encroach upon that love which is due to himself, or which he requires us to cherish towards our fellow-creatures.

It is his first and great commandment, that we should love Himself with the whole mind—beyond all objects or beings in the universe; and the second is like unto it, that we should love our neighbour as ourselves—respect his substance, his reputation, his feelings—all that is equitably *his*, as though it were our own. The rectitude of these commandments we may assume to be universally acknowledged: for, surely, if there be any proportion in the motives which should influence our doings, a principle of obedience to the Creator ought to stand the highest in the scale; and none can doubt that the exertions of individuals to obtain the things of the world, ought to be subordinated to that rule of equity and law of charity, which he has enjoined upon us in our conduct towards our fellow-creatures.

But here it is important to observe, that while the two great commandments of our religion, comprehending the whole law of righteousness, are obviously the proper checks to an inordinate attachment to the world, it is not to be supposed that Christians must

uniformly agree in the application of them. Individuals, equally subject in their affections to the authority of God, may differ in opinion as to the innocence or lawfulness of certain gratifications which the world is constituted to afford them. When these are not specifically prohibited in any of those injunctions into which the two great commandments are resolved or subdivided—in order to be adapted to every understanding, as well as made applicable to the varying circumstances of particular individuals—the permission and warrant from the Almighty to partake of such gratifications, must evidently depend upon the influence which they exert on the general character, the tone of the habitual feelings, or the governing principles of conduct. Accordingly, there is scope for the exercise of private judgment, and ground to anticipate and acquiesce in a diversity of opinion. There are some, we are aware, who pronounce such gratifications to be either indirectly forbidden, or properly allowable to the *whole* community of Christians; but we have not so observed human nature. We conceive that particular modes of education, as well as a variety of other causes, originate a difference of predisposition in the minds of individuals, qualifying

their susceptibility of good and evil; and that, consequently, persons are differently affected in their sense of religion under similar circumstances, receiving different impressions from identical objects. For this reason, we conclude that a Christian should not assume his own mind to be an infallible criterion of the minds of others, or a certain test of the quality of their actions; and should be exceedingly cautious in affirming the universally irreligious, unchristian character of any such conduct, as is not expressly, or by the clearest implication, prohibited in the word of God. Let him rather respect the wise and liberal precept of the Apostle—a precept which he enforces in order to promote, together with a more charitable construction of the actions of others, a more faithful examination of our own—“ Let us not therefore judge one another.”—“ Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.”—“ Let every man be persuaded in his own mind.”—“ Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.”* This injunction of St. Paul must of necessity, as we have intimated, be capable of a considerable degree of application; for, in justice to

* Rom. xiv.

our religion as a rule of duty, it should be added, that its commands and prohibitions are never founded on distinctions which are purely external, local, and circumstantial. Inasmuch, indeed, as our practices may mislead the judgment, and be detrimental to the character of others, it undeniably demands our attention to extraneous circumstances, or the *appearance* of our conduct; but, obviously, it makes that demand on a *principle* of benevolence. So, in all instances, its distinctions are strictly internal and spiritual, essentially and exclusively *moral*. It condemns certain principles of action, dispositions of the heart, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes; the pride of life;" but there its condemnation terminates. It holds "the mind" to be indeed "its own place," declaring that "unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled."*

Without entering into a particular examination of the phrases, "the lust of the flesh; the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," we may assume them to signify an excess of those appetites which we share in common

* Titus i. 15.

with inferior creatures; as also an excess of the desire of wealth or gain, of the desire of power, and of fame or admiration. Many such excesses are, at all times, open to observation; and, under the names of intemperance, sensuality, avarice, ambition, and vanity, are universally condemned, as degrading to the reasonable mind, and injurious to the common good. But if we aspire to a Christian moderation in the pursuits and enjoyments of the world, we shall aim, by a comprehensive view, and a practical application of the two great commandments to which we have adverted, to detect and avoid those excesses in their less gross and palpable forms: remembering, especially, that, whereas these vices are encountered by our fellow-creatures principally in the outward act, our religion, as we have already remarked, attacks them as affections of the mind, and would accordingly destroy their power over the thoughts and imagination.

Indeed, we should very inadequately perceive the extent of injury which might be inflicted upon us by "the things of the world," were we to regard them merely as direct incentives to acknowledged vices, or as rendering us, in vulgar estimation, intem-

perate, or licentious, or covetous, or haughty, or malicious. It must be evident to professing Christians, that we have to guard against the influence of the world in withdrawing our attention from the studious cultivation of religion, as the true basis of character, as well as of inward peace and enduring satisfaction. We have to beware lest, absorbed in its passing interests, we become contented with those loose and superficial notions of rectitude towards God, as well as towards man, which are so naturally suggested, or which we so readily entertain, when intent upon the indulgence of our present inclinations; lest we forget the revealed will and purposes of our heavenly Father, the duties and privileges of our redeemed and Christian state;—lest we relax our hold on the divine promises, and slumber in the prosecution of our eternal life.

We are warned in the Scriptures against a state of repose—a feeling of independence and security—a self-complacent satisfaction, which the world may very easily generate, though it cannot sustain:—for example, in the parable relating to “a certain rich man,” who said to himself, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat,

drink, and be merry."* It is observable that no intimation is given us, that this person had accumulated wealth by means of fraud or extortion. Indeed, we are not allowed to make that supposition; for it is expressly said that "his ground brought forth plentifully"—a most unsuspecting source of worldly prosperity. But he was guilty of a fatal error in concluding, that because he had made ample provision for his earthly wants, he had no other wants remaining: that he had obtained all that he needed, and had only to find a safe and convenient receptacle for his treasures, to render his happiness complete. "Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," was the speech for which the Almighty pronounced the man "a fool;" and which drew from our Saviour the impressive admonition, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Now there are persons, and those neither Atheists nor Deists, but rather loth to be regarded as contemners of Christianity or virtue, who, however, deem what is called a superiority to the world, or an abstraction from its interests, to be little better than a pretence of affectation or hypocrisy. But—not to allege that

* Luke xii.

the practice of the common rules of morality is materially assisted by the persuasion of a life to come—how can such persons apprehend the parable to which we have alluded? Can they believe that Christ delivered that parable for the instruction of mankind, and, notwithstanding, account it unreasonable or incredible that any should be conscious of desires which the world is impotent to excite or satisfy,—that any should aim to form their character after a new and unearthly fashion,—that any would consent to be impoverished, to be reduced to the lowest destitution in “the things that are in the world,” in the hope of being “rich” or of some account in “the sight of God?” Assuredly, no one ought to experience any satisfaction in this world, unless he is engaged in making provision for the next. We have a work and destination, wherewith to concern ourselves, which reduces to insignificance, to nothingness, the highest interests of earth and time. We have to acquaint ourselves with the Almighty, as the subjects of his authority, and the objects of his mercy; “to know God, and Christ whom he hath sent;” and to cultivate those peculiar and exalted virtues which grow out of “repentance

towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." This is our proper vocation and pursuit as Christians—distinct and needful, surely, as the augmentation of our property, the care of our reputation, or even the sustenance of our life—a vocation which ought to exert a ruling and pervading influence in the whole circle of this world's transactions.

But, farther, our Saviour has reinstated us in that immortality which we had forfeited by our sins, and established our title to an inheritance beyond the grave. He has "thrown open the kingdom of heaven to all believers;" marked with his own footsteps the path which leads to it; and there awaits the assembling of his faithful followers. Were it not then a base subjection to the world, if we should become so captivated with its pleasures, though not unlawful,—so tenacious even of "those things which God hath given us richly to enjoy," as to feel an increasing reluctance to surrender them, and be filled with dread and melancholy at the idea of our departure from the present state? It would surely be a dishonourable termination of our earthly pilgrimage—for pilgrims to "a continuing city" we should ever account ourselves, however fair the scenes through which it be our

lot to journey—it would be a dishonourable termination of our earthly pilgrimage, if, as we approached the confines of mortality, we should falter in our course, and hesitate to proceed; and instead of advancing on the solid ground of our faith, as on a bridge that arches the dark gulf of death, and which has borne a host before us in safety and rejoicing to their eternal rest, we should shrink and tremble, as though we had been pushed to the edge of the precipice, and could see nothing but the abyss beneath. Ill examples should we furnish of that faith which our religion inculcates and inspires!—which gives substance and reality to things unseen, and whose property and distinguishing glory it is “to overcome the world”—to outweigh its enjoyments, as well as to surmount its temptations.

In offering some apprehension of that love of the world which the words of the Apostle admonish us to suppress, we have had in view principally the power which the world possesses over us through the medium of its pleasures, or those objects which it offers to our natural desires and propensities; and by which it brings us under subjection to “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride

of life." It should be intimated, however, that a love of the world is no less to be dreaded and restrained in the strength which it opposes to our patience and resignation under suffering; whether brought upon us by the more immediate disposal of Divine Providence, or the conduct of our fellow-creatures. It must be abundantly evident that our love of the world is excessive, and virtually forbidden by the Gospel, when it so far occupies the heart as to prevent us from devoutly resigning ourselves to the will of God, or disables us from the exercise of forbearance, or the discharge of any of the offices of charity towards our neighbour. But into what a wide field of religious consideration would this view of a love of the world conduct us! for how numerous are the occasions when our fulfilment of the passive duties is put to the proof by the vicissitudes of this changeful life, or by the selfish indifference, the wayward tempers, and the unprincipled artifices of our fellow-men! — But we must proceed to a second particular suggested to our consideration in the text.

We remarked that the Apostle ascribes to mankind a prevailing disposition to an inordinate attachment to the world, and that the

injunction "Love not the world" was of proportionate urgency and moment. We may conceive the nature of man to be so excellently constituted, his desires and inclinations so subordinated to reason, as to render such an injunction, comparatively speaking, unnecessary, or of perfectly easy obedience. He might be so inspired with sentiments of gratitude and devotion towards the Author of his being, as scarcely to be in danger of degrading himself from a subject of God, and a citizen of Heaven, into a slave of appetite, and a votary of the world. And yet, if men were in a state of trial—that is, if they were, to any extent, liable to form too high an estimate of this life, and to make unworthy sacrifices for its advantages, we should still consider the admonition before us to be valuable and useful. Notwithstanding a prevailing inclination to the right, we should hardly deem it fit that mankind should be entirely contented with the world, as long as it contained any incentives to the wrong. We should scarcely regard it as a state of unmixed satisfaction, until their integrity had been incontestably proved, and their happiness sealed for ever. One could not altogether banish concern and apprehension, or at least circumspection, from Paradise itself,

while there stood in it a single tree that offered forbidden fruit, and suggested the thought — the possibility of transgression. But to learn with what distrust and caution we should “use the world,” let us refer for a moment to the representations which the Scriptures have given us of human nature as subjected to its influence, and exposed to the force of its temptations.

The inspired writer, in adverting to the excesses already specified, seems, we have said, to consider them as lamentably prevalent in the world. For *all* that is in the world, he affirms, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” He does not for a moment pause to qualify his assertion, and to except from his condemnation the moderate and lawful indulgence of our worldly inclinations; and far less to commend a certain attachment to the present life, as a stimulus to universal activity, and consequently essential to the exercise and growth of the faculties, the progress of arts, and the general advancement of society. He was evidently too much affected with the general preponderance of the inferior passions over the rational and spiritual part of our nature, to make distinctions. Indeed, it is not

the time to remark the uses and benefits of a noble river, when it has overleaped its banks, and is swollen to a desolating torrent. The Apostle looked upon the human passions as having far overpassed the bounds which God had prescribed to them, and saw in their unmeasured prevalence and wild commotion, the aspect and disaster of a moral deluge. And, truly, the rebukes and expostulations of the New Testament were amply justified by the vicious propensities and unholy deeds against which they were directed. They seem but to reiterate and confirm the accusing judgment of the Almighty, that "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually;" and to recall that awful and pathetic declaration which he has left on record against our species, that "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth."*

Our Saviour, moreover, consistently with the assumption of a natural and universal proneness to pervert "the things of the world" into instruments of sin and disobedience—into weapons of rebellion against the divine authority, which he came forth from God to re-establish in the heart and conscience—our

* Gen. vi. 5, 6.

Saviour instructed his hearers that a devotion of the affections to earthly objects was essentially incompatible with the service due to himself; and that in obeying him as their Master, they would be distinctly conscious of a preference of the privileges which he offered them, to the possessions and enjoyments of the world. This he taught them irrespective of the fact, that, as the professors of a new and most holy religion, they were destined to provoke the persecution of a world devoted to idolatry, and "lying in wickedness:" as is manifest from the general tenor of his exhortations: — "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life." — "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Indeed one cannot but be arrested by the earnestness and solemnity with which the original teachers of our religion conjure their contemporaries to withdraw their affections "from the world, and the things of the world." We do not find, it would seem, in the New Testament what we meet with on this subject in the instructions of uninspired men—of other teachers of religion and morality—the proposition, for example, that the pleasures of the world have their value, and ought not

to be despised, and encouragements to enjoy the good of life, though qualified with a praise of moderation, and cautions against excess. That mankind had a sufficient estimate of earthly good, the sacred writers evidently took for granted; or they omitted the consideration altogether, as an insignificant part of their subject. That Christians too, in after times, under the impression of their representations of the world, might entertain opinions regarding it too sombre for discrimination—too gloomy to allow them either to distinguish the characters of guilt and innocence in human enjoyments, or to collect the true, determinate sense of the word of God, by a comparison of one part of it with another; and, consequently, might be driven into a needless sacrifice of human happiness, into acts of self-denial dishonourable to the service of God, because unnecessary to the holiness of his creatures, and simply burdensome and painful to those who serve him;—that Christians, we say, might thus understand and apply their language concerning the world, was a consequence which the sacred writers scarcely appear to have imagined; or this was a portion of possible, and even probable evil, which, it seems, they

concluded might be left out of their calculation, when consulting for the universal interests of religion, and the happiness of immortal beings. In truth, our Saviour and his Apostles regarded the moral constitution of mankind as the reverse of sound or healthy ; as by no means possessed of such stamina as would permit them to indulge their affections towards the world in freedom and security. They looked upon the human race as the subjects of a moral taint and corruption ; as inheriting a predisposition to numerous disorders of a spiritual nature ; and they enforce as the only means of cure, or effectual amelioration, a course of abstinence, or habitual restraint upon the natural desires and inclinations.

But it may be said, and often is said, that the descriptions given of the world in the Scriptures are scarcely applicable in our time, inasmuch as Christianity has effected an important reformation in our religious and moral principles ; that, consequently, we are not so prone to an exclusive or immoderate attachment to the world ; and that if this difference be not observed, we shall entertain a misplaced or extravagant fear of its temptations, and encourage a contempt of its pleasures for

which there is no rational foundation. Now we readily admit that great and singular improvement has been derived to the human character from the instruction and discipline of the Christian religion. Were it our purpose to argue the excellence and value of the faith which we profess, we should assert and particularize that improvement; and we would not, for the sake of producing a deeper temporary impression of one fact, of one truth, reject or extenuate another: the latter, moreover, being one which, on some other occasion, we might be earnest to allege, and even be in danger of exaggerating. We would admit to the full the meliorating influence of the Gospel on the opinions and habits of its professors in general, and the necessity of taking this into our view, in order to a well-directed application of the words of the Apostle. But whatever be the extent of that influence, we have no cause to undervalue the injunction "Love not the world;" for the amendment which has taken place in our estimate and use of the world, must have been the consequence of observing that injunction. If we have attained to indulge our natural inclinations, without polluting the conscience, we are confessedly indebted for so

auspicious a change of character, to that religion which has raised our affections to the Author of our being, and taught us to prefer his approbation and friendship to the sinful pleasures of the world. Although therefore the warning of the Apostle should not be so imperatively needful at the present moment, as at the period when it was originally penned, yet we could never set aside an injunction, to the observance of which we must ultimately owe our successful resistance to temptation, and our final conquest over evil.

But has the Gospel so prevailed amongst us?—has the love of God become so ascendant a principle in our minds, as that those objects which, in old time, enticed his creatures to disobedience, make a vain appeal to our affections? Has the world lost its power to tempt—to engross, infatuate, and destroy? And has the apostate spirit, who was described as the god of it, been driven from his usurpation, and his agency destroyed in “blinding the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them?”* Is the world then a terror of other times?—the bugbear of an antiquated theology? “The

* 2 Cor. iv. 4.

lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life"—have these ceased from amongst us? Have we no longer to lament and deprecate the abuse of that passion which the Almighty hallowed by the institution of marriage?—abuse of it which perverts the difference of sex into a source of bitterness and degradation; which renders man the worst enemy of woman, her busy tempter to evil, her remorseless conductor to infamy and desolation—or associates them in habitual alienation from God, and rejection of his mercy? Are the simple appetites of hunger and thirst no more perverted to obscure the reason, to deaden the moral feelings, and to obstruct the influence of things unseen and future? Has the love of lucre ceased to impair the justice and congeal the charity of men; degrading in their esteem the claims of others, and rendering them insensible to their wants and sufferings? Has the thirst of fame and distinction lost its power to stir our unsocial and malevolent feelings, and to make us creatures of envy and detraction? Is power laid aside as an instrument of injustice and oppression, or never used as a weapon of revenge? Are rank and wealth no longer viewed as reasons for contempt of inferiors and dependents?—no longer nutriment

of selfish pride and heartless ostentation? Truly our self-gratulation must turn, upon reflection, into deep confusion, as professors of the Gospel, and might well provoke from an enemy of our faith a pungent satire, and a bitter scorn.

Admitting an increasing spirit of Christian moderation, an improvement, as we trust, in temperance, and purity, and, especially, a more active and enlarged benevolence—how can we boast a superiority to the things of the world, while in all the departments of business, and in all the walks of pleasure, so many acknowledged derelictions of “the right,” so many practices confessedly unchristian, are excused on the very ground of their prevalence and notoriety? Where are the proofs and monuments of our victory over the world, when we hear so much of the strength and irresistibility of the passions, and the uselessness of attempting their subjugation?—when so much license is awarded to the excesses of youth, and that season given up to the world, in which its power might be wisely forestalled, and most effectually broken?—when we experience in our own minds, and perceive in others, so strong a disposition to defer the serious prosecution of religion, till we shall

have taken a larger draught of worldly pleasure, and even emptied the intoxicating cup to the lees?—when many, it is feared, are unable to avert their eyes from the attractions of the present state, till they fade and disappear in the shadows of death?—But enough has been said to remind us that the monition of the text has lost neither its value nor its urgency; and that it will require a firm and watchful control over our minds, and an assiduous use of all the helps of our religion, to subject our appetites and passions to the laws of Christ, and to “keep ourselves unspotted from the world.”

In conclusion, we must add a word on the motive urged upon us to follow the exhortation of the Apostle:—“The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” It is the anti-thesis in these words which gives them all their impressiveness. That the world should pass away is no very heavy calamity—let it pass — it may carry with it no very general and bitter lamentations—so many are sated, though enslaved with its pleasures! And how many are outwearied with its toils—sickened with its friendships—disgusted with its brag-gart virtues, and its ruling selfishness! How

many have survived that ardour which it once inspired, and which care, not time, has quenched! How many barely endure it in disgust and melancholy—nay, cannot endure it! — day after day, or hour after hour, some one is rushing out of the world in desperation—forcing the gates of death, and plunging into the darkness of futurity!—The evil of loving the world is that we sacrifice for it the friendship of God, and forfeit the blessed immortality reserved for those who fulfil his will. The folly, the misery of a sensual and worldly life, is not that it is animated by passions which expire with “the breath that is in our nostrils,” and turn to corruption in the tomb:—if this be all—if man must wholly perish on the earth, “let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.”* The waste and ruin of such a life is, that, consuming the strength, preventing the growth of all Christian virtues, it leaves us destitute of those qualities which meet the approval of the Almighty; which bring the assurance of his redeeming mercy, and the forethought of his unclouded presence; which make us “partakers of the divine nature,” and are alone incorruptible and immortal. So when death is coming—there is nothing within us

* 1 Cor. xv. 32.

impervious to his stroke—no faith to fill the mind's conception, when the mortal eye grows dim—no hope that bestirs and erects itself amid the prostration of our earthly affections—no thoughts and feelings that grow strong in agonies, and great in dissolution — unearthly and imperishable as the spirit's essence, springing out of a " life" that is " hid with Christ in God."* Of that life, brethren, we will strive and hope to be partakers; nourishing it, more than heretofore, by meditation, by prayer, by holy ordinances, and a wakeful keeping of the heart;—a life which dates its commencement only here, and awaits its perfection hereafter—passing not away with the passing of the world; — for what passes with the world? The love of the world—not the love of God.—Death hath no dominion here.

* Col. iii. 3.

SERMON VII.

LUKE XVII. 17, 18.

And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

THOUGH all mankind, it is confessed, betray a very defective sense of the goodness of the Creator, if not by habitually disregarding his commandments, yet by failing to observe them in a measure answerable to the benefits which he is continually conferring upon them, most persons, it is probable, would judge the nine lepers, who, after the cure which our Saviour had wrought upon them, did not return "to give glory to God," to have been more deeply tainted with the sin of ingratitude than the mass of our unthankful species. If this verdict be a just one—and it is not, we apprehend, without foundation — the

ground on which it rests should be rightly understood, and attentively considered: for we shall find that the reason of this distinction between the lepers and ourselves, will bring into view a humiliating defect in our own piety, — a defect of consideration as objects of the divine beneficence; and must accordingly suggest a most needful reproof and admonition.

The lepers, whose shame is recorded in the Gospel, were not distinguished from the rest of mankind, or especially called upon to acknowledge the goodness of the Almighty, on account of any peculiar severity in that distemper under which they had laboured, and which had left them at the bidding of our Saviour. The leprosy was doubtless a loathsome and debilitating malady; and, being contagious, it excluded the patient from general society: but such is the nature of a variety of diseases to which all mankind are subject, and from one or more of which, almost every individual has, at some period of his life, experienced a restoration. These lepers, indeed, were far from being in the worst stage of disease. They retained some use of their limbs; they breathed the pure air; and though they “stood afar off” from

the uninfected community, they were allowed to congregate without the city.

But it is not in sickness only that we own the succour of that gracious Being whose will we are so prone to forget, and even wilfully disobey. Many, if not most persons must acknowledge His compassion towards them, not solely in their recovery from bodily anguish or prostration, but in their escape from impending death by fire, flood, or other instrument of terror and destruction ; or, it may be, in their extrication from a concurrence of calamitous events, enclosing them on every side, confounding and threatening to overwhelm them. Some who could with difficulty recall any signal deliverance, or propitious change in their condition, are indebted to the Giver of all good for having hitherto granted them a comparative exemption from suffering, both bodily and mental : an immunity of large import, of incalculable value, though rarely or but carelessly noted in the memory of God's beneficence. And some there may be, who, notwithstanding the catalogue and magnitude of human sufferings, have found their life to be little else than a state of happiness ; a course of successful exertion, or of prosperous enterprise ; or a succession of pleasures

obtained without toil, varied without end, and continued with scarcely any interruption—a stream of enjoyment flowing into the soul from unnumbered fountains in the sensible, the intellectual, and the moral life.

Now it cannot, in the smallest degree, diminish the claim of the Almighty on our gratitude, that any deliverance or exemption from suffering which we experience, or any good which we enjoy, is not the effect of his miraculous agency—is not the consequence of a departure from those ordinary modes of his operation, which we call the laws of nature; and by adhering to which, he establishes a regularity in the succession of the natural phenomena; imparts an uniformity to the experience of mankind; and thereby, it may be added, gives existence to human science, and lays the foundation of intellectual improvement. For a supernatural manifestation of the power of God cannot imply a more observant attention, a superadded design—an afterthought of the Deity. It cannot presuppose any conceivable change in the Omniscient mind, “the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow, of turning.”* “Known unto God,” said the

* James i. 17.

Apostle, "are all his works"—whether to our apprehension they take the form of miracles or not—"known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."*

Nor would any of us, it may be presumed, deliberately refer to chance or accident any event which has contributed to our welfare; meaning thereby to except it from God's foreknowledge and overruling purpose; or to omit it in the recital of his goodness towards us. And surely none of us would make the smallest deduction from the debt we owe Him, on the presumption that any benefit which he confers upon us is ascribable to a general, in contradistinction to a particular providence: for the general providence of God, whereby, in a manner inscrutable to our faculties, he accomplishes his own will in conformity with the constitution of our nature as intelligent and accountable beings, must necessarily imply his superintendence over the lot of every one of his creatures, and over every particular event relating to them. But this may be taken for granted, and, on the whole, it may be assumed that any benefit derived to us in the ordinary course of events, or by the action of natural laws — every

* Acts xv. 18.

instance, for example, of restoration to health—is as certainly attributable to the gracious purpose of God, as the cure of the lepers at the word of Christ. Otherwise, indeed, the story of their ingratitude would have been delivered to distant generations to little purpose. The instruments of healing may be indefinitely varied, and the remedial process quickened or retarded; but it is God, who, in the words of the Psalmist, “healeth our diseases, and redeemeth our life from destruction.”

But if the goodness of the Almighty, conveyed to us through its wonted channels, brings with it an equal claim to praise and thanksgiving with a miraculous interference in our behalf—inasmuch, we mean, as it affords as distinct and infallible a proof of his benevolent intention towards us—why, it may be asked, should we single out the lepers as examples of more than the common ingratitude of mankind? Why should the cure of their malady at the word of our Saviour, be assumed to have laid them under a stronger obligation “to give glory to God,” than is imposed upon ourselves in our recovery from disease, by medicine, diet, climate, or any other means dictated by the human intel-

lect? — seeing that that intellect is but an efflux from his own intelligence — the light by which he guides our footsteps into the recesses of creation, as into a vast repository, in which he has laid an ample provision wherewith to assuage our pains, to retard or mitigate the doom of mortality. Restoration from sickness is that particular display of the divine goodness suggested by the account of the lepers; but, as we have intimated, it may fitly represent any other instance of deliverance, preservation, or benefaction received from the Giver of all good.

If we inquire into the cause of our comparative insensibility to the goodness of God, as it is manifested towards us *in the order of nature*, we may discern a just foundation for our opinion concerning the lepers. That insensibility is scarcely explained by remarking our proneness to confine our attention to sensible appearances, or “to stop at second causes” in our estimate of things: indeed, this is merely stating in a different phraseology, the fact proposed for explanation; namely, our forgetfulness of the Original Cause of all good, the sole creating, restoring, and sustaining Power in the universe. The question returns in another form—Why are we prone to confine

our attention to the sensible media of the Almighty's goodness, or "to stop at second causes," when that goodness is exhibited in a manner that suggests no idea of a miraculous interposition in our behalf? Were we recovered from a disease in such a manner as to assure us of the working of a preternatural energy within us; were our limbs, after having been long imprisoned in paralysis, set at liberty, in an instant, at the utterance of a word; or were our eyes, after years of blindness, to open, at a touch, upon the objects around us;—we should hardly, at such a moment, restrain our attention to the person whose voice we heard, or whose touch we felt—the immediate, sensible cause of our restoration. The mind would merely glance at the human vehicle of strength or sight, and fix its full and undistracted gaze on God. Yet are we certain that such a miraculous cure of our infirmity would be but a specific example of the self-same goodness, which "healeth all our diseases, and redeemeth our life from destruction."

No other reason, we presume, can be assigned for this comparative inattention to the manifestations of the divine beneficence in the order of nature, than that the uniform

appearance, and frequent recurrence of objects, tend to harden the mind to the impressions which they are adapted to produce; and that it is not the value or excellence of things, which, for the most part, attracts attention to their causes; but the surprise or wonder which they may happen to awaken. The understanding immediately assents to the proposition, that the works of nature and the works of God are the same: that, in these forms of speech, God and Nature are strictly synonymes: but the edge of this conviction—as of a thousand other convictions by a similar cause—is blunted by a long, unbroken familiarity with the natural media of good; with the instruments, animate and inanimate, by which, in the order of nature, the Almighty effects the deliverance, or upholds the well-being of his creatures. In the instance of bodily cure, not Christians only, but theists in general, would concur with the Psalmist, in acknowledging that it is God who “healeth our diseases, and redeemeth our life from destruction:” but he healeth them by identical or analogous means and processes—in a manner which moves no astonishment, as would a miracle; and, consequently, the devout ascription of our redemption from the

grave to the Supreme Restorer, is apt to degenerate into a tardy, inert deduction of the understanding. If, therefore, there was any circumstance of peculiar enormity in the ingratitude of the lepers; it was that, in the miraculous nature of their cure, the compassion of the Almighty towards them, though not more clearly demonstrated to reason, was more immediately and vividly presented to their minds. The heedlessness and inattention consequent on the recurrence of the same or similar sensations, was, in their case, done away; and no excitement of wonder was wanting to stimulate their devotional feelings. They were called to no effort, no duty of consideration, in order to raise their conceptions to the Author of all good, and to fill their hearts with grateful adoration. The Almighty had superseded the necessity, anticipated the process of reflection, and rendered the conviction of his interposition to heal them as instantly and inevitably palpable as the extinction of their leprosy—simultaneous with the strength which suddenly begirt their limbs, and the hue of health which, in a moment, overspread their frame. A persuasion of the hand of God in their restoration, so irresistibly forced upon their minds,

demanding a sentiment of gratitude correspondingly energetic and profound; and, accordingly, the unthankfulness of these lepers evinced an extreme induration of soul; and their omission "to give glory to God" was aggravated to a glaring hue of impiety.

Nor is that all. The astonishment which necessarily seized them must have heightened, inexpressibly, the joy excited by their cure. Surprise or wonder not only stimulates the understanding, but is a mighty element in all the movements of the heart. It lends an impetus to all the passions; it strikes an intensity into every feeling into which it enters—the exultation of success—the shame of defeat and failure—the dejection of calamity. Every evil and every good is notoriously magnified to our experience by its unexpectedness, or by the emotion of astonishment. Disease is invariably imbibed to us by the suddenness of its irruption; and the natural fear of the last enemy is exasperated to horror, when he comes upon us without foretoken or harbinger, and in the manner of a prodigy. In like manner, the joy which animates the heart on the cure of a distemper, is carried to ecstasy by the rare or unprecedented efficacy of the means employed to

effect it, or by the wonderful rapidity of its accomplishment. The subject of such a cure, it were reasonable to infer, like one who had been saved from a shipwreck, in which a multitude had perished, would be affected with peculiar emotions of gratitude to the Divine Being; and should he afterwards consent to the instigations of evil, would be encountered by a sterner resistance from his conscience, and be overtaken with a keener remorse. The instantaneous cure of the lepers—their emancipation, in a moment, from the filthy and oppressive chain which had hung upon them, must have awakened a transport of exulting emotions, which none but such as have been the subjects of a similar miraculous renovation of their frame, can be supposed to have experienced; and, agreeably to the constitution of our nature, it was fitted to exalt to the utmost their conception of the favour which God had shown them. That, notwithstanding, they proved ungrateful, and, while the Samaritan, “when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at the feet of Jesus, giving him thanks,” they, on the contrary, slunk away, and kept aloof from their Omnipotent healer

and benefactor, may justly excite even *our* astonishment, and place them on a "bad eminence" in *human* estimation. We might, indeed, speculate upon the feelings and motives by which they were immediately influenced in so heinous a neglect "to give glory to God." Possibly, they were swayed, in common with many of their countrymen, by a prejudice against "Jesus of Nazareth," and were thus rendered impenetrable to those feelings which filled to overflowing the heart of the grateful Samaritan; for in acknowledging the miracle which Christ had performed upon them, they would so far have accredited him as the expected Messiah. But whatever was the motive by which they were actuated, like every other motive to wickedness, it did but lay open the depravity of the heart that could admit it. Depraved and hardened they surely must have been, to have turned their backs upon One, who, whatever might have been their apprehensions of his nature and personal dignity, had undeniably revealed himself to be the minister of God—the minister of his mercy and compassion — so wonderfully — to themselves.*

* Such conduct, we must add, is a forcible instance of the contagion of a *bad example*. That all but one, out of

The practical conclusion which we would derive from this view of the conduct of the lepers, is the duty and necessity of counteracting the deteriorating effect of our familiarity with the ordinary methods of divine goodness, by a studious and reflective piety. The emotions of amazement, for the reasons assigned, must have aggravated the criminality of the lepers in neglecting to give glory to their Divine Deliverer; but the influence of uniformity and repetition in gradually wearing away impressions made upon the mind, can afford no valid excuse for an impaired and defective sense of obligation to the Creator: though that influence, it is true, is the effect of our mental constitution. It is also the ten persons healed in such a manner, should, separately or *alone*, prove so exceedingly ungrateful, appears to be scarcely possible, and is difficult to be imagined. But presuming them to be *together*, we can well suppose that, one or more of them showing no disposition to return to Jesus, the others might, by their example, be led into the omission of so palpable a duty, and succeed in excusing the very vilest ingratitude on their own part. Indeed, it is too well known that men, in bodies or in combination, are capable of a degree of evil which their character as individuals would ill prepare us to expect. In no instance is their collective strength more remarkable and dreadful; enabling them to confront the plainest dictates of conscience, and to quell the most powerful virtuous movements of the heart. Happily, the same principle is at work, and greatly efficacious, for *good* also.

effect of our mental constitution, or conformable to the structure of the mind, that the past experience and present enjoyment of any blessing—health, for example—should tend to promote the belief and expectation of its continuance; and consequently, as our regard to Divine Providence is very much supported by a feeling of insecurity, and the persuasion of our continual dependence on God, that expectation is commonly found to abate the impression of his goodness, and not unfrequently, it may be feared, to obliterate it from the heart. This, we say, is conformable to the structure of the mind; for we are originally constituted to deduce our belief and expectation of the future from our experience of the past—to conclude that what *has* been *will* be. But this predisposition or law of the mind must seem but a miserable apology for those amongst us, who, confident in a profusion of wealth, and calculating on length of life, have been thereby beguiled into a long forgetfulness of their Creator and Preserver: continuing in mature age, and in the vigour of their faculties, as insensible to his goodness, as vacant of gratitude towards him, as when, in the helplessness of infancy, they lay embosomed in parental charities.

True it is that the impressions of our mind, from whatever objects, whether sensible or purely intellectual, commonly tend to diminish or grow fainter in proportion to the frequency of their recurrence ; and, doubtless, it is the effect of novelty to rivet the attention, and arouse the faculties. These are conditions or laws of our nature, the utility of which it were needless to mention : but to surrender ourselves unresistingly to their influence, may be as detrimental to our religious principles, and permanent well-being, as to succumb to the appetites and passions : though indeed these, it may be added, are equally inherent in our nature, and, in due restraint, as undeniably instrumental of good. In the fulfilment of our duty towards God, we are especially committed to the guidance of our reason, and not to the varying impression of external circumstances, or the impulse of accidental emotion ; and we are bound to regulate our gratitude, as well as every other affection towards him, by the clear and deliberate conclusions of the understanding,—by a comprehensive and deeply-meditated view of his benevolence, of “ those tender mercies which are over *all* his works.”*

* Psalm cxlv. 9.

It is observable, indeed, that this inattention, this inertness toward the Supreme Being, under the influence of an apparent identity or the unchanging appearance of his works, is a mark of untutored minds, a peculiar feature of barbarism. Savage, uncivilized man, is moved to the contemplation of a superior power by singular appearances only—by objects which fill him with amazement. The uniform aspect of the skies, the sun as he appears every day in the heavens, the usual forms of men and animals,—these he beholds with an incurious and a vacant eye; but he is fixed at once in wonder and devotion at sight of meteors in the firmament, of the sun when eclipsed, or of strange, eccentric shapes of living nature. On the other hand, it is the noblest occupation of our reason, to contemplate the being and attributes of God, as they are proved and illustrated in the constant, uninterrupted succession of phenomena, or the operation of fixed, unvarying laws in the universe: as, indeed, it is a fruit of mental cultivation in general, to be capable of curiosity, and excited to inquiry, without the emotion of wonder; to supply the want of that stimulus by habitual observation and reflection; or rather to find matter for wonder

and admiration in things themselves, more than in their unprecedented appearances. But if this be a distinction between rude and cultivated minds, are we not rebuked and self-condemned for that insensibility which we too often allow to the ordinary gifts—the uniform beneficence of the Deity? What—shall we nourish and extol a habit of attention to common and minute appearances, in the search of a merely *speculative* theology, and the pursuit of knowledge in general, and neglect to acquire it in the culture of practical religion; and with relation to the goodness of God, and the affections which it is rationally fitted to awaken, shall we yield to an influence proper to barbarians and children?

Truly, if any of us, in order to be habitually inspired with a spirit of thankfulness towards God, and constrained to render him, by a life of obedience, the glory due unto his name,—if any of us stand in need of an extraordinary intervention of his providence, which may strike us with amazement and transport,—if we require to be healed, or otherwise benefited; as by a miracle,—if we want any impulse to our gratitude superadded to the conviction, which it is presumed we already have, that he is, in truth, the Giver of all good, we betray

a deplorable neglect and misuse of the faculties with which he has endowed us. We expose a wretched husbandry of the soil into which he has cast the seed of his word, that it may produce the fruits of holiness, and spring up to everlasting life. We evince an habitual neglect to *consider* the ways of God to man : a duty included in the most obvious principles of natural religion, as well as repeatedly inculcated in the Scriptures. We lay ourselves open to a charge of exceeding unrighteousness toward God. For what are the *causes* of that impression of uniformity under which our gratitude for his goodness, a vital principle of religion, is experienced to languish and expire ? What but the extension of the benefits which he confers upon ourselves to other and innumerable beings, and more particularly the long continuance of them in our own experience ? And can any thing be more repugnant to our reason and sense of rectitude, than that the goodness of God should fail in its hold upon our affections, because we are every where surrounded with its proofs and manifestations ?—because the source from which it flows is inexhaustible, and its objects are multiplied to infinity ? Shall we surrender our minds to the influence of

such a principle as this?—a principle which, if allowed to operate universally and without resistance, would wrest from the Almighty the gratitude and subjection of the intelligent creation,—for what is the tribute of the universe to its Author, but the memory of his beneficence to individuals, and their united voices of praise and thanksgiving? Or can we be guilty of a more palpable injustice towards God, than by allowing the sense of his goodness to be effaced by the uninterrupted continuance of those blessings which we individually enjoy? If the possession of any good for a day, or an hour, be a reason for thankfulness, can it be less so because it has continued through a series of years, and will probably be as lasting even as our life? If health be so precious and heart-refreshing, so much an impulse to gratitude, and a theme for praise, immediately after the cure of a painful and lingering malady, when we first escape from the chamber of sickness, and feel anew “the blessed sun at our bosom,”—when we expatiate again upon the scenes of nature, and seem to inspire new life and faculties from the change, can we acknowledge an inferior debt of gratitude to the Preserver of all men, because that health has rarely, if ever, been disturbed, and

our body never chained to a bed of pain and weariness ; or because when our broken strength was restored, it bore no deceitful promise of duration, but has continued to improve the zest of every enjoyment, and enhance the worth of every hour we live ? Is that life which, whether our own or another's, we so fondly clung to, and could not part with, when the angel of death had raised his hand to smite it—is that life reduced in worth because the Almighty forbade the stroke, and, as we gladly hope, forbade it to a distant period ? Are the gifts of God to be thus accounted cheap when they have become a comparatively secure possession, and may be enjoyed with a fearless and quiet mind ? Shocked as the understanding must needs be at such presumptions, may none of us any longer feel and act as if they were truths, and allow a mechanical influence of repetition and uniformity to supplant the conclusions of our reason ; as though the mind of man were nothing better than the matter which he shapes to his purposes, the passive subject of impressions. May we resolve, in future, to trace the manifestations of divine goodness in our own individual and habitual experience ; regarding our various capacities

and means of happiness—the use of the senses, the play of the affections, the exercise and progression of the intellect, with all that variety and combination of circumstances required to constitute the ease and comfort which we daily and hourly enjoy—whatever, in a word, contributes to the sum of our pleasures here, or our hopes of happiness hereafter, as the fruit of a benevolent purpose—the effect of determinate volition and decree in the Infinite Being. And with this persuasion, may we cherish such a spirit as prompted the Psalmist to exclaim:—“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies.”

We have called your attention to the effect of a long familiarity with the methods of Divine goodness, in diminishing our gratitude for the cure of *bodily* disease; but it should be added, that it operates also to diminish our gratitude for the means of our recovery from a disease, of which the distemper of the body is but a shadowy type, a

fugitive image—a disease which assails our spiritual and enduring nature, enervates the powers of virtue and true holiness, and threatens to extinguish our hopes of immortality. We suffer a diminution in our gratitude for the offer of forgiveness in the Gospel—the forgiveness of all our iniquities, the first topic of thankfulness in the Psalmist's acknowledgment of the Divine goodness—not the least of which iniquities, but rather the head and front of them all, is the ingratitude of which we have spoken — we suffer, we say, in our gratitude for the forgiveness of our sins, as offered us through the sacrifice of our Saviour, from the fact that we have been always accustomed to contemplate a merciful God, and that there never was a time when we judged our sins to be unpardonable, and were bereft of the hope of absolution. The like may be said of our Christian privileges in general; notwithstanding their absolute necessity to our well-being, their intrinsic and unspeakable value. It increases our acknowledged liability to become insensible to those privileges, and adds to our danger of neglecting to improve them, that we have heard of them times without number, and have never, it may be, been

placed in such circumstances as to fear that we had forfeited them entirely and for ever. It must suffice however to suggest the fact, fraught as it is with abundant matter for reflection; and calculated to enforce, in a most conclusive manner, the duty and necessity of frequently reviewing and considering the reasons for thankfulness to Almighty God, as motives to an unreserved devotion of our powers to his service: — calculated to enforce the appeal of the Apostle—“ I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”*

* Rom. xii. 1.

SERMON VIII.

HEBREWS XII. 9—11.

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

WE are assured in these words, as well as in numerous other passages in the sacred writings, that our sufferings—those, we mean, which necessarily result from the constitution of our nature, and the disposition of external circumstances—instead of presenting an obstacle to our conviction of the goodness of God, do but afford an additional and especial manifestation of that benevolence

which is so conspicuously apparent in the general phenomena of the universe : for this momentous reason—that those sufferings are essentially conducive to the attainment of that holiness, which constitutes our affinity to the Father of spirits, and our qualification for that eternal life which has been made known to us as the destined inheritance of his children.

Such an explanation of our pains and sorrows, the afflictive heritage of humanity, supplies, it must be obvious, a most powerful and conclusive argument for the love of God, and a life of rectitude ; but, strange as it may seem, divines, as well as others, have not unfrequently pursued their inquiries into the origin of *natural* evil, as if the Scriptures were silent, or their testimony useless, on the subject ; and, in their endeavours to reconcile the sufferings of mankind with the perfect benevolence of the Creator, have adopted a mode of reasoning, which conducts us to a conclusion at variance with the declaration of the inspired writers, and proceeds, as will appear in the sequel, on essentially inadequate views of our nature and destination. We are far from concluding that the prevalence of such reasoning precludes a belief of the

doctrine of the Scriptures; for it is very observable that persons—even those who are habituated to inquiry and discussion—can embrace opinions which not only have no perceptible coherence, but which are manifestly incongruous: for no other reason, it may be, than that their attention has never been fixed upon them in juxta-position. Nevertheless, we can hardly doubt that, in many instances, the reasoning to which we refer interferes with that full conviction of the final cause of our sufferings as revealed in the Scriptures, and that ready and habitual recurrence of it to the mind, which must be needful to impress it on the feelings, and to render it practically beneficial. Our purpose, then, in the first place, is to offer some proof of the doctrine of the Scripture itself—to show that our subjection to disease and calamity is an actual demonstration of the Divine goodness; and that the declaration of the Apostle in the text is highly conformable to human experience in general. Secondly, and more particularly, we shall endeavour to show that the reasoning by which it is frequently, if not commonly, sought to reconcile the sufferings of our species with the goodness of the Creator, betrays a departure from the doctrines

of Christianity, and an inattention to the presumptions of natural religion.

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul ; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits : who forgiveth all thine iniquities ; who healeth all thy diseases ; who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.”* Now, as Christians, we must all conclude that the disposition, or state of mind, which prompted the Psalmist to review the benefits which he had received at the hand of God, and dictated such language as that which we have just cited, was of more essential worth to him than the whole of those benefits themselves. It was evidently so in his own judgment ; for his words express a predominating desire to be adequately sensible of the goodness of the Lord, and at all times to bear it in remembrance. It is as certain indeed as our religious obligations and immortal destiny, that an habitual, prevailing sentiment of gratitude to the Giver of all good, is of incomparable and transcendent value ; essential and powerful, as it is, to attract us to an obedience of his precepts, and to promote our attainment of

* Psalm ciii. 1—4.

that holiness, which reflects into the mind the assurance of his favour, and argues our preparation for a life of perfect and enduring happiness. Whatever then supports that gratitude is, undeniably, an especial proof of the divine benevolence. Such, however, is the indisputable tendency of all those ills, which assail or menace us in this preparatory stage of our existence. The experience or the apprehension of those ills is directly conducive, or rather indispensably necessary, to preserve in human beings a sentiment of gratitude to the Deity; to renew their impressions of his goodness; and thereby to promote their subjection to his authority, and their advancement to a state of existence, compared with which an unbroken continuance of health and prosperity, an uninterrupted succession of pleasures—all that mundane happiness which we are accustomed to regard as the principal or only token of the goodwill of the Almighty towards us, is less than nothing and vanity.

In taking this position, that our sufferings are demanded for the support of our religious gratitude, we do but assume the reality of that general experience, which was the subject of the preceding discourse: namely, that the long possession, the uninterrupted enjoyment

of a good, is almost universally found to reduce our esteem of its value, and often to efface the sense of obligation to its Divine Author ; and, moreover, that we are affected in an inferior degree by the bounty of the Creator, because there are innumerable other beings, who participate it in common with ourselves ; or, in other words, because the same illustrations of His goodness are everywhere and continually before our eyes. The irrationality and sinfulness of thus allowing the influence of uniformity and repetition to impair the impressions of divine benevolence, and to work the effect of ignorance itself upon our religious principles, was dilated upon in the last discourse. At present, we are concerned only with the fact itself, that the benefactions of Almighty God suffer in our estimation as they grow familiar and become naturalized to our experience and observation : that our gratitude towards him is in danger of being as superficial and fugitive as the impression of change or novelty ; and is consequently dependent, in an incalculable degree, on painful reverses in our own experience, or the contrast which the sufferings of others present to our own condition. The fact is universally acknowledged ; but not so

generally perceived is the light which it casts upon the final cause of human sufferings, or the powerful aid which it affords us in seeking a solution of natural evil, and in justifying the ways of God to man. If such, however, be the corrupt state and wayward proneness of our nature, that gratitude to God, awakened as it is by the communication of happiness to his creatures, is laid asleep by the continuance and extension of that happiness; then is it a farther and yet more affecting proof of his benevolence, to interrupt its continuity, and to limit its extension. If a long duration of life and health gradually hardens the heart to the beneficence of our Creator in the gift and preservation of those blessings, and begets an indifference to his laws and institutions, then was it his unaltered, his persisting goodness, that sowed in our nature the vigorous seeds of disease and mortality. If the continuance of worldly prosperity engenders a false and dangerous conceit of our own security and independence, then was it the goodwill and kindness of our heavenly Father which rendered that prosperity uncertain and transitory; which founded it on no surer materials than human power and foresight, and condemned it to the waste of time, and the overthrow of disastrous vicissitudes;—thus

forewarning us that we do not build our house upon the sand, and reap the fruit of our industry in the flood and the whirlwind.

In truth, it was no less needful, in order that we might be suitably affected by the goodness of God, that our earthly happiness should be subject to interruption, diminution, and sudden extinction, than that it should exceed, on the whole, the amount of misery in the world. If happiness had not been preponderant in the average experience of mankind, so closely do our affections cling to the "things that are seen," though "temporal," and so unapt are they to attach themselves to the "things that are not seen," though "eternal," that we could with difficulty have conceived it possible that goodness might be the governing attribute of the Deity. Even a very partial admixture of bitterness in the cup which he has given us to drink, has sufficed, it appears, to awaken a doubt on this head; or, at least, to raise an objection to the goodness of God which theologians seem bound to combat, and to overpower with specific proofs and demonstrations of his benevolence. On the other hand, had the condition of mankind been one of universal and unbroken enjoyment,—presuming such enjoyment to be compatible

with the present infirmity of our moral powers, or the irregular working of the passions;—we should have grown entirely forgetful of the manifold goodness of the Creator, and insensible to the claims which he most righteously prefers to the supreme affection, and unreserved obedience of his creatures. In either case, we should have stood in need of an abiding and effective incitement to the love of God, and the pursuit of holiness. When, therefore, in contemplating the goodness of the Deity, in “healing our diseases and preserving our life from destruction,” we are prompted to inquire for what reason he should have made us liable to diseases, and encompassed us with perils of destruction, and are tempted to murmur that in these and other instances he should Himself have ordained those evils which he demands our gratitude for removing, we are admonished to reflect that but for those diseases and those perils, the gift of life and health had been wholly unvalued—the Divine Author of them forgotten—his will lost sight of—his searching judgment unprepared for.

It is related, as is well known, of an ancient professor of wisdom, a disputer of the common belief of a divine providence, that, when his

attention had been pointed to a number of votive tablets which had been placed in the temple of Neptune in grateful acknowledgment to the god, by persons who had escaped the dangers of the ocean, he inquired with a tone of derision—“ But where are the memorials of those who have been shipwrecked or drowned ?” The query had been greatly more suitable to a person who affected the wit, than to one who sought the repute of a sage ; if, indeed, a regard to the divine power was a principle which it became a philosopher to respect ; or if a reverence for the Ruler of the ocean was an object of rational desire, no less than the preservation of those who might invoke his aid in the tempest : for, assuredly, unless many a vessel had been dashed upon rocks, and many a life had perished in the deep, no offerings of gratitude to a divine power had been presented by those who had crossed a propitious sea, and accomplished their voyage in safety.

But it is not only as a means of renewing and keeping alive a sense of obligation to Almighty God for the happiness of the present state, that we stand in need of the experience or forethought of pain and adversity. The afflictions which beset and overhang our

path in this world, are essential to awaken our gratitude for that superior state of existence which has been made known and offered to us in the Gospel; to endear it to our affections; to commend it to our earnest pursuit; and to enable us to realize it as a commanding motive to a devout and holy life. But we forbear to enlarge on this consideration, important as it is to illustrate the efficacy of affliction as an instrument of spiritual discipline: for it was not our purpose, even had these limits allowed, to trace the various ways in which our sufferings are found to correct our inordinate passions, — to minister to the exercise and improvement of our religious affections,—to promote the gracious purpose of our heavenly Father, that of bringing us under subjection to himself, and imbuing us with the principles of a new and imperishable life. In bringing forward this explanation of the divine conduct in subjecting mankind to a condition or liability of suffering, we are mainly concerned that Christians may give it their full assent, their cordial acquiescence; that they may adhere to it as an explanation explicitly offered them in the sacred volume, and confessedly corroborated by their own experience; and entertain it

in their thoughts without admixture and confusion from merely human judgments and surmises on the subject, or theories excogitated by the unassisted intellect of man.

The Christian religion assumes mankind to be in a state of moral degeneracy, and naturally averse to the practice of holiness ; and instructs us, as we have seen, to regard the afflictions to which they are exposed as at once the memento and corrective of their sin and disobedience. Theologians, however, of very considerable repute, have endeavoured to reconcile the existence and diffusion of misery with the benevolence of the Creator, without taking into consideration the prevalence of sin, or the means of correcting it at all. For what is the method by which they have attempted to establish the goodness of the Deity ? Do they not consider, almost exclusively, the proportion which the enjoyments of this life bear to its sufferings ? Do they not tell, as it were, so many sensations of pleasure on one side, and so many sensations of pain on the other ? Do they not compare the items of happiness with those of misery, strike a balance between them, and, finding the former very greatly to exceed the latter,

infer the prevalence of a benevolent principle in the Creative Mind ?

In this calculation, they not only forget the depravity of our species, and the instrumentality of affliction in correcting it, as set forth in the Scriptures ; but they overlook the presumption of our accountableness to the Author of our life and happiness, and the dependence of our condition in futurity on the tenour of our conduct as the subjects of his moral government. For if this presumption signify any thing—and it is a natural and imperative one, apart from the divine revelation which has so solemnly and affectingly confirmed it—most certain it is that the amount of pleasure in our earthly lot, can furnish no accurate measure of the goodness of God ; unless it be an accurate measure of our regard to his will, and consequent degree of preparation for a future state. So far however from its being such, we have reason to conclude that a general and continued immunity from pain and sorrow, as far as this were consistent with the disorder of the passions, would tend to an universal forgetfulness of the Supreme Being ; and that the optimism which many appear to desire and lament the want of, would aggravate the common

propensity to sin, and complete the depravity of the species.

We err then as widely from the principles of reason or natural religion, as from the doctrines of the Gospel, if, in seeking to collect the disposition of the Deity towards us, we limit our attention to the actual sufferings of mankind; without inquiring whether they be favourable or otherwise in the influence which they are fitted to exert on our religious and moral principles, and our hopes of future happiness,—whether they be remedial of our spiritual distempers, and salutary to our enduring life. It is this most reasonable inquiry which the Bible has anticipated; and when it assures us that affliction is the chastening of our heavenly Father, which though, “for the present, it seemeth to be not joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby,” it answers that inquiry in a manner conformable to the experience of all who are not studious to evade the lessons of Divine Providence, and obstinately averse to the practice of religion. The theologians referred to, however, though in no degree indifferent to the worth of the Gospel as a divine communication, but, on

the contrary, its firm believers and its powerful advocates, — impelled, as it would seem, by that eager spirit of inquiry, or love of speculation, which often grows forgetful of familiar truths, and overlooks the clew to knowledge when it lies at our feet,— have propounded a method of reasoning on the dealings of God with his creatures, which inevitably places them in opposition to the most explicit declarations of the Scripture. For if it be the preponderance of happiness over misery in the present state which properly and exclusively demonstrates the goodness of the Deity, we are compelled to regard the pains and sorrows of mankind, or the exceptions to their felicity, as the unavoidably accidental consequences of a system designed for the production of happiness—of happiness *only*: since it were palpably absurd to refer the causation of misery for its own sake, to a purely benevolent being; or to suppose that the Deity, if he be such a being, would permit the existence of an amount of evil which were unnecessary to the production of a greater good, and which he had the power to prevent or destroy. Accordingly, if we repine at that constitution of our senses, which renders them so many inlets to pain and uneasiness, as well

as avenues of pleasure—that structure of our frame which makes it an engine of torture, as well as an instrument of enjoyment, they would silence our murmurs by alleging the fact or probability, that the body's susceptibility of pain is a necessary concomitant of its capacity for pleasure—that its sufferings are the price of its enjoyments, and inseparably pertain to its existence. With a similar explanation they would reconcile us to the constitution of our social affections; which, however fruitful of habitual complacency, exalted at times to delight and rapture, are so often found, in their tenacious hold upon the heart, to consume it with grief, or to rend it with agony.*

* Dr. Balguy, in his "Divine Benevolence Asserted," is so engrossed and captivated with this view of the constitution of our nature, that forgetting, as is manifest, the moral corruption of all human beings, he accounts even "the abuses of the passions" as "accidental," and regarding them *as a whole*, pronounces them to be in a state of optimism:—"The *general* state of the passions is what it ought to be. The *direction* of each is usually right: and the *degree* of each is comparatively right." "Nor is the force of the passions too great when taken *all together*." He concludes, that "the understanding, the will, and the passions, are each of them adapted to good *ends*, though *accidentally* indeed the occasion of evil." (P. 104.) This, from a Christian divine, otherwise a sound expositor of the Scriptures, as we should conclude from a partial acquaintance with his writings, and an able defender of

Now,—passing the purely hypothetical character of such a conclusion, and the dissatisfaction which is left upon the mind in thus supposing limitations to the creative power of God, and the modes of displaying his benevolence,—how can such a conclusion comport with the doctrine of Scripture, that our afflictions were ordained by the “Father of spirits” as a means of our religious improvement? How can we receive, on the one hand, the testimony of the Scriptures that man was made subject to sickness and mortality, and yet allow, on the other, that the pains of the body are but accidental to a structure designed to be exclusively a vehicle of enjoyment? How can we believe that the Creator inserted into our frame the elements of infirmity and disease, and notwithstanding account those derangements which take place in its organization, its oppressive languors, and its throbs of agony, as accidental to a system contrived for the production of pleasure? Is it reasonable to ascribe the seeming imperfections in a work to the will and intention of the artist—to a stroke from the

Christianity, is a striking example of that incongruity of opinions which suggested, and will fully justify, the tenour of the present discourse.

hand that made it, and, at the same time, to ascribe them to some flaw or untractableness in the materials of which it is composed?—Is it without reason that we exhort Christians to entertain consistent views on this subject, and to adhere to the single testimony of the Scriptures on the purpose of God in the infliction of suffering, when we find them thus admitting conclusions which oppose and destroy each other?

There is no colour whatever in the word of God for the notion that the painful maladies incident to our frame have come into existence independently of the power and will of the Creator. On the contrary, it frequently declares them to be his own work. By the mouth of Moses, for example, the Almighty asserted his entire supremacy in destroying life, in wounding as well as in healing:—"See now that I, even I am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand."* Moreover, the Apostle expressly affirms that "the creature was *made subject* to vanity,† not willingly, but by reason of Him who subjected the same. . . ."‡ And it should be added, that it is not very consistent to accept the doctrine of the Scriptures relative

* Deut. xxxii. 39.

† Misery.

‡ Rom. viii. 20.

to the universal resurrection—to believe that the body which is now the tenement of the spirit, will be transformed into a body impervious to pain, and incapable of dissolution—to believe that “this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality;”* and, notwithstanding, to impute the anguish and infirmities of the human frame to something necessary and unavoidable in the works of God.

It cannot be pleaded in vindication of those who have reasoned on the goodness of the Deity in the manner animadverted upon, that they had proposed to demonstrate his benevolence on grounds independent of divine revelation, or on the principles of natural theology: for, as we have before remarked, they take no account of a fundamental principle of natural theology—a principle which, we contend, is an essential element in the inquiry whether the experience of mankind, in any particular instance, be an example of the benevolence of God or otherwise—namely, the presumption of our accountableness to the Creator, or probationary condition before him. Their omission of this principle, and the consequent defect in their reasoning, must be

* 1 Cor. xv. 54

evident, if we simply ask—What is the *end* proposed in proving and illustrating the benevolence of the Deity? Is it to inspire a confidence in his benignant disposition towards us, irrespective of our own affections and conduct as the recipients of his bounty, and the subjects of his authority? Assuredly not. We do not collect the results of our past experience, and that of others, at the hand of God, and thereby augur his purpose concerning us for the time to come, in the belief that his disposal of our destiny will be *eventually* the same, whatever be the character of our own minds—whatever be the nature of our own doings—whatever be our own endeavours to attain the happiness which it is His final purpose to bestow, or to secure our immortal being from irreparable damage and utter ruin. We do not trace the path in which the Power which upholds the universe is wont to move, with the same passive and helpless curiosity as that with which we contemplate the course of a body in the heavens, whose collision with our own planet would disturb or absorb it. On that supposition, indeed, a demonstration of the good-will of God were unspeakably grateful, presuming a general proneness or liability to doubt it. But surely the authors

of those elaborate treatises which, from time to time, have been composed to establish the predominance of a benevolent design in the constitution of our nature, would have hardly allowed that they had aimed at no other and higher object than to dispel any apprehension that might have possessed us, that the Creator designed our misery, or was indifferent to our happiness. They were concerned, it is presumed, to illustrate the benevolence of the Supreme Being as an argument for thankfulness towards him, and obedience to his known or discoverable will. It cannot suffice, then, even on the principles of unaided reason, to deduce the goodness of God from the amount of enjoyment distributed amongst us; unless it be the sum of our pleasures which determines the degree of our gratitude for his bounty, and devotion to his service. But this, we repeat, is so far from being a statement of the fact, that we are compelled to acknowledge that the uniform experience of pleasure would be followed by a monotonous indifference to the Author of all good,—that a change in the aspect of external nature is not more necessary to suggest to untutored man the notion of an intelligent Cause, or presiding Power in the

universe, than strong contrasts and grievous vicissitudes in the conditions of human nature, are essential to renew in our degenerate, thoughtless minds the ever-decaying impressions of God's beneficence.

We need not therefore regard as an obscure and mysterious phenomenon the prevalence of natural evil, or account it as an anomaly in a creation of infinite benevolence. Whatever difficulty adheres to this subject is more properly felt in the original constitution of our *moral* nature; whereby we were rendered susceptible of a defect of love and obedience to the Deity, and liable to become so insensible to the appeals which his goodness is continually making to our gratitude, and so alienated from the service due to him, as to need the rod of adversity to urge our sense of religious obligation—to require the chastisement of affliction in this life, as well as the certainty of a future retribution, in order to school us in the duties of intelligent creatures, and to prepare us for our proper destiny. Assuming, however, that such *is* our character—assuming the incursion of *moral* evil, it must seem a deduction of our reason, as well as a doctrine of the Gospel, that in exposing us to calamitous reverses in our external

condition, to pains and infirmities of body, and to the urgent, awful apprehension of dying, God has in reality consulted for our most essential wants, our worst exigency, and our largest capacity of happiness.

But especially is the doctrine of Scripture, relative to the end of those troubles which "man is born to as the sparks fly upwards," confirmed and enforced by our particular experience as Christians. The peculiar advantages appertaining to a knowledge of the Gospel exhibit, in the strongest light, the use and necessity of affliction in strengthening and establishing our religious principles. For is it sufficient, we ask, to engage us in the habitual practice of religion, and to determine our preference of a spiritual and eternal good, that we believe the Bible to be in truth a revelation from the Divine Being? Is it sufficient that the precepts which it enjoins are entirely commended to our judgment; that the claims which it enforces on our obedience provoke no question; that the rewards which it holds out to our pursuit overflow our hopes; and that the punishment which it denounces are such as none could bear? Is it sufficient to reclaim us to the service of God, that it even records the humiliation and

sufferings of his incarnate Son as our ransom from death and perdition? Are not other considerations yet needful to predispose us to give heed to those arguments which compel our assent to the inspired writings, and to incline us to realize their force and value—needful to turn the scale against a rival and tempting world, and to induce us to apply our hearts, unreservedly and without delay, to our proper vocation as Christians—even a constant, importunate sense of insecurity, the thought that we know not what and how great disasters may await us, the presentiment of fearful disease, of mortal agony, and of the world's impotence to satisfy or console us? Is not piety at all times powerfully upheld by the reflection that the Christian hope, however valued in health and prosperity, is infinitely grateful in sickness—calamity—dissolution?

We cannot but perceive that it had been no additional and crowning proof of the gracious purpose of God concerning us, to have considerably prolonged the term of our life, and to have augmented its security and pleasures. It was no added token of the kindness and long-suffering of the Almighty towards the contemporaries of Noah, who were called to repentance by that preacher of righteous-

ness, that they encountered no check in their career of self-indulgence, while the waters of the deluge were assembling against them ; but were gratifying their inordinate appetites with the same presumption of their safety as before. On the contrary, we know that it was rather an evidence that divine mercy had well nigh done its work in their behalf ; and that “ every imagination of their hearts being evil continually,” and the measure of their iniquities full, a complete and overwhelming destruction was coming upon them. And so we are apprized it shall be at the near approach of the last judgment, when those who will have rejected the provision of divine grace,—so greatly commended to our acceptance by the troubles and insufficiency of the present state,—and neglected to watch for the hour of their Lord’s coming, shall not be recalled to a sense of their spiritual condition by any new, extraordinary portents of the impending judgment ; but, like the heedless prey of the deluge, shall be “ eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.” Had God designed to deal with mankind on a principle of severity or unmitigated justice, he would have placed them in a more abiding and satisfactory condition of existence. He

would have surrounded them with an apparently firm wall of defence against the shocks of adversity. He would have refined to a higher relish the pleasures of this life, and have pushed into a remoter futurity the period of surrendering them. In other words, he would have raised his claim to our gratitude and obedience, without consulting for our indisposition to feel and entertain it. He would have made us indefinitely his debtors, and have left us to slumber out the season of preparation to meet him. But, urging this topic no farther, we submit that as the sufferings to which we are exposed are manifestly instrumental to sustain and invigorate the gratitude due to the Almighty,—instrumental, in various ways, to attach us to his service, and qualify us for the fruition of his goodness in a future state, those sufferings cannot have been undesigned—cannot be termed accidental:—unless our ability to perceive and adore the benevolence of the Deity was undesigned, and may be termed accidental—unless our constitution as reasonable and immortal beings, and our capacity to reap the fruits of holiness in the everlasting perfection of our nature, be merely fictions of our own imagination, and foreign to the purpose of God in our creation.

Let us not then pursue our inquiry into the origin and design of natural evil—for so we are accustomed to call the gracious chastisement of our heavenly Father—needlessly and unthankfully, as though no light had descended upon us from the Fountain of truth and wisdom; and far less may we repine at those characters of imperfection and instability which are impressed on all that is earthly. The alloy which mixes with all present enjoyment; the failure which menaces all human enterprise; the dissatisfaction which clings to all success and achievement in this world; those terrible reverses in human circumstances which the intelligence that scans and watches the heavens cannot descry; those destroying powers which mock our boasted dominion over the material world, and humble to the dust our lordship in the creation; the disease which is forming within us; the death that may surprise us in a moment;—in all these things, may we confess and submit to the correction of the Father of our spirits, and be admonished of those innumerable blessings which we are continually receiving at his hands, and which, in the absence of those sufferings which we wonder or cavil at, would be speedily committed to forgetfulness, and leave no peaceable

fruits of righteousness behind them. May all such tokens of a world which has fallen from its rectitude, and is destined to destruction, continually remind us of our true condition in the present state—that our rest is not here—that our better life is beyond the grave; and thus effectually aid and befriend us in our preparation for a state of existence, where the goodness of God, as displayed in the immediate and incessant communication of happiness, is met by no impediments in the objects of his bounty; but is known in all its fulness, and beheld in all its glory; where, entirely subject to the Father of spirits, we shall be like him, and, being like him, we shall see him as He is.

SERMON IX.

DEUT. IV. 30, 31.

When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice, (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God,) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.

THE utility and benefits of affliction as a means of religious discipline are not, as was remarked in a former discourse, to be computed by a reference to the amount of our actual suffering, or the length of time in which we are personally sensible of pain and trouble; for, whatever may be our condition at this moment, or however diverse the present experience of individuals, the Almighty has instructed us all to *expect* afflictions, and thereby supplied us with an immediate and continual inducement to the culture of reli-

gion—to that holiness of character which infers our title to the promises of the Gospel, and anticipates a final and eternal exemption from suffering in the world to come. But what is most important on this subject is to ask ourselves — How, but by encountering and overcoming in anticipation the afflictions to which we may be destined, shall we “in patience possess our souls” under actual suffering, and prove, in our own experience, the value of our faith as Christians? How shall we illustrate its efficacy “to overcome the world”—to overcome it in its power to subdue the fortitude, as well as the virtue, of mankind? How can we hope to support with honour those trials which it may have pleased Divine Providence to appoint unto us, whether of our patience or integrity, but by previously informing the mind with religious knowledge; retaining that knowledge in habitual contact, so to speak, with our thoughts and feelings; and premeditating its use and application?—as well-disciplined warriors in times of peace accustom themselves to the weight and use of their armour, perform beforehand the various evolutions, and well nigh feel the plight of battle? But, neglecting this previous inurement and exercise of the soul, can we wonder

that the faith which we profess so often fails to endue us with a moral courage, a devout fortitude, akin to the spirit which distinguished the first professors of our religion, and which the sacred writers so manifestly aim to inspire? Can we wonder that, in so many instances, our knowledge of the Gospel rather aggravates the sufferings of this life by awakening an inquietude of conscience, and gloomy apprehensions of the future?—that, when called to “endure a great fight of afflictions,” the armoury of God supplies the combatant with weapons which he can neither bear nor use? If, as the soldiers of Christ, in our conflict with trouble or with sin, we resemble those degenerate armies which served in the decline of the Roman glory, whose armour, instead of being habitually worn and used, was laid aside in light chariots which followed the march,—what can be expected but that, like them, we should, as the historian writes, “at the approach of the enemy, resume with haste and reluctance the unusual incumbrance.” If we would vanquish the world, whether in its sufferings or temptations, we must adopt into our spiritual warfare the policy which distinguished the military character of a more ancient and illustrious time; when the *name*

of an army denoted, not the actual conflict with the enemy, but the preparation to meet him; * when it was observed that “the effusion of blood was the only circumstance which distinguished a field of battle from a field of exercise;”—nay, when it was provided “that the arms destined for the imitation of war should be double the weight which was required in real action.” It may indeed seem impracticable to acquire an equanimity of character exceeding the necessity of our condition, or more than equal to the probable exigencies of human life; but it cannot be doubted that Christians ought, and by the Divine assistance are enabled, so to familiarize and imbue their minds with the counsels and promises of holy writ, so to entwine their affections with the consolatory and encouraging truths of their religion, as to be fully prepared to suffer whatever ills may await them; to support the worst conditions of human life; and “to hold fast their confidence” even to the end.

For these reasons, the necessity of affliction, in its personal experience, to awaken the sense of religion, and to incline us “to turn to the Lord our God, and be obedient unto his

* Exercitus. Gibbon, ch. i.

voice," betrays a foolish and criminal neglect of forecast and preparation ; and accuses our slowness to meditate and apply the instructions of Divine Providence. The text, however, reminds us that such, in numerous instances, is our untractableness to the heavenly discipline—such our reluctant and dilatory application of the heart unto wisdom. "When *thou art in tribulation*, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice, (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God,) he will not forsake thee." It was not expected that the Israelites would renounce the idolatrous worship and forbidden practices into which it was predicted they would fall, in prosperous and peaceful times. On the contrary, it was foreseen that continued security from their enemies would harden them in their iniquity, and accumulate matter for repentance in the day of their calamitous visitation. The crisis of invasion and captivity—of the nation's overthrow and prostration by its enemies, was the hopeful period—the season when awakened from the intoxication of national success and glory, they might mourn their departure from the Divine Author of all their prosperity, and the

only Being who could succour or protect them; and "turn to the Lord their God," confessing their forgetfulness of his bounty, and desertion of his altar.

Their conduct, indeed, was an aggravated instance of insensibility to the admonitions of Divine Providence; since they had been instructed to regard tribulation as the punishment of actual transgressions, and had been warned to avert it by a faithful adherence to the worship and service of the true God; yet, notwithstanding, they were repeatedly seduced into idolatry, and its endless abominations; and were consequently visited by palpable and appalling tokens of divine displeasure, enormous and overwhelming calamities — famine, pestilence, and the sword. As Christians, we have not so learned to interpret the afflictive dispensations of the Almighty: we are neither taught, nor otherwise warranted, to regard the signal distresses of nations or individuals as the penalty of heinous sin. The punishments and rewards held out to us in the Christian revelation are the evil and the good of a future and eternal state. But, while we reject the notion that the afflictions of this life are tokens of divine retribution, yet we acknowledge, and have the utmost reason to

be thankful, that they are most admonitory in their nature, and especially designed for our spiritual correction and improvement. The troubles which embitter human life in general, and the uncertainty which, in consequence, overshadows the prospect of every individual, confessedly forewarn us to establish our happiness on a firmer basis than is supplied in the safest and proudest conditions of humanity: to seek our well-being and satisfaction in the Father of our spirits, the sense of his merciful approbation, and the assurance of his unchangeable friendship. Yet, notwithstanding we thus speak and are persuaded, our affections are often so engrossed by the objects of this world, our judgment so beguiled and infatuated—the prospective light of our understanding so obscured and darkened, that it is altogether doubtful whether our conviction of that uncertainty which clouds our destiny in this life, and may be charged with we know not what elements of wretchedness, will affect us religiously, will fix our thoughts on God and a future state; while the time present affords us an average share of the world's happiness, or even an exemption from poignant suffering, from severe distress. That conviction, there is cause to fear, will

lie in the mind as though it were an idle and barren speculation, or a portion of useless knowledge, till the precariousness of all that we value and cherish shall be evidenced to the senses;—till not only those pleasures which we too accurately describe as working enchantment and fascination in the soul, shall be dissipated, but even the needful comforts of our life shall fail us—nay, the solace of adversity, the alleviation of sorrows,—the scant provision spared, it may be, from a succession of losses, or the surviving friend that saves the heart from utter desolation.

As Christians, we are well assured that to love God, to obey him as he is revealed to us in the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is “the one thing needful:” that thereby we obtain a deliverance from the just punishment of our sins, and lay up, in its stead, a treasure for ourselves above all comparison with the rewards of our labour here, and the prizes of a merely human ambition. Yet, in numerous instances, it is not till the hollow emptiness of this world is laid open by a stroke of sickness or calamity, or the rent of some strong affection, — not till the soul is forced from its hold of terrestrial things, and cast upon religion as the last resource of hope

and consolation, compelled to cling to it as to a solitary plank on the infinite abyss,—it is not till such a moment that we are awakened to the wants and exigency of our spiritual nature; feel the pressure of our eternal concerns; cast an anxious eye into an endless futurity; and crave a sympathy larger and more effectual than can be shown us by a fellow-mortal. Then, indeed, we often “turn unto the Lord our God” in earnest supplications for his mercy; in ardent resolutions to fulfil his will; and in deep, protracted meditation on his word and providence. Then we feel as though our spiritual nature were inspired with unaccustomed energy;—for as the powers of reflection are strengthened by seclusion from external objects, and thought becomes more vigorous and excursive in the inaction of the senses, in darkness and silence, it seems that our spiritual and immortal being acquires unusual power in the gloom which overcasts this world, and the blank vacuity of its joys and hopes. We take a larger comprehension of our inalienable duties, and enruling interests,—we feel more impatiently the chain of the flesh and its corruptions,—we spurn the seductive pleasures of the senses,—we pant for “a new heart,” and “a

right spirit," — we aspire to the divine nature,—we clasp the promise of an immortal life, and cherish the hope which it enkindles. Happy if a solicitude so rational and propitious prove, in the main, abiding! Happy if it survive the occasion of its excitement, surmount the force of recurring temptations, and effectually free the sufferer from the bondage of the passions! so that the succeeding tenor of his life may entitle him, when appealing to the Searcher of all hearts—who, merciful to the weakness of our resolutions, and passing by our manifold trespasses and imperfections, is ever ready to accept the upright purpose of his servants—to adopt the words of the Psalmist:—"Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I have kept thy word."

As the history of the Jews is recorded for our instruction, the text is a most encouraging exhortation to those who are in tribulation, and who, like the refractory Israelite, or the Psalmist whose confession we have just cited, have "gone astray" from the path of divine ordinances. It calls upon them to consider and acquiesce in the gracious design of the Almighty towards them; to regard him as at length convincing them, by their own expe-

rience, of the worthlessness of all that can be enjoyed or hoped for in the neglect of his known will, and disregard of his approbation and promises; and thereby urging them to devote their faculties to his service, and confide their interests to his hands;—seeing that to incline them to obey his voice, He opposes to the rapid pleasures of sin, and the delusive hope of impunity in transgression, the inviolable promise of his own most gracious presence and unfailling protection.

To secure a part in that promise, they are exhorted “to repent and turn to the Lord their God:” to turn the drift of their reflections from their sufferings to those sins—those many and wilful sins which they have committed, and which have not only subjected them to temporal afflictions, but rendered them obnoxious to the condemnation of a just God, and, but for the abundance of his mercy, must have brought down upon them a sentence of eternal banishment from “his presence, and the glory of his power.” They are called upon to merge “the sorrow of the world,” which “worketh death,” in that “godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of:” * to entertain

* 2 Cor. vii. 9.

a more rational grief, and shed more availing tears; lamenting that portion of their lives which, consumed in self-indulgence and neglect of "the great salvation" made known to them in the Gospel, has been lost to the chief end of their creation; and resolving henceforth "to be obedient," not to the impulses of their own inclinations—"walking after the imagination of their own heart," "finding their own pleasure," and "speaking their own words"—but "to be obedient to the voice of God;" to account his authority the ground of obligation, his word the rule of conduct, and his approbation the aim of life:—ever mindful of his infinite condescension in accepting their scanty, broken service, and honouring it with the name and reward of obedience.

The declaration before us holds out especial encouragement to any who may be dejected with a sense of guilt, and the retrospect of a careless, irreligious life. By the mouth of Moses, God predicts the apostasy of his people; declaring, in the language of prophetic accusation, "Ye shall serve gods; the works of men's hands, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell." "But," he adds, "if from thence thou shalt seek the

Lord thy God, thou shalt find him. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice, (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God,) he will not forsake thee." This is language which, consistently with the tenor of the Scriptures, assures us that no weight upon the conscience, no persistency in sin heretofore, can preclude the hope of divine forgiveness; and that the promise of mercy to the sincerely penitent extends to the closing period of life. "*Even in the latter days*" The aged transgressor, who has arrived at the last stage of his existence, through the whole of which he has felt and acted as if the Creator had no property in him, and could demand no service at his hands, and who might justly regard every affliction which he suffers as a token of his exhausted patience, an omen of his coming wrath,—even he is permitted, nay, invited to offer to Him the remnant of his days, the dregs of his life and faculties; to terminate a course of "enmity against God by wicked works," in reconciliation and peace; and to resign those limbs which have laboured till they faint and totter in the servitude of

evil, into the hands of his Redeemer, to be gathered to the dust of his saints! So transcendent is the mercy of God—so large his promise to repentant man! Truly, “he hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.”*

This gracious admonition and promise to the afflicted, so full of encouragement to the truly penitent, exposes in glaring colours the untractable folly, the pertinacious wickedness of those who frustrate and abuse the merciful chastisement of God by disabling the powers of reflection; seeking a treacherous oblivion of trouble in the stupefaction of intemperance; and so deeply perverting the uses of adversity, as to contract from it a morbid avidity for pleasure—a more violent proneness to sin.—It cannot but remind us also that we deeply fail of the end of our afflictions when eager only to escape from thought, to shun remembrance, we fly to amusements however innocent, or betake ourselves to the excitement of secular interests and occupations:—it cannot but remind us that there is a far

* Ps. ciii. 10, 11.

wiser and surer remedy for a wounded spirit than all such temporary alleviations, or merely allowable palliatives, of regret and melancholy. — It accuses us, moreover, of a grievous negligence of divine instruction, and evinces our pitiful dependence on a perishing substance, if, in our earthly losses and discomfiture, we seek no better solace and engagement for the mind than can be found in other worldly schemes and expectations,—no better refuge than the strenuous enterprise and hard-dying hopes of time,—cleaving to a short-sighted policy which, however active in expedients to repair our shattered fortunes, must leave us, after all, on a treacherous element—far from a settled peace; if, indeed, it can do any more than help a wreck to drive and crash a little longer on the billows.—Again, it counsels us to hold that a cheap and base philosophy, which can avail only to a hardihood and impenetrability of soul; whose aim and glory it is unflinchingly and proudly to endure; attaining, by a process of reasoning, what the uncivilized and savage nature more effectually acquires by the force of circumstances, and the dint of habit. “The Father of our spirits,” we are assured, “chasteneth us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.” We are in-

structed to draw from our afflictions an incentive to the correction of depraved habits, the attainment of Christian virtues, the pursuit of a future and eternal good—to attain a moral elevation from defeated projects and our decaying hopes, and on the scarred and dreary ruins of an earth-built edifice, to command a wider prospect, and breathe a purer life.

On this subject, we cannot forbear advert- ing to that wretched and deplorable insensibility to the teaching and discipline of Divine Providence, which those evince who are reduced by their afflictions to utter and hopeless despondency; and instead of bearing with patience the rod of the Almighty, and profiting by his paternal chastisement, are goaded by it to despair and self-destruction. We should shrink from asserting the act of suicide to be impossible to a Christian in a state of salvation; and thus applying to the destroyer of himself the awful and withering judgment which the Apostle pronounced upon the murderer of his fellow:—“Ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”* But not attempting to compute the heinousness of suicide as a crime—not forgetting that it is often perpetrated under stunned or

* 1 John iii. 15.

debilitated faculties—not forgetting the mercy of God, who “knoweth our frame,” the fact is surely most lamentable, and prior to experience might well appear incredible, that any should be driven to such a state of hopelessness and desperation as impels to self-destruction—any who have been made acquainted with the Gospel, and have not rejected the record of our redemption by Jesus Christ as an imposture or a fable. The jailor at Philippi, when he thought that his prisoners, Paul and Silas, had escaped from his custody, was alarmed to desperation—“he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself;”* but when arrested by the signals of a preternatural interposition,—when the ideas of God, of His searching judgment, and his own everlasting destiny, rushed and crowded upon him, the fright which had seized him on the supposed escape of his prisoners—his dread of human punishment, was sunk and lost in the terror which then overwhelmed him—the peril that threatened his immortal spirit.—“What,” he exclaimed “trembling”—“what shall I do to be saved?” The answer of the Apostles was—“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy

* Acts xvi. 27.

house." The self-destroyer in a Christian land has heard those words a thousand times— words so fraught with consolation to the troubled mind ! inspiring a faith and hope for which multitudes have even " borne with cheerfulness the loss of all things ;" have even " gloried in tribulation ;" and triumphed in death itself. Yes, the self-destroyer has heard the words of eternal life,—he has been taught to seek, " by patient continuance in well-doing, glory, honour, and immortality,"* and to be " a follower of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises ;"† yet, when assailed by calamity—in the loss of his property, a wound in his affections, or a stain upon his honour—he is broken down and crushed in the conflict. Despair seizes him though God is not implacable—though eternity is yet to come—though heaven itself may still be his, " the fulness of joy which is at God's right hand," the " pleasures " that are " for evermore,"—nay, though the " Lord our God " is, pre-eminently and to the last, " a merciful God," and has promised to those who in tribulation " turn unto him, and are obedient unto his voice," that he will " never forsake them !" We need not longer dwell on this

* Rom. ii. 7.

† Heb. vi. 12.

deep forgetfulness, this reckless abandonment of all that is most worthy and enduring in our nature—this utter incongruity with the knowledge and privileges of persons who bear the name of Christians—the name of Him who “hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,” and “by whose stripes we are healed.”

But, reverting to what was offered at the outset of this discourse, we would urge the necessity of providing against the troubles and perplexities which may await us by abstracted meditation, and a preparatory discipline of the mind ; so that when the storm shall come, it may find us already anchored in the faith of the Gospel, and an habitual confidence towards God. This is the wisdom taught us in the Scriptures, and the use which they forewarn us to make of this troubled and perishable life :—“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them”*. . . This is the only sure method of profiting by the afflictions to which we are subject in this fallen world : for though, doubtless, the actual experience of suffering affects us more powerfully than the prospect of it ; yet it should be well consi-

* Eccles. xii. 1.

dered that it is under the prospective discipline of affliction — it is in the habitual sense of exposure to it, and preparation to meet it, that we extend the instruction which it is designed to impart, throughout the whole of our lives, and derive from it a constant and uniform motive to amend the character, “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”* Whereas it is too often seen that those who are heedless of disease or calamity, till it actually comes upon them, and startles them from a dream of peace and security, obtain from it no lasting impressions, or effectual improvement; but relapse into what they were before, the abject slaves of circumstances, rather than the intelligent pupils of Divine Providence: and—so contrasted is the external condition of the same individuals at different times—that such are not unfrequently driven from one extreme in religion to another; from indifference and recklessness to terror and consternation; from presumption to despondency; from torpor to perturbations of enthusiasm and fanaticism:—reminding us of those latitudes where the winds afford no equable and continued breeze, and never break their death-like silence but in the rage of hurricanes; where the ocean

* 2 Cor. vii. 7.

never heaves but in mountains; and the vessel is chained in the dead calm, or whirled in the wild tempest:

But, to say no more on the great wisdom of an immediate and determined prosecution of our spiritual welfare, our common liabilities and certain destiny as human beings, call loudly upon us for forecast and a defensive preparation of the mind; and shameful is the abandonment of our reason if we give the warning no heed—if we stand in need of the actual experience of suffering as an incentive to repentance and a holy life. What! shall the fascinations of the world cease only with its pleasures? Can we not act upon knowledge and foresight in the greatest of our concerns? nor stir in it till our convictions of its importance are fully realized to our feelings, and swell into emotions of terror? Can we not learn the uncertain hold which we have of all things here till they are actually wrested from our hands? nor look upon death till we are pushed into his face? nor take refuge in our Redeemer till all other beings have sensibly forsaken us? Inhabitants of a region so underlaid with elements of destruction—so frequently, and almost periodically, visited with the earthquake,

shall we take no impression of insecurity till the ground beneath us is felt to tremble? or shall we heed no warning till the tall edifices about us are seen to shake and totter, and are hurled from their foundations,—till the eye is filled with ruin,—till the dread increases into wild dismay,—and, peradventure, the means of escaping are lost for ever!

SERMON X.

JOHN VI. 47.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

It has caused surprise, and appeared to demand explanation, that the everlasting happiness offered to our pursuit in the Gospel should be represented as dependent on an act of *faith*—that belief in Jesus Christ should be declared the medium of our acceptance with God, and be regarded as the assurance of eternal life—that it should be expressly and repeatedly affirmed, “He that *believeth* shall be saved.” This fact, we say, has occasioned surprise, and appeared to demand explanation: for it were unquestionably consonant to our reason, and indeed agreeable to many declarations in the Bible itself, that a holy and upright life, or the discharge of our religious

and moral duties in general, should commend us to the favour of God; and not the belief of propositions, of whatever kind and number! It were reasonable to conclude, that our condition in a future state would be determined by our conduct as the subjects of a moral law, or our exemplification, however defective, of love to God and love to man—that the Divine Being were the friend and patron of goodness, and the “portion” of the devout and virtuous of all time. It is true that the Christian revelation has enforced by extraordinary sanctions the obligations to piety and virtue; but, nevertheless, it may be deemed singular that *faith* in Jesus Christ should be particularly specified as the condition of salvation; because it is far from being true, that those who believe the Gospel to be a divine communication are uniformly imbued with its spirit, or controlled by its precepts. Indeed, the history of Christendom abounds with enormous and revolting examples of immorality, in nations and individuals who were unshaken and even enthusiastic in their belief of Christianity,—at least, most tenacious of its peculiar doctrines, scrupulous in the observance of its external ordinances, and studious of parading its symbols. In our own time also, the belief

and profession of Christianity are frequently dishonoured by practices which even the Heathen teachers of virtue condemned, and Christ himself expressly marked with his reprobation.

Now it will break the force of this apparently formidable objection to the special demand of faith in the New Testament, if, in the first place, we can make it evident that that belief in Jesus Christ which is so repeatedly declared to be essential to our justification before God, *involves* a conviction of the obligation, necessity, and reward of personal holiness, or the fulfilment of our religious and moral duties, as laid down and enforced in the discourses of Christ, and the writings of his Apostles; and that thus far the demand of faith in the New Testament quadrates with the presumption of reason, as well as the declaration of the Scripture itself, that "in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."*

But as it is one thing to believe and confess our *obligation* to the practice of holiness, and another to act upon that belief, it will yet remain to reconcile the stress laid upon faith in the sacred writings with the absolute neces-

* Acts x. 35.

sity of holiness, or a personal obedience of the divine commandments. Now—to say nothing of the innumerable passages in the Scriptures, in which it is either asserted or implied that holiness of character is an essential qualification for the happiness of a future state—if it be shown that faith implies a conviction of the authority of the *precepts* of the Gospel, as well as of the truth of its *doctrines*—for so it is common to distinguish certain portions of the Scriptures—we shall be immediately prepared to conclude that in all those passages in which “faith” stands alone as the great requirement of the Christian religion, that term is used to import, together with a knowledge and belief of the Gospel, a correspondency in the dispositions and practices of the believer—that is, to import both faith itself and the “works” which it should properly produce. There are, moreover, certain important considerations which may sufficiently account for this compendious usage of the term: these we shall take occasion to suggest at the conclusion of the present discourse.

But to prove conclusively that such is the comprehensive significance of “faith,” we shall enter into a particular examination of the doctrine of St. James on justification. That

apostle has especially distinguished between a belief of the Gospel which terminates in the understanding, and a belief which controls the affections, and determines the conduct; and has affirmed the former, that is, faith when alone or without works, to be ineffectual to our justification. Now we shall make it manifest that, in drawing this distinction, he refers to that particular conviction which we hold to be included in faith, considered as an act of the understanding—namely, a conviction of the obligation and necessity of personal holiness; and, consequently, that in asserting that “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only,” he asserts a proposition which is virtually, or by implication, received in an intelligent belief of the Gospel: thus conducting us to the inference that when faith is declared to be the instrument of our justification, it must be understood to comprehend the “works” which should properly flow from a belief of the Gospel.

We shall thus offer, we are aware, an explanation of the connexion of faith and works in our justification, different from that which is very frequently, it may be most generally, adopted. It is too common, however, to deal with the language of St. James in a superficial,

or rather, as we cannot but conceive, in a timid and evasive manner, as though it were dangerous to the integrity of our faith to receive it in its palpable and full import. We have no such apprehension, but shall follow as closely as we are able, and with the confidence of perfect safety, the footsteps of that inspired Apostle. We shall maintain his proposition, that "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only," in that sense which is most obvious and natural—that sense, which it would have conveyed to every reader but for a preconceived opinion of its inconsistency with some other parts of Scripture—namely, that *works* as well as faith are necessary and subservient to our justification. We shall answer objections to this natural acceptation of his language; and show, in particular, that its supposed incongruity with the assertion of St. Paul, that "we are justified by faith without the works of the law," arises from a misconception, on the one hand, of the import which that Apostle attached to the phrase "works of the law," and, on the other, from an inadequate apprehension of his meaning in the use of the term "faith." It will be seen, then, that our object in the following discourses is, first and principally, to exhibit a

necessary and inseparable connexion between the demand of faith in the Son of God, as the condition of our eternal life, and the use and purpose of the Gospel as the instrument of our moral restoration : secondly, to bring into a close comparison the affirmations of St. James and St. Paul on the instrumentality of faith and works in our justification ; to examine their relative import ; and to show that the doctrine of the former, as deduced from the natural sense of the words in which he has conveyed it, is essentially consistent, or substantially identical, with that of the latter. .

To proceed then as proposed—the position which we are mainly concerned to establish, and to apply to the illustration of our subject, is, that *belief* in Jesus Christ—which we shall now regard as an act of the understanding only—involves a persuasion of the obligation, necessity, and recompense of personal holiness, or the discharge of religious and moral duties, as enjoined in his own discourses, and the teaching of his Apostles.*

* To preclude misapprehension, we would apprise the reader that we distinguish between the *obligation* and the *necessity* of holiness, because we consider the former to apply to *the whole* of the divine law ; and that it does so is manifest from a single consideration—namely, that *every*

It will scarcely be questioned, we presume, that belief in Jesus Christ imports, in general, an assent of the understanding to his own declarations, and those of his inspired Apostles. But then it follows that faith has respect to no single declaration, or partial view of the Christian revelation; and must be estimated, not by the firmness or tenacity with which we hold any part of that revelation, but by a just and comprehensive grasp of the whole. It must be speculatively erroneous, as well as dangerous in a practical point of view, to restrict the exercise of faith to any one article of the Christian religion, of whatever necessity or value. Faith, indeed, has an especial rela-

departure from it is a reason for repentance. In speaking, however, of the *necessity* of holiness, we presume that a prevailing regard to the divine commandments, or a certain *degree* of personal rectitude, is essential to salvation. What that degree actually *is*, must be seen to be a distinct and separate question. It is treated, however, by Paley, and three positions are laid down by him on the subject which none can dispute, and are of vital importance. (Mor. Phil. ch. vii.) It may be well to add, that a "work" takes its character from the *mind* of the agent: that the outward act is holy, inasmuch as it is expressive of an upright will and purpose toward God, and may therefore be held to exist virtually, or in his sight, when there may be no ability to perform it, as in the last moments of the dying penitent.—We use the terms faith and belief as synonymous.

tion to the merits of our Redeemer, and in the apostolical writings is very frequently treated of in this connexion: for these momentous reasons—because the merciful scheme of divine government revealed to us in the Scriptures, which admits the penitent to forgiveness, and rewards the imperfect holiness attainable by human beings, *exists in virtue* of his mediation; and because his vicarious interposition in our behalf has mightily reinforced our motives to the love of God, and consequently to the obedience of his commandments. But it would appear from the explanation which some have given of the faith which justifieth, that the efficacy of our Lord's atonement for sin is its exclusive object; or that a simple dependence on the expiatory virtue of his sacrifice is the amount and substance of the faith imputed to us for righteousness. It is true, and should in all justice be acknowledged, that those who thus speak and write concerning the faith which saves us, commonly hold it to be productive of a holy life, but while they allow that limitation in their notion of it to which we advert, they fail, as we conceive, and necessarily must fail, to make out the connexion between faith and holiness in a definite and satisfactory manner.

Now, undeniably, the faith which the Apostles inculcated as the instrument of justification before God, was substantially the same faith as that which had been demanded by their Master before them. It could be no otherwise distinguished from the belief which he had himself required, than as it implied a clearer knowledge of the design of his mission, and the nature of his kingdom, than had been communicated previous to his resurrection. The faith, however, which Christ himself demanded from those before whose eyes he wrought his miracles, and exhibited the proofs of his divine commission, was a belief that he was the predicted Messiah. When Jesus had said unto Martha, the sister of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"—she replied—"Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world:"*—implying that such was the belief which he required her to confess, and by avowing which she signified her

* John xi. 25—27.

persuasion that he had power to restore life to Lazarus, and to all the dead.* “Lord, to whom shall we go?” was the language of Peter to his Master, “thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”† On another occasion, Jesus, commending the faith of his disciples, said—“For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God.”‡ But, surely, a belief in Jesus as the Christ—a belief that he came forth from God, carries with it a general and unreserved assent to his communications, whether uttered by his own lips, or imparted through his accredited messengers—men who, “with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost,”§ evinced themselves “ambassadors for Christ.” It implies a conviction of the truth of the whole Gospel, as expounded in the discourses of our Lord himself, and the writings of his Apostles. The faith which justifieth, therefore, cannot be limited to the efficacy of our Lord’s atonement, central and vital as that doctrine is to the system of Christianity: for the Gospel is

* John xi. 25.

† John vi. 68.

‡ John xvi. 27.

§ Heb. ii. 4.

not only an announcement of mercy, or a declaration of privileges, but an exposition of duties. It is not a body of doctrines only, but a collection of precepts; and the act of faith is equally involved in consenting to the authority of the precepts, as in admitting the truth of the doctrines. Inasmuch, indeed, as faith in the Gospel is considered as the fruit and evidence of a desire to do the will of God, it must appear to regard more particularly the precepts contained in it. At least, it can scarcely be questioned, that the bias of a depraved mind is equally at work in evading the evidence of the divine commandments delivered in the Bible, as in disputing the proof of any of its doctrines; and that an upright heart towards God must be no less needful in dealing with the former than with the latter. In the judgment of most Christians, indeed, it is the authority of the Gospel as a rule of conduct which is the principal cause of scepticism and unbelief. This was the reason, we are assured by Christ himself, why *the Jews* rejected the instruction which he offered them:—"Ye love darkness rather than light, because your deeds are evil:"—so ungrounded is the opinion, that the demand of faith in the Son of God would be satisfied by

a simple reliance on the efficacy of his atonement for our sins, and his prevailing intercession for the guilty. But yet farther—though it may be convenient to assume a distinction between the *doctrines* and the *precepts* in the Scriptures, it were superficial thinking indeed to consider the act of faith as limited to the doctrines of the Gospel. For what are the precepts but doctrines taught in a preceptive form? Alter the wording of the precept, and you change it into a doctrine: “Love thy neighbour as thyself” is a precept: “it is right and obligatory to love thy neighbour as thyself” would be a doctrine.

We repeat, then, that to “believe in Jesus Christ” is to receive as infallibly true the substance of divine communications in the New Testament. In the sacred volume, however, the necessity of repentance is as positively and distinctly laid down as the propitiatory nature of the death of Christ, in virtue of which repentance is available to the absolution of the transgressor. The obligation, the indispensableness of good works is as fully and undeniably taught as the utter incapacity of mankind to merit eternal life by performing them. A gradation of rewards and punishments in a future state is as unequivocally set before us

as the universal demerit of our species, and their entire indebtedness to the grace, the mere favour of God, for the gift of immortality. We may find more or less difficulty in connecting these and other propositions in the sacred writings into a dependent series, or disposing them into an harmonious system; and much consideration may be needful, as well as a diffident and charitable caution, in determining their relative magnitude, and in distinguishing those doctrines, the rejection of which would seem fatal to the character and hopes of a Christian. But why, we ask, is not a conviction of the reality and permanency of our moral obligations as properly and essentially a constituent of the faith which justifieth, as a persuasion of the reality and sufficiency of the atonement of Christ? We know of no higher authority for our belief than the word of our Redeemer; and not more certainly did he declare that "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,"*—not more certainly did he make that invaluable declaration, than he expounded to his hearers the moral law which had been promulgated to their forefathers by the ministry

* Matt. xx. 28.

of Moses, enforcing it on their uniform and conscientious obedience,—not more certainly than he pronounced the blessedness of “the poor in spirit, the meek, the hungry and thirsty after righteousness, the pure in heart, the peacemakers”—and foretold the everlasting punishment of the doers of iniquity. It was He who delivered the parable of the talents; and it was He who instructed the most faithful and laborious of his disciples to account themselves unprofitable servants. It was He who “called sinners to repentance;” and it was He who instituted memorials of his body which was to be broken, and his blood which was to be shed, for the remission of sins. Need it be added that, in the teaching of his Apostles, that summons is but reiterated and prolonged, which calls the guilty to repentance, and would awake the world to righteousness?

The faith, then, by which St. Paul declares us to be justified, in contradistinction to the works of that law, in virtue of which the Jews of his time so fondly, blindly, and pertinaciously strove to establish their own righteousness, but by which every individual of the human race in its successive generations is found wanting,—that faith is an assent of the

understanding to the Gospel of Jesus Christ substantially or generally: whether as unfolding the medium of forgiveness, or the conditions of receiving it: whether as a grant of immunities and privileges, or a call to obedience. We are now regarding faith as a judgment of the understanding, irrespective of its appropriate influence on the dispositions and practice of the Christian;—but we may step aside for a moment to observe, that when St. Paul discourses of faith he regards it in its actual operation in the heart and conduct of the believer. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, he extols the faith of the patriarchs and the saints of an early age, as a mighty and effective principle of endurance and activity. The eleventh chapter of that Epistle was evidently penned to illustrate the power of faith, or the efficacy of a reliance on the divine promises, to fortify the mind against the seductions of evil, to support it under the pressure of the worst calamities, and even to inspire a contempt of death and torture. It is a record of passive and active virtues—a history of patient suffering and heroic daring supported by an unshaken confidence in God, as the Fountain of truth, and the unfailing Friend, the sure Rewarder of the just.

But to return—it was concluded that the faith to which our Redeemer has annexed the promise of eternal life, and which St. Paul inculcates as the instrument of justification, imports an assent of the judgment to the Gospel substantially or generally ; and consequently includes a conviction of the obligation and necessity of personal holiness, or the fulfilment of our religious and moral duties as enjoined by Christ and his Apostles. Thus far the evangelical requirement of faith is in perfect harmony with the dictates of reason or natural religion. But we are concerned to proceed farther in this line of observation ; not so much for the purpose of establishing the preceptive authority of the Gospel, as of vindicating the entire consistency of the sacred writings.

It may seem that by regarding as matter of faith the reality of moral obligation, or the duties of practical religion and virtue, we trench upon an established distinction between articles of faith and deductions of reason. But we are insisting on the usage of the term faith in *the Scriptures* ; and in these it is important to remark, that propositions which are commonly supposed to be deducible by reason, are assumed to be articles

of faith, as well as those which are exclusively matter of divine revelation. That *God exists*, and that *he is not regardless of those who seek to know, and aim to fulfil his will*, may be justly considered as deductions of reason, or presumptions of natural religion, and indeed are actually affirmed in the Scriptures to be such;* but these are specifically mentioned, and even singled out, as articles of faith in the following passage:—"But without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."† A principle of religion, then, is not the less an object of faith in the judgment of the inspired writers because it may be discoverable by human reason.

But we learn from the Epistle of St. Jude that the reality of our moral obligations, in particular, is an essential tenet of "the faith which was once delivered to the saints," and for which that Apostle exhorts us "earnestly to contend." His exhortation, it should be remarked, is especially applicable and stirring against any who should explode or disesteem this doctrine of revealed, as well as of natural religion; for immediately after giving that

* Rom. i.

† Heb. xi. 6.

exhortation, St. Jude marks out as persons ordained to condemnation—not ordained, be it observed, to the *ungodliness* which provoked it—those who had adopted a belief subversive of morality, and tending to licentiousness. “For,” he adds, “there are certain men crept in unawares who were before of old ordained to this condemnation; ungodly men, turning the grace of God to lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” The men who had “crept in unawares” were not, it seems evident, those who, under the bias of corrupt propensities, had rejected the Gospel altogether; but those who, under the same bias in a worse degree, had wrested from its doctrines an apology for vice and ungodliness; and when we consider, that in the whole Epistle of St. Jude there is no distinct allusion to any other heresy than that of “turning the grace of our God to lasciviousness,” we can hardly be accused of straining our argument in alleging that it was that particular heresy—that of rejecting the obligation to personal holiness, or of denying the authority of divine commandments inculcated by our Saviour, as well as by Moses the prophet who foretold and prefigured him—which St. Jude pointed at, and only more emphatically reprobated, in the words, “denying

the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." But even if this be disputed, it is obvious from his language, that a conceit had infested the church that the Gospel did not enforce or necessitate the fulfilment of moral duties; and that this was an error which was held by St. Jude to be wholly incompatible with "the faith which was once delivered to the saints." It will be remembered, moreover, that this perversion of the Christian doctrine—this strange and most detestable shape of evil crossed the path of St. Paul, was vehemently resisted by him, and repelled with the utmost abhorrence.

We shall farther adduce the much-controverted language of St. James, as furnishing an exact and incontestable proof of the position which it was proposed to establish; and shall thereby offer, it is conceived, a simple and conclusive exposition of his doctrine. But deferring this additional argument, it may surely be already concluded that a persuasion of the obligation, necessity, and reward of personal holiness, or the discharge of our religious and moral duties as inculcated in the New Testament, is strictly and essentially comprehended in the faith by which we are justified and saved.

It then inevitably follows, and this inference,

however obvious, is frequently overlooked or evaded, that a large portion of the immorality of Christendom in past ages adverted to at the commencement of this discourse, is *not* an example of incongruity between the belief and practice of the Gospel ; but a proof rather of absolute ignorance, or enormous error concerning it. Large bodies of men, for example, have so interpreted the religion of Christ as to derive from it a warrant for invading the territories, afflicting the persons, coercing the liberty, and even destroying the lives of their fellow-creatures, in the endeavour to convert them to their own belief and profession. In *this persuasion* they were no more, intellectually or speculatively, Christians, than an army of Mahometans are Christians, or a troop of banditti, or a horde of savages. To identify or connect such a persuasion with faith in Jesus Christ, were just as intelligent or upright, as to hold up and stigmatize Jesus Christ himself as a teacher of injustice and cruelty,—an abettor of invasion, pillage, oppression, and murder. Individuals and communities, we say, have understood the divine command to extend the knowledge of the Gospel as superseding or neutralizing the ordinary duties of justice and benevolence, and have “thought” they

were "doing God service" by acting on this construction of his word. Others have wrapped about them an imaginary faith in the Son of God, as a cloak for malice, cupidity, or licentiousness, and have covered and cherished the conscience in its folds. How far such fallacious impressions are the work of the mind itself, "loving and making a lie,"*—the effect of corrupt passions perverting the intellect, turning the eye of the understanding from the light of truth, and detaining it in darkness till the very faculty of moral vision is destroyed,—and how far they are the consequence of false instruction and unavoidable ignorance, is a question which the Omniscient Being only can determine. But to represent such conclusions as appertaining to a belief of Christianity, is an abuse of speech which it were hard to describe in qualified terms. No system of religion or philosophy can, with any propriety, be said to be believed wherein it is wholly misunderstood, and so far virtually unknown: yet we meet with writers who seem willing to shut their eyes to the glaring certainty of this position; and inclined to make the Gospel responsible, not merely for the immorality of its intelligent professors, but even for crimes which were the product of a

* Rev. xxii. 15.

faith as foreign to a belief in Christ as the grossest, wildest superstition that ever degraded the intellect, and overlaid the virtues of mankind.—For, assuredly, no superstition ever engendered in Egypt or Hindostan could be more alien from a belief in the Messiah, than such opinions as tend to subvert the authority, or excuse the violation, of the law of universal charity : albeit such opinions have, to an extent most humiliating, and at certain periods almost universally, disfigured the Christian character, and polluted the church of God.

The defective practice of religion and morality, so often and so lamentably apparent among well-instructed and, in a speculative sense, rightly judging Christians, *is*, we confess, an inconsistency between the belief and conduct of professors of the Gospel. But we have yet to consider the important fact, that the Scripture distinguishes between a merely speculative faith, and a faith which regulates the passions, and moulds the character ; and, moreover, that in making this distinction, it points to a conviction of moral obligation in the mind of the believer. Taking this for granted at present, the only circumstance demanding explanation is the frequent usage of the term faith in the Holy Scriptures as signifying, not only a belief of the truths made

known to us in the Gospel, but its appropriate influence on the affections and conduct. We can scarcely account this a difficulty: but rather regard it as a fact which it were easy to explain, and instructive to reflect upon. The following considerations will, in our apprehension, sufficiently illustrate this comprehensive usage of the term faith—this synecdoche.

1. It is not to be forgotten that, while the Christian revelation is designed to purify the motives and reform the conduct of its professors, its reception as *an act of the understanding* is not independent of a previous state of the affections, or determination of the will—a momentous fact, which must constitute whatever accountableness lies upon man for his religious belief. There are some, indeed, who deny that any such accountableness exists; though the denial would be found, on examination, to involve egregious consequences, and to extend, as we apprehend, to the very foundation of morals. This responsibility, however, the divine Founder of our religion most distinctly taught, and on it he grounded his remarkable declaration, “If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;”* and also his accusation

* John vii. 17.

of the unbelieving Jews, "Ye love not the truth." How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?*" This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."† This may be accounted one reason for the emphasis laid upon faith, and the comprehensive import of that term in the sacred writings: a reason which cannot but appear of some weight when we consider the peculiar and inveterate prejudices which instigated the Jewish people to resist the pretensions of Jesus of Nazareth to be the predicted Messiah.

2. Again, it should be considered that at the first publication of the Gospel, those who had the fortitude and intrepid zeal to avow their belief of it, would be commonly actuated by a resolution to fulfil its precepts,—would be determined to exemplify its influence, and illustrate its excellence in their lives. The earliest professors of our religion, we well know, were exposed to the loss of property, liberty, and life itself, at the hand of the persecutor. They were called upon, at the very outset of their Christian course, to make a sacrifice of whatever could be dear to them

* John v. 34.

† John iii. 19.

as tenants of the present life, or inhabitants of the earth, and even to prepare for the endurance of cruel torments. The public confession of their faith in Christ, therefore, might be fairly taken as a strong presumption of their sincere and effectual conversion to the principles of the Gospel: a presumption which, it is evident, very generally pervades the Apostolical writings:—we say a strong presumption only; for the fact that the Scripture discriminates between the belief and practice of the Gospel, and even presumes the possibility of a faith which might remove mountains, and enable a person to give his body to be burned, and yet be ineffectual to save him,* proves that the profession of the first Christians was not accounted an infallible test of sincerity.

3. But, yet more particularly, it should be remarked that the moral depravation of our species, which preceded the introduction of Christianity, had been confirmed and aggravated—in a degree we know not how great—by a prevailing ignorance and misapprehension of the true God; that the first and indispensable requisite to the reformation of mankind was, an authenticated communication from the Deity, unfolding his moral perfections, and laying open the gracious principles

* 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

on which he governed, and would judge the world; and, most especially, that the announcement in the Gospel of "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world," affords unspeakable encouragement to all piety and virtue—to all human endeavours in the service of a just and holy God. The Christian revelation, however, could, it is obvious, be of no use or value in supplying the knowledge of which the world stood in need, any farther than it was actually believed, and relied upon as the word of Him who "cannot lie," and who "changeth not." Reflecting, then, that Christianity was the necessary and ordained means of commencing and carrying forward the moral restoration of mankind,—that it was the great desideratum for recovering them to the service of God, and qualifying them for the fruition of eternal happiness,—that in the want of it the world had long lain, and must have lain irrecoverably, in wickedness,—we can hardly wonder that the act of believing in the Son of God should have been so often demanded as the special condition of receiving the benefits of his mediation; and thereby assumed to comprehend that repentance, or important change in the human mind, which no system of religion then existing in the world,

and, we may safely add, excogitable by man— which nothing else than a belief of the truths made known to us by the Son of God, could have produced.

Lastly, it should be added that there is a natural and proper connexion between the deliberate conclusions of the understanding, and the habitual tenor of the conduct; that this connexion has very considerably influenced the usage of language in general; and, consequently, might have been expected to appear in the phraseology of Scripture. True it is, that the habits and practices of mankind are extensively at variance with their calm and deliberate convictions—a discrepancy, however, which must arrest our attention, whether we regard them as universally desirous of happiness in the world that now is, or in that which is to come. Nevertheless, so natural is it to presume a consistency between the opinions and doings of a man,—so ready are we to look to the conclusions of his understanding for his principles of action, that whenever an individual is carried by the impetus of his passions into conduct inconsistent with the maxims of prudence received by himself in common with mankind in general, we almost invariably impute to him a lack of knowledge, or error of

judgment. We describe his conduct as *foolish, senseless, or mad*; applying to it epithets which properly belong to the understanding. And we do this, it should be observed, without any reference to the fact, that, in all such acts, the judgment itself is warped from its calm and habitual determinations, and made instrumental to the inordinate indulgence of the passions. Accordingly, it is a custom of the sacred writers, as every reader of the Scriptures must have remarked, to describe that portion of mankind who fear God and obey his commandments, as having the "knowledge" of him, and to identify a sinful and unholy life with an ignorance of the true God. "Awake to righteousness," writes St. Paul, "and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame."* It may appear, then, but an additional instance of this natural connexion of ideas, and current mode of speech, which we have before us in the circumstance, that the phrase "belief in Christ" is understood to imply a practical regard to his precepts and example, and used as an expression for the substance or totality of the Christian character. Indeed, the sacred writers, in this elliptical use of the term faith, may be held to have presumed the peculiar

* 1 Cor. xv. 34.

adaptation and entire sufficiency of the Gospel —when believed to be a divine communication —to relieve the wants, and engage the affections of our rational nature, and, accordingly, to supply the ruling motives of our conduct, and to form the basis of our character. Of the great reasonableness of this presumption we ourselves are witnesses ; for it may safely be affirmed, that every careless believer of the Gospel is, on reflection, astonished at his own insensibility to the truths which it has revealed to him, and to the arguments by which it would constrain him to a devout and holy life. Indeed, so manifest to our reason is the incongruity between a belief of Christianity and a practical disregard of its doctrines, that some have affirmed them to be incompatible ; and probably few, without difficulty, have perceived them to be otherwise. The sacred writers, we repeat, in frequently annexing so large an import to the term faith, have especially regarded our rational nature ; and, on such occasions, have taken for granted that knowledge of so deeply interesting a nature, and so vital concernment to mankind as that which they were inspired to communicate, must stimulate the feelings, and prompt to action ; that intelligent beings, whose craving desire of happiness is encountered and sorely baffled by a sense of demerit

before God, and a dread of his righteous retribution, would be at once and most powerfully attracted by the offer of a perfect and endless life in virtue of a Mediator ; that so far from seeking to evade, or consenting to postpone, the gracious and practicable conditions of such an offer, they would be mainly concerned to fulfil them ; and be reconciled to any degree of self-denial—any restraint of present inclination—any sacrifice of a perishable good, by which they might attain to peace of conscience, and reserve to themselves a hope in death :—by which they might recover the original perfection of their nature, and secure their everlasting welfare. May none of us disappoint this just presumption and expectation ! May none of us “ seem to fall short of it ! ” but applying our belief in the Son of God as a cumulative argument for an obedience of his precepts—a manifold inducement to holiness of life, be entitled to appropriate his gracious promises : appreciating the worth—the preciousness of that declaration—“ I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

SERMON XI.

JAMES II. 18.

I will show thee my faith by my works.

IN the last discourse, we animadverted on an opinion, which some appear to entertain, that a reliance on the merits of Jesus Christ for acceptance with God is the amount or substance of that faith which is imputed to us for righteousness. Those who hold or convey this opinion inculcate, it is true, the performance of good works, and regard these as the fruits and manifestations of a justifying faith; yet since they consider faith as equivalent to a dependence on the atonement and righteousness of Christ, they want that connecting link in their reasoning, by which, and by which only, it can be determinately shown to be instrumental to personal holiness, or the

performance of good works. To supply this deficiency, and with a view to elucidate the greatest of questions—the method of our justification before God, we endeavoured to establish, or to bring more fully into view, the following most important position: namely, that a conviction of the obligation, necessity, and reward of personal rectitude or good works, as inculcated by Christ and his Apostles, is necessarily and fundamentally comprehended in faith, considered as an act of the understanding only, or irrespective of its appropriate influence on the life of the believer; and were proceeding to cite the language of St. James, as furnishing an exact and unequivocal proof of that position.

“I will show thee my faith by my works.” Now we request it to be considered what that faith—what that article of belief is, which a man can show by works of righteousness? If the disputants in the controversy concerning the relative subserviency of faith and works in our salvation, have not proposed to themselves this specific question, and endeavoured to answer it definitively, that controversy, we conceive, has received but little elucidation from the instruction given us by *St. James*. What faith, we ask,—what conviction of his judgment

Can a man make manifest by good works? Can it be any other than his conviction of the obligation, or necessity, or expediency, of performing those works?—we do not say, his conviction that there is any inherent merit, or atoning efficacy in them; but his conviction that it is his duty or his interest to perform them?

The faith which justifies us before God implies, most certainly and essentially, a belief in the reality and sufficiency of our Lord's atonement for our sins;—but in what conceivable manner can this article of faith be evinced by good works, otherwise than as it reinforces our conviction of the obligation which lies upon us to perform them; or confirms our persuasion of the evil to be escaped, and the good to be obtained, in doing them? Whatever sentiments of devotion, whatever feelings of awe and gratitude towards God, that especial and distinguishing doctrine of the Gospel may be calculated to awaken, how can our belief of it be shown by good works, any further than as it strengthens our conviction that it is the will of God, and essential to our salvation, that we should perform good works? Or, speaking generally, by what means can our faith in the Gospel be productive of holiness;

except by applying a stimulus to the conscience, and quickening into life and activity the inert sense of duty towards God and our fellow-creatures?—thereby exciting that “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” of which our Saviour spoke, and promoting the nourishment and maturity of the moral powers?

That Christianity *has* supplied us with additional and most constraining motives to the fulfilment of our religious and moral duties, is commonly believed by Christians, and need not now be insisted upon. What we are concerned to establish, is, that it is this belief of the practical design of the Gospel—this persuasion of its use and purpose as a means of reforming and sanctifying the character, or promoting the performance of good works, which St. James assumed to be comprehended in the faith by which we are justified, and to which he pointed the attention of his readers, when he called upon them to show their faith by their works:—that it was that persuasion which he looked upon as the nucleus upon which the entire substance of Christian doctrines tended to gather and consolidate; or, more pertinently, as the element which the whole apparatus of the Christian system was

constructed to evolve and bring into action. We do not say that he took for granted that his readers were actually and universally persuaded of the obligation and necessity of personal holiness. Some of them, there is ground to infer, had brought themselves to believe that the moral law had been abrogated as a rule of life, by the satisfaction offered for the violations of it by the Son of God : though we can hardly doubt that the greater portion of them concluded that it had been thereby signally vindicated and upheld, as an immutable standard of duty ; besides having been previously explained and enforced in the discourses of our Lord himself. But whatever might have been their opinions on this head, most certain it is that they who perceived in the Gospel nothing more than a declaration of forgiveness through the merits of Jesus Christ—they who did not perceive in it an authoritative rule of life, or permanent standard of duty towards God and towards man, were essentially deficient in the exercise of faith, considered as a conviction of the judgment only, and distinct from its influence as a principle of action.

“ Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” Now what part of the word of God can a man be accused

of hearing and not doing, believing and not practising, but the precepts which it contains, and which it so solemnly warns, and so graciously exhorts us to obey? Any one, therefore, who should hold himself exonerated by the Gospel from obedience to commandments and prohibitions of a practical nature, would not only fall under censure as not being "a doer of the word," but would be essentially deficient as an intelligent "hearer of the word." He could not be accurately said to possess even that faith which, being without works or alone, St. James pronounces to be dead, as the body is dead without the spirit. He would be wanting in a principal member of the mere carcase of the faith by which we are justified.

"For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed."* In these words, the Apostle most obviously directs our atten-

* Ch. i. 23—26.

tion to the Gospel as a resplendent mirror of duty; and, accordingly, rebukes the man who, when he has perceived in it a distinct reflexion of the defects and blemishes in his character, immediately forgets it, and, consequently, continues as heedless of his doings, and as far from repentance, as before; and at the same time commends the man, who not only acknowledges the Gospel as a rule of conduct, but studiously consults it for his guidance, and regulates his life by its precepts. The Apostle, moreover, designates the Gospel *the perfect law of liberty*, because in the sincere and earnest, though imperfect obedience of its precepts, the conscience reposes on the mercy of our Judge: because it includes in its singular and most gracious constitution, a full absolution of our guilt, abundant help to our infirmities, and even an everlasting reward: because it lightens inexpressibly the universal bond of subjection to the Supreme Being, by an assurance of his plenteous forgiveness, the privilege of access to him even with a filial confidence, and the forethought of eternal satisfaction in his presence:—thus emancipating us as moral and accountable creatures, by qualifying us for the acceptable service of God, and by refreshing

and enlarging the soul. "in the way of his commandments."

We repeat, if a professor of the Gospel were devoid of a conviction that he was bound to the practice of holiness as inculcated by Christ and his Apostles, his faith would be radically defective, even as an act of the understanding only, a state of the mere intellect; for what conclusion of his judgment—what portion of his creed would remain to be shown by works of goodness? That conviction, it is possible, in common with many other convictions, may have actually taken root in the mind, and be productive of its proper fruits in the life; and may, notwithstanding, be discarded in speculation, and even decried in words. A minister of one of the Reformed Churches, contemporary with Luther, in his affrighted eagerness to escape the heretical presumption of human merit in the sight of God, flew into the fanatical extreme of asserting that good works were not only defective in their nature, and not only unnecessary to salvation, but positively detrimental to the believer. Yet we are not informed that this wayward theologian was correspondingly solicitous to escape the personal defilement of good works; that his opinions and discourses destroyed the rectitude

of his *own* character ; or that he approached so nearly to the condition of a maniac in any thing but speculation. But were a professor of the Christian religion in reality destitute of a conviction that he was bound and necessitated to the practice of holiness, he would want the form—the shadow of the faith which justifieth, to say nothing of its life—its substance. If the faith of a Christian be shown by upright and holy deeds, it is palpable that the individual who should expunge from his creed the duty and necessity of performing them, and be strictly an Antinomian in his principles, would be farther—immeasurably farther from a belief in Christ than the bulk of Pagans. He would be preeminently and emphatically an unbeliever. He would be scarcely less so—we speak considerately—than an atheist ; for the existence of God is not more plainly taught, or rather, not more obviously assumed, in the Scriptures, than the universal obligation of serving him, both in the offices of devotion, and in the practice of justice, temperance, purity, and benevolence.

So great, however, is the stress laid upon the necessity and efficacy of faith in the sacred writings—in other words, so often is that term employed, for reasons stated in the last dis-

course, to comprehend the virtues which properly flow from a belief of the Gospel, that it is of the utmost importance to fix the attention on the *practical* operation of our faith: to examine the quality and measure of that influence which it exerts upon our dispositions and conduct. St. James, therefore, admonishes us of a fact, as certain as it is humiliating and deplorable, that there may be a conviction of our duty as expounded in the precepts, and enforced in the doctrines of the Gospel—a conviction of our peculiar obligation to holiness as the objects of God's unbounded mercy, and the purchase of the humiliation and sufferings of our Redeemer, which, notwithstanding, may leave us habitually insensible to our debt of gratitude, or excite no earnest and persevering endeavours to discharge it. He warns us that there may be a belief of the Gospel, founded on an accurate perception of its import, as well as the evidences of its divine original, which, however, may win no consent from the affections, and work no subjection in the will; which may be wholly or comparatively powerless as an incentive to the love of God, and consequently to the fulfilment of his commandments;—a faith, it may be, fervent and active in opinion and controversy, but

cold and motionless as a principle of action ; and he aims to disturb the satisfaction which any may derive from such a faith—to startle their security—to force them to quit with the speed of terror the treacherous footing on which they stand, as believers in Christ, and expectants of eternal life through his mediation.

The point which this Apostle so earnestly and, as we conceive, perspicuously urges, is, the inutility of yielding a merely theoretical assent to a religion, the scope of which is to control the passions, and determine the conduct of its professors. He exposes the vain and pernicious imagination that God will accept as a plea for justification, a faith which, though it dictates and enforces the practice of holiness, fails, in point of fact, to produce it ; —a faith which, while it sets the Gospel before us as a means of moral purification, instructing us that “our Saviour Jesus Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,”* yet leaves the believer in bondage to depraved propensities ; and instead of kindling his ardour in the cultivation of all piety and virtue, serves only to throw a stronger light on the

* Titus ii. 14.

selfish and worldly principles by which he is actuated. He insists on the lifelessness, the inanity of such a faith, as the instrument of our justification, be it held with whatever firmness, avowed with whatever intrepidity, or propagated with whatever zeal. Accordingly, he warns us that "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only;" and that "by works faith is made perfect." In other words, he warns us that works, or obedience to the precepts of the Gospel, is necessary, not, strictly speaking, to prove the reality of our faith, as some have explained his language, but to secure our justification: necessary to render our faith efficacious to justify us: *thereby* instructing us that when faith is specified and demanded as the condition of our justification, it is assumed to be productive of works, or holiness of character; or—which is the same thing—that the term faith imports not faith only, but those works also which it is essential to our faith to inculcate, and, by the application of the most cogent and encouraging arguments, to enforce.

That we have offered a faithful exposition of the language of St. James, must be evident if we consider the terms in which he alludes to the faith of Abraham;—an example by

which he illustrates and confirms his position, that "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."—"Was not our father Abraham justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?"* It is manifest from these words that the faith of Abraham, in the Apostle's apprehension of it, regarded the commandment which God had imposed upon him to offer his son for a burnt-offering, as well as the promise which he had previously made to him (or rather, it is probable, the goodwill, the gracious purpose of God towards him, which that promise had so unequivocally declared); otherwise, we should be at a loss to conceive through what connexion of ideas in the mind of Abraham his faith could have "wrought with his works:" besides that there would naturally have been as strong a temptation upon Abraham, as there certainly is upon every one of ourselves when tasked to a religious exercise of self-denial, to shun the conviction of the divine commandment, as to distrust the fulfilment of the divine promise. As the faith of Abraham, then, included his belief of the reality and authority of a divine

* Ch. ii. 21, 22.

command to offer his son in sacrifice, it is obvious that his obedience to the command, or—which is, morally, the same thing—his intention to obey it, was necessary, not properly to prove the existence of his faith, but to realize the promise which his faith held out to him—necessary, in order that his faith might be “imputed to him for righteousness.” True it is, that the faith of Abraham was indispensable to produce his works, and was made manifest by them. He could not have laid his son upon the altar with a resolution to slay him—he could not have prepared himself to endure the heaviest of losses, and to execute the hardest of deeds, but in the clear persuasion that God had commanded him to do so; and would eventually, by whatever means, accomplish the promise which he had made to him. Nevertheless, he might have had faith without works; for the argument of St. James infers the possibility of a separation between these; and we are not at liberty to conclude that the inspired Apostle has committed a misnomer, by applying the term *faith* to a belief of the Gospel which fails to control the conduct, and is ineffectual to justification. Abraham, we repeat, might have had faith without works. He might have been convinced of the reality of the injunction laid

upon him, and the certain fulfilment of the divine promise towards him in the event of his obedience; and yet, under the impulse of a natural affection uncontrolled by an habitual regard to the first duty of all rational creatures, he might have hesitated to fulfil, and have actually disobeyed the divine commandment. In that case, however, it must be universally agreed that his faith, instead of effecting his justification, or being imputed to him for righteousness, could only have exposed his disobedience to the will of God, and sealed his forfeiture of the promise made to him. It follows, then, that the works of Abraham were essential, not merely, or strictly speaking, to testify his faith, but, as we have already stated, to secure the fulfilment of the promise which his faith set before him—necessary to make his faith “perfect” as the instrument of his justification. Consequently, we are compelled to infer that the faith demanded as the condition of our justification, is divisible into faith and the works which should properly flow from it: that is, that the term faith is used as comprehensive of both.

Many, as we have said, are satisfied with explaining the language of St. James as importing only that works are the fruit and

evidence of such a faith as is effectual to our justification. But had this been the whole of the Apostle's meaning, would he have distinctly specified "works" as instrumental to justification, and have roundly declared "that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only?" That *a man is justified by works, and not by faith only*, and that *a man's works are a proof that his faith is of such a nature as to justify him*, are two very different propositions; and to presume that St. James has confounded them, is to give an exposition of his language greatly more free and paraphrastic than we are willing to adopt. Indeed, we can find no satisfactory solution of his assertion that "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only"—thus distinctly ascribing to works a subserviency to our justification, or of his assertion that "by works faith is made perfect"—thus representing works, not merely as the effect and the sign, but an *integral part* or the complement of faith—we can find, we say, no satisfactory explanation of these assertions, except in the fact that when faith is propounded as the condition of our justification, it is assumed to comprehend the practice of holiness, or the performance of good works.

Moreover, the opinion that works have no

part, or are wholly quiescent, in the matter of our justification, and do but make manifest the justifying efficacy of faith, is nowise answerable to the very strong figure by which this Apostle illustrates the intimate connexion of faith with works, and, as it would seem, their combined operation and efficiency to obtain our justification. We are fully aware that the utmost caution is demanded in citing the figurative language of the Scriptures in confirmation of any particular doctrine; a rigid, literal construction of the metaphors used by the sacred writers being especially observable in the support of extravagant opinions in theology. It is but just, however, to our argument to allege, that St. James affirms of "faith without works," that it is as unavailing to our justification as the body without the spirit is useless to the purposes of life:—"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."* Now, we submit that the position so formally laid down by many, and so zealously and conscientiously insisted upon—namely, that works are nothing more than the effect and manifestation of a justifying faith, fails to do justice to this illustration of St. James, in a manner too remarkable to

* Ch. ii. 26.

be passed without notice. For who would say that the spirit, as distinguished from the body, is but the effect and manifestation of life?—that it is not essential, as the body is, to constitute life itself?—that it is to the body only that we are to ascribe the principle or phenomena of life? Is it not highly probable, to say the least, that, in comparing faith without works to the body without the spirit, and so comparing them *with regard to our justification*, this Apostle intended to signify that, as the body and the spirit are equally essential to, and necessarily united in, the living man, so faith and works are equally essential to, and necessarily united in, the attainment of justification?—thus corroborating that large import of the term faith, as just stated, when used to designate the condition and means of our justification?

That in numerous instances the term faith *is* used, and must in all consistency be understood, in the comprehensive sense for which we are contending, can scarcely be matter of dispute, however the fact may be judged to have been explained by the reasons assigned for it in the preceding discourse. Equally evident is it that such a usage of the term is entirely consistent with the most ready and

obvious construction of the language of St. James. But what is yet more cogent to our view of his meaning is, that the position that "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only," is, in effect, involved in that article of belief which, as we have endeavoured to show, is essentially matter of faith as an act of the understanding, or considered independently of its appropriate influence on the dispositions and conduct. For if we believe the obligation and necessity of good works or holiness under the Christian economy, do we not, in other words, believe the necessity and instrumentality of good works to justification? For is not justification the great and distinguishing privilege which appertains to us as the subjects of that gracious economy, and which it was the end and virtue of our Lord's atonement to set before us, or capacitate us to obtain? If we conclude, as every intelligent believer of the Gospel must conclude, that the great purpose of God in the commandment which He has given us, "to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ," and the promise that "believing we shall have life through His name," is the renovation of our depraved nature, or our recovery to the love and practice of holiness preparatory to a superior state of existence

hereafter, we cannot but infer that the use, the efficacy—the very life of faith in the Son of God depends on its effecting the amendment and sanctification of the believer; and that if it fail to move him to repentance, and to actuate him to well-doing—if it be alone, it becomes a thing of no use or value, and is fitly likened to the body when forsaken by the spirit—that is, when it is no longer subservient to the uses, the vital uses, for which it was created. But is not this conclusion fully tantamount, and a virtual subscription, to the proposition that not faith only, but good works also, or holiness on the part of the believer, is indispensable to our obtaining justification, the inestimable fruit of our Saviour's mediation, and thus realizing the promise that “we shall have life through his name?”

There must now appear an obvious and indisputable consistency, and a necessary connexion, between the demand of faith in the Son of God as the condition of our justification, and the all-important uses—the pre-eminent efficacy—the incalculable value of the Christian religion, considered as an effectual means of restraining the corrupt bias of our nature, and promoting the fulfilment of all religious and moral duties. The declaration

that "we are justified by faith," so far from appearing to supersede those commandments and prohibitions, which relate to the control of the passions and appetites, and which fill so large a space in the word of God, most unequivocally supports and confirms them. So far from having the semblance of unsettling the grounds, or weakening the force of those awful denunciations and encouraging promises, those representations of a state of reward and punishment in futurity—in a word, those numerous and powerful arguments which the Spirit of God has used to deter us from the commission of sin, to arm us against the power of temptation, and to secure our perseverance in well-doing—the declaration that "we are justified by faith," directly corroborates those arguments, repeating their import, and adding to their weight. And this consideration, we submit, is no trivial commendation of the sense in which we have explained the demand of faith, as the condition of our justification ; and should at least obtain for it a most candid and unprejudiced examination : from those, we mean, who are prepossessed with different explanations of these parts of Scripture. For it must surely be a source of painful dissatisfaction to believers in the sacred

volume, if imbued with any portion of the spirit which breathes through its pages, that when those passages in it which attribute our justification to faith are alleged and insisted upon, whether from the pulpit or the press, the unchangeable authority of its practical precepts should often appear to be, not unreasonably, impugned and brought into question; and that the absolute necessity of an upright and holy life, instead of commanding attention as a *doctrine* than which there is not one more prominently and repeatedly inculcated in the word of God, should seem to stand in actual and even urgent need of support and confirmation. We do not, indeed, conclude that the interests of practical religion are materially affected by the obscurity thus occasionally cast upon the moral attributes of the Gospel, and the lustre of its holiness. The professors of Christianity are, for the most part, convinced—so obviously is it the tenor of the Bible to instruct them—that in order to establish a well-founded reliance on the mediation of Jesus Christ, they must sincerely repent of their sins, and make it their main purpose to obey the precepts, and imitate the example of their crucified Master. Moreover, the public teachers of religion and

expositors of Scripture in general, however they may differ in their reasoning and phraseology, are agreed in *asserting* the sanctifying influence of the faith which justifieth, and even its necessary connexion with holiness of character. Nevertheless, the fact is grievous and humiliating, and can hardly fail to impair, in some degree, the efficiency of religious instruction on the principles of action, that when the efficacy of faith is the subject of a sermon or treatise, our holy religion should so often appear to be in danger of being degraded from its character as a teacher—the most authoritative—the most persuasive teacher of virtue and true holiness, and be even put upon its defence against an imputation of indulging the vices of mankind—and this, although St. Paul, a great authority for the articles of our creed, repelled that imputation as a flagrant perversion of the Gospel; reprobating, as a malignant heresy, the presumption that the abundant grace of God had furnished a license to sin, or annulled the obligation to holiness: and although St. James has so expressly affirmed the necessity of works, as well as faith, to our justification. It surely demands inquiry, whether that construction which is frequently put on the

language of the inspired writers, and gives rise to an appearance of discrepancy in their statements, may not admit of correction? In our judgment, there must always appear a certain degree of incoherence, or the want of a necessary connexion, between the declarations that "we are justified by faith"* and that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord,"† while the act of faith is assumed to be completed in a dependence on the merits of Christ for justification; and, accordingly, is contradistinguished in its instrumentality to justification, not to works as exacted by the *law*—the all-condemning, inexorable *law*—but to works generally or absolutely; to works therefore which, as we contend, it is essential to our faith to enjoin; and not only to enjoin, but to assure us that God will enable us to perform, and even condescend to reward. On the other hand, if we understand faith to include a conviction of the authority of the precepts delivered by Christ and his Apostles, it follows that the Gospel, in demanding faith as a prerequisite to our justification, demands, at the same time, those works which, we must again repeat, it is of the nature of our faith to enjoin, and to assure

* Rom. v. 1.

† Heb. xii. 14.

us of the help and favour of God in performing—that is, demands, as St. James has taught us, both faith and works to our justification. — But we shall conclude, for the present, with an admonitory remark of universal application.

However Christians may differ as to the precise signification which they affix to the language of St. James, they agree, for the most part, in assenting to that most reasonable conclusion, which it was his main purpose to impress upon the minds of believers: namely, that God will allow no test of our faith—no proof of our sincerity—no reason of our confidence towards Him, to supersede the necessity of obedience to his commandments, or the habitual fulfilment of our religious and moral duties as inculcated in his Word. The Gospel abounds with pure and exalted precepts of religion and morality, enforces extraordinary and most adequate inducements to the observance of them, and more particularly, includes a promise of especial aid from the Spirit of God. As such it is the offer of a remedy for the disorder and weakness of our moral powers, and designed to restore us to that rectitude of will—that holiness of character from which we have fallen. Can it,

then, be approvable to God, or satisfactory to ourselves, that we merely confess our obligation to the Great Physician of our souls; or that we do but admire and laud his marvellous wisdom and goodness in providing a specific for the malady of our nature? Will he accept any professions of our gratitude or confidence, while his remedy, in fact, continues to be unapplied, his instructions to be read merely, or to supply us with matter for reasoning only or declamation? Our reason irresistibly assures us, that the mind must be wholly and perseveringly submitted to the rule which he has laid down for us; the craving of diseased appetites must be denied and mortified, and thereby cured, by a scrupulous regard to his all-wise and most gracious prohibitions; the soul must be nourished by the word of life, and exercised in religious offices and active virtue after the Christian pattern; and, as far as may be practicable in the judgment of an enlightened conscience, we must adapt our external condition, our pursuits, our recreations, our society, our reading—whatever affects and acts upon the mind from without, to the exigencies and weakness of the inner man,—breathing the purest atmosphere which this world can afford us. That such a course of

life is incumbent on the believer, and essential to his eternal welfare, every intelligent Christian acknowledges; and none but the most ignorant or fanatical would deny. Be it our concern, then, inasmuch as we may have been heretofore unmindful of so manifest and important a truth, now with all earnestness to apply it to ourselves: to be no longer satisfied with acknowledging the wisdom and goodness of that Being, who is at once our gracious Benefactor, and our absolute Lord; while we are habitually omitting any one of his commandments, and returning his goodness no otherwise than in the emptiness of words. May none of us any longer expose ourselves to that solemn and humiliating, but no less touching and persuasive expostulation of our Redeemer:—"Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say!"*

* Luke vi. 46.

SERMON XII.

ROM. III. 28.

*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith
without the deeds of the law.*

WE have expounded and maintained the declaration of St. James, that "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only," to signify that faith and works are unitedly necessary and instrumental to our justification; and have made it evident, we conceive, that, if the discovery of his meaning be sought in a close and fearless examination of his *own* language only, that, and no other, must appear to be the proposition which he intended to convey. But the subserviency of works, as well as of faith, to our justification is either wholly rejected, or most reluctantly and equivocally conceded, from an apprehension that such an opinion would militate against those numerous

passages in the Holy Scriptures, which represent our eternal life as the effect of Divine mercy and compassion—"the *gift* of God through our Lord Jesus Christ," and not as the desert of our own rectitude, or reward of our own worthiness: and, particularly, that it stands opposed to the affirmation of St. Paul, which we have just cited—namely, that "a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." We should, therefore, do most imperfect justice to our argument, were we to pass these objections without especial notice and examination: objections which have prevailed with some to dispute the competency of St. James as a teacher of the Gospel—(a fact which, it may be remarked in passing, affords some proof that we have supported the most natural construction of his language, or that which it would at once convey to an unprepossessed judgment)—and have tasked the ingenuity of others to invent the most arbitrary expositions of his language.

In the first place, then, we have to meet the objection, that to allow the instrumentality of works to our justification, is to infer the merit of human rectitude before God, and to bring into question the necessity and sufficiency of our Redeemer's sacrifice for the sins

of the world, and the prevalency of his intercession for the guilty. Now, that no such inference was deducible from the words of St. James, in his *own* apprehension, would seem to admit of no question; and to impute it to *him* must betray a most cursory or indiscriminating perusal of his language. For, let the following passage be considered:—"and the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, *and it was imputed unto him for righteousness*"*—precisely the same language as is used by St. Paul concerning Abraham, in the original as well as in the translation.† Is it not evident that, in penning these words, the mind of St. James reverted to the one only fountain of merit or worthiness to this guilty world—the mediation of the Son of God—in virtue of which the faith of Abraham, and the works which it actuated and sustained him in performing, were imputed to him or accepted for righteousness? It was manifestly taken for granted by St. James, that faith and works stood upon the same level, with regard to any intrinsic worthiness, or claim of desert, that might be presumed to attach to them; and, conse-

* James ii. 23.

† Καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.—Gal. iii. 6.

quently, that it was no less consistent with the efficacy of our Saviour's mediation to ascribe the justification of a man to his works than to his faith. This assumption of St. James, then, is the position which we oppose to the objection in question: one, however, which seems to have been entirely overlooked and unthought of by those who allege that objection. When a preacher maintains the necessity of works, as well as of faith, to our justification, he is liable to a charge of setting up a claim of merit on the part of man: he is supposed to incline to the error of the Jews, who dreamed of justification by the inflexible law, and refused access to a just God by a Mediator; or he is accused of seeking to divide the glory of man's redemption between the Redeemer and the redeemed. From this ungracious, and, to a minister of the Gospel, revolting imputation, the preacher is exempt who presses on his hearers the doctrine, that a man is justified by faith only. But what is the philosophical—what the rational ground of distinction between them? If I attribute man's justification to his faith, do I not, *primâ facie*, ascribe it to himself, equally as much as when I refer it to his works? Do I not, in the former instance, *seem*

as much to assume the merit of faith, as in the latter the merit of works? Faith is acceptable to God as an act or state of the believer's mind, and the acceptableness of a work also consists in the state of the agent's mind. The exercise of faith is, in truth, an act of obedience to God. It is regarded as a proof of our willingness to know his will, and even enjoined upon us under the title of "a work:"—"Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom he hath sent."* Repeated acts of faith are, in fact, repeated acts of obedience; and, consequently, faith and works, as connected with our justification, stand precisely in the same predicament—that is, a derived, appointed, or subordinate efficacy to procure our justification may pertain to works, as well as to faith; the original, meritorious cause of justification existing in neither.†

It is incumbent, however, that we point out the consistency of this position, as well as the drift of our argument in general, with the

* John vi. 29.

† As, then, it is almost proverbial to say that we shall not be saved *for* our works, though we shall not be saved *without* them, it were equally correct to say that we shall not be saved *for* our faith, though we shall not be saved *without* it.

doctrine of St. Paul on the method of our justification. But in approaching this part of the subject, we must at once observe, that those who deny the necessity or efficacy of works to justification, so far from helping us to harmonize the assertions of the Apostles, have embraced, as most orthodox and unquestionable, a position which directly contradicts the language of one of them. The position we mean is, that we are justified by faith *only*; whereas St. James has written that we are justified by works, and *not* by faith only. We are well persuaded, that this position was originally laid down for the purpose of disavowing and condemning, as a pernicious error, the presumption of human merit before God,*

* This is obviously the purport of the proposition, as it is set down, or quoted with approbation, in the eleventh Article of our Church:—"We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or *deservings*: wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and full of comfort." "Works" is here manifestly taken to be synonymous with "deservings." Our Church then, in this Article, intends to repudiate the presumption of our own desert before God—not surely to assert that we are justified by faith without works, or that works are unessential to our justification. For, in the next Article, it is affirmed that good works are the fruits of faith—that they "do spring out

and not of denying the necessity of holiness to the salvation of the believer; and we firmly believe that this is, generally speaking, the real, as it is the avowed purpose for which it continues to be maintained by a large body of Christians. In that purpose—the scope of the position in question—we entirely and cordially concur. Nevertheless, as that position itself is, *in words*, as obviously and positively a contradiction to the declaration of St. James, as it is possible for one proposition to be to another, it should be well considered by Christians, whether so frequent and earnest a repetition of it, be, to say the least, consistent with the reverence due to the authority of an Apostle. They cannot suppose that St. James himself, in affirming that “a man is not justified by faith only,” intended to convey a

necessarily of a true and lively faith.” As, then, *fruit* as well as stem (not root merely) is necessary to constitute a *fruit-tree* a *perfect* tree, so works are necessary to make our faith *perfect* as the instrument of our justification: which, as we have shown, is the doctrine of St. James.

The distinction insisted upon between the *merit* and *necessity* of works, relative to our justification, may find more favour with some, if we cite in its support the authority of John Wesley, who, speaking of repentance, humility, &c. observes:—“These things do not merit our justification, but they are absolutely necessary in order to it.”—*Watson's Life of Wesley*, p. 69.

notion that the pious and virtuous deeds of mankind were intrinsically meritorious, or to unsettle the persuasion that justification was the fruit of divine mercy, or the gift of God: indeed, we have seen that such a supposition would be completely at variance with a particular passage in his Epistle. For what reason, then, is a proposition, *worded* in direct opposition to his own assertion, so unceasingly reiterated—so pertinaciously adhered to?—for, be it observed, it is not strictly a quotation from St. Paul; who, whatever be deducible from his language, nowhere asserts that a man is justified by faith *only*, but that “we are justified by faith,” or that “we are justified without the works of the law.” It may be true that the declaration of St. James is open to misconception and perversion, but—not to say that, according to St. Peter, the language of St. Paul also is liable to, or rather susceptible of, a misconstruction of the most ruinous nature—are we at liberty to alter the words of Scripture, because we judge them to supply a pretext for the diffusion of error? and, for the sake of obviating a mistake, and checking the progress of a heresy, to substitute an *affirmative* proposition for a *negative* one?—to insist that a man is justified by faith only;

whereas the Scripture declares that he is *not* justified by faith only? But we need not dwell on what must at once be acknowledged to be a somewhat exuberant zeal in the defence of Christian truth, however valuable and important. We must repeat, however, that the position that "we are justified by faith only," whatever be the reason for maintaining it, is wholly nugatory and useless—to say no more—in the endeavour to appreciate the relative bearings of the doctrine of St. James and St. Paul, on the matter of our justification: for if we allow the inspiration of the former as well as the latter—and we have no controversy with any who deny the apostolical authority of either—we must receive the declarations of both of them to be equally true and undeniable. What, then, can it avail towards a discrimination of their respective views, to insist that a man *is* justified by faith only, when St. James affirms that he is *not*? We will add, that the inutility of the position, that we are justified by faith only—considered as the summary and conclusion of what *both* the Apostles have stated upon the matter of our justification—bespeaks from those who have hitherto rested in it, a tolerant, nay, a most candid and even favourable consideration for any endea-

your which may be made to ascertain that *harmony* in their views which, guided as they were by the Spirit of God, we are sure must have actually existed—to collect from their writings an exposition of the subject under consideration, which may include and satisfy the declarations of both, and not compel us to merge the language, and seem to slight the authority, of either. To proceed, then, in an attempt of this nature—

We have contended that in affirming the instrumentality of works as well as of faith to our justification, St. James proceeds on the assumption that our works and our faith are equally devoid of merit, and entirely dependent on the mercy or gratuitous favour of God for his acceptance of them. St. Paul, however, directly asserts that “we are justified by faith,” and denies “that we are justified by works.” It is obvious, moreover, that he deemed it an assumption of human merit, and a disparagement of the grace of God, to ascribe justification to “works,” as is evident from the following passage :—“By grace are ye saved, through faith . . . not of works, lest any man should boast.”* Now, the consideration which at once exhibits the consistency of this lan-

* Ephes. ii. 8.

guage with the explanation which we have offered of that of St. James, is, that when St. Paul denies the instrumentality of works to our justification, he speaks of them with relation to the *law*, as distinguished from the Gospel. "By the works of the law," he affirms, "shall no flesh be justified." "A man is justified," he concludes, "by faith without the deeds of the law."* Now, the law exacts undeviating rectitude: it tolerates no partial obedience, and shuts out the penitent from the hope of forgiveness; inexorably decreeing, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." The works of the law, or the works demanded by the law as the ground of justification, are comprised in nothing less than a conformity to the whole of its commandments, and are equivalent to unblemished purity of character.† It follows, that as certain

* Rom. iii. 28.

† St. Paul expressly affirmed that those who sought justification through *the law*, were, in order to be justified, necessitated to obey it *entirely*—"were debtors to do the whole law." (Rom. ii. 15; Gal. v. 3.) It was, indeed, because a tenacious adherence to the Mosaic ritual argued a dependence on the law for justification, and, thereby, a virtual rejection of salvation through the mediation of Christ, that he not only forbade, but deprecated, in the

as it is that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not,"* so certain it is that "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." St. Paul, we repeat, speaks of works as they are judged of and dealt with by the law—"the law of works," as he entitles it, inasmuch as it offered eternal life as the desert of our own works. He does not speak of works as they are enjoined upon us in the Gospel—that gracious constitution which offers eternal life as the "gift of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ," to be received by faith; and which he, therefore, designates "the law of faith."† Consequently, the precise import of the doctrine of St. Paul, in its bearing upon the

strongest language, the observance of those ceremonies which the law had prescribed, and which had answered their purpose when the Gospel was promulgated; and spoke of those ceremonies in terms of intolerance, scorn, and detestation, which had they been simply useless, and not subservient to pernicious error, he would hardly have used with regard to ordinances which, in a former age, had borne the stamp of divine authority, and had been recently honoured by the observance of the Son of God himself. But, for the important reason stated, he does not scruple to describe those ordinances as no better than the very rites of Paganism, which the Galatian converts had abandoned, and stigmatizes the adoption of them as tantamount to a relapse into idolatry itself. Gal. iv. 8, 9.

* Eccles. vii. 20.

† Rom. iii. 27.

subserviency of works to our justification, *as laid down by St. James*, depends upon the sense which he intended to convey by the term "faith." There is, therefore, no discrepancy whatever in the argument of the two Apostles, but on one supposition; namely, that faith, in the apprehension of St. Paul, was a reliance on the merits of Christ for justification, *and nothing more*: that it was *not* a belief of the declarations of Christ and his Apostles in general: that it did *not* extend to and embrace a conviction of the permanent authority of those precepts in the divine word, which enjoin the love and practice of all rectitude towards God and towards our fellow-creatures—a conviction, moreover, assumed to exert a corresponding influence on the life of the believer. That this, however, *was* the comprehensive significance of the faith inculcated by St. Paul, in common with the sacred writers in general, was established, it is presumed, in a preceding discourse; and might, indeed, be proved by a single passage in one of his Epistles, as well as by the strain of his writings:—
 "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of them-

selves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."* Can words be more effective to assure us that, in the judgment of St. Paul, an influential conviction of the obligation and necessity of being personally righteous, was an essential part and constituent of the faith which justifieth? Or must we infer that St. Paul has left his readers in the dilemma of concluding, that a man may be justified and admitted into the kingdom of God in virtue of his faith, and, notwithstanding, condemned and excluded from that kingdom on account of his unrighteousness?

The truth is, that the great Apostle, while he confutes and deprecates the notion that any one can be accounted righteous in virtue of his obedience to the law, or be exempted from condemnation through any other medium than the atonement of the Son of God, yet most distinctly recognises that broad line of separation, which the Scripture everywhere draws between the righteous and the wicked; notwithstanding it holds mankind to be universally transgressors, and dependent on the infinite mercy of God for life eternal. He most undeniably assumes, with the sacred

* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

writers in general, the necessity of a comparative rectitude of character, in order to participate in the divine mercy : to realize the benefits of our Saviour's mediation : to obtain that justification which no merit inferior to *His* could have challenged. And here it should be especially observed, that the design of the Apostle in insisting upon the depravity of our species, was not merely, or indeed specifically, to demonstrate the unquestionable guilt and degeneracy of every human being ; but to dissipate a conceit which the Jews entertained, that, *as a people*, they were an exception to the common depravity ; and to convince them that they were as certainly subject to condemnation by the law as the rest of mankind, and stood in need of a mediator no less than the Gentiles. That this was, strictly speaking, the aim of his reasoning, is clearly intimated in the following passage ; and must be evident, in a moment, if we consider the language which he cited from the Psalmist, to establish his accusation against them as transgressors :—" What then ? are we better than they ? No, in no wise : for we have before proved, *both Jews and Gentiles*, that they are all under sin ; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not

one : there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable ; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre ; with their tongues they have used deceit ; the poison of asps is under their lip s : whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness : their feet are swift to shed blood : destruction and misery are in their ways : and the way of peace have they not known : there is no fear of God before their eyes." * Now, were it not an injustice to the uninspired intellect of St. Paul, to say nothing of his apostolical endowments, to suppose that, in order to demonstrate the guilt and punishableness of every human being, he would have adduced the conduct of men whose "throat" had been "an open sepulchre ;" whose "mouth" had been "full of cursing and bitterness ;" and whose "feet" had been "swift to shed blood ;"—the inveterate liar—the daring blasphemer—the trained assassin ? Or can we suppose that he would have included under such a description of wickedness every individual of the human species : those ancient servants of God, for example, whose piety, notwithstanding its im-

* Rom. iii, 9—18.

perfections, is recorded and held up to our imitation in the Scriptures ; and whose virtues, springing from a steadfast faith in the divine promises, he himself has eulogised in the Epistle to the Hebrews ; describing them as men “ of whom the world was not worthy? ” * To prove the guilt and corruption of every individual, he would rather have subjected to examination the better portion of mankind, and have applied the divine law as a test of the boasted virtues of our species. He would have laid open the germs, the incipency of actual and flagrant sins in the hearts of those who had never in reality committed them, and have shown a taint of the worst crimes in the least guilty amongst us. He would have exposed an essential deficiency in the fairest patterns of human rectitude, and have made it manifest that no claim to be accounted righteous by the divine law, could be made out for those who had professed an exact observance of its statutes, and who, in the judgment of their fellow-creatures, and in their own esteem, had entirely or substantially fulfilled them : as, indeed, he wholly renounced such a claim on his own part, though, before his conversion, he had judged

* Heb. xi. 38.

himself, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."* Such, we may be sure, would have been the nature of his proof, had it been his only or his specific purpose to establish the guilt and condemnation of every human being, in the judgment of the law. But the Jewish opponents of St. Paul had arrogated a personal righteousness on national and exclusive grounds, as Israelites, or in virtue of their descent from Abraham. Accordingly, we perceive, in an instant, the aptitude and propriety of that particular citation which he made from the Psalmist; for what was so calculated to confound their national pride, and to demolish the presumption of their sanctity as a people, as such a description, in their own sacred writings, of a multitude of Israelites — children of Abraham — contemporaries of the Psalmist — their own forefathers?

Apart, however, from St. Paul's design to confute this error of the Jewish people, his doctrine undoubtedly is, as we have already stated,

* Phil. iii. 6. He must here evidently refer to the opinion which he had entertained of his own obedience to the law previous to his conversion; unless—which, indeed, is most probable—he speaks of the external ordinances only which were prescribed in the law.

that by the law, or on the ground of his own desert, no man can be justified: that justification is held out to us, and must be received, as the gift of God through Jesus Christ. But does this invalidate or clash in the slightest degree with the doctrine of St. James, that God demands a holiness of character as preliminary or conditional to our justification, and will not account our faith as righteousness, if it be "alone" and "without works?" What! have the uses—the worth—the necessity of all that we understand by piety and virtue — by moral rectitude in its largest acceptance, ceased with our *merit* and *perfection*? and is no reason left why God should concern Himself in its support and promotion amongst his creatures? True, we must confess with the patriarch,* that "we are not worthy of the least of all his mercies;" but is it therefore less certain that the law which He originally imposed upon us, and which we have so grievously violated, is founded in justice, and agreeable to our reason?—that obedience to it is essential to the well-being of the world?—that it is supremely worthy of the Deity to uphold its authority, as well as to vindicate its rectitude?—to uphold it by the

* Gen. xxxii. 10.

most powerful motive that can be applied to a rational being; even by making our practical regard to it a condition of our receiving that inestimable gift, which the sacrifice of His own Son was demanded to vindicate him in bestowing—the justification of the guilty? Or has the sufficiency of our Redeemer's atonement forestalled Him in the communication of its expiatory virtue, and interfered with his absolute right to open the life-giving fountain to whomsoever, and on whatever terms, he may deem fit? Has the amplitude of God's own provision for the pardon of a guilty world, debarred him from demanding the reformation of his creatures? Has it superseded the universal dictate of reason and natural religion, that the forgiveness of sin presupposes the contrition and amendment of the sinner? Has it abolished our accountability, and put a period to our probation before God?

But, indeed, the Almighty has actually and confessedly demanded, in order to our justification, a sincere acknowledgment of our guilt and unworthiness, and a reliance on the mediation of Christ, as the meritorious ground of our acquittal at His tribunal. Is it then inconsistent to conclude that he has demanded something more; that he has made it equally

imperative on us to cherish the sense of our duty towards Himself and our fellow-creatures, and to apply our earnest and persevering endeavours to obey that commandment which is unchangeably holy, just, and good? Nay—is it not a peremptory dictate of our reason, and one borne out and pressed upon us by the prevailing language of the Scriptures, that God has made it incumbent on us to confess our demerit, and encouraged and commanded us to confide in the sacrifice of Christ for the expiation of our sins, for the specific purpose of working a deeper conviction of our obligation to serve him in well-doing, in all rectitude towards Himself and our fellow-creatures?

Most certain it is, that the writings of St. Paul, no less than those of St. James, forbid us to conclude that a disclaimer of our own desert, and a dependence on the merits of Christ for justification, however essential a part, is the whole or completion of that faith which is accepted for righteousness. We have already seen that a practical conviction of the duty and necessity of personal holiness, must have been comprehended in his idea of faith, as the instrument of justification. But more than

this—he instructs us that the purpose of God, in the constitution of the Gospel, was to renew that conviction ; to fix it more deeply in the mind of the believer ; and, moreover, to imbue him with the power to exemplify it in an active and ardent cultivation of moral excellence.* He teaches us to regard the sacrifice of the Son of God as the basis of our liberty and encouragement in the obedience of divine commandments.† He alleges the love of God in the redemption of the world as a constraining motive to devote our lives to his service and honour. But he does not exhort us to holiness as a debt and expression of our gratitude only, as if the heart of man were universally, and at all times, most powerfully affected by the goodness of God, and stood in need of no other incentive to the fulfilment of his known will ; or as if the gift of justification were offered and ensured to the sinner, whether he receive it in thankfulness or otherwise : whether he be careful to derive from the mercy of God a motive to obedience of his commandments or not. He seconds his most affecting appeal to our gratitude by an equally urgent application to our hopes and

* Titus ii. 14.

† Heb. ix. 14.

fears. He beseeches us that we "receive not the grace of God in vain."* He warns us to beware lest we fall short of entering that eternal rest which God has promised to his people; lest we turn a deaf ear to the Son of God, and incur a "sorer punishment" than the despisers of Moses. On the whole, it is assumed by St. Paul, and the tenor of his epistles admonishes us, that God has judged fit and ordained that the efficacy of faith to justify shall depend upon—shall be inseparably connected with its efficacy in purifying the principles of our conduct; in inducing us to obey his commandments; in actuating us to the performance of good works;—in other words, that a man shall not be justified by faith alone, but as St. James has taught us, by faith together with works.

Such, we conceive, is a just construction of the doctrine of St. Paul, and so clearly is his language reconcilable with that of St. James. We have only to bear in mind that St. Paul, in declaring that we are justified by faith without the works of the law, addressed himself to men who sought justification on the ground of their own fulfilment of the law, or without faith

* 2 Cor. vi. 1.

in the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ:—that great ordinance of divine wisdom, so essential to illustrate the justice and mercy of God in the absolution of the sinner; to humble and abase the pride of man, and to affect him with a just sense of his guilt and unworthiness; as well as needful to penetrate his obduracy, to encourage his repentance, and, not unfrequently, to save him from despair. St. James, however, expostulated with persons who indeed expected justification in virtue of their faith in the merits of Jesus Christ, but forgot or would not perceive—would not be feelingly and practically persuaded, that the whole scheme of our redemption through a Mediator was designed to establish the divine law in the conscience, and to inspire us with the love of God, which is “that we keep his commandments.”*—Be it our concern then, by divine assistance, to unite a profound sense of the grace and mercy of God in our salvation, with a conviction, no less profound and influential, of the great practical purpose for which his mercy has been so signally, so wonderfully displayed: receiving in its full import, in its whole spirit, the following declaration of St. Paul:—“By

grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus unto good works*, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

* Ephes. ii. 10.

SERMON XIII.

MATTHEW VII. 21.

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

THIS declaration and warning of our Redeemer must suggest reflections so apposite to the subject which has recently occupied our attention, and appears, in particular, to afford so decisive a confirmation of that exposition which has been offered of the doctrine of St. James, that we propose it to your consideration, as a conclusion of the whole argument.

It has become a current observation with a considerable number of sincere Christians, that to urge the necessity of personal holiness or "works" to our justification, is needless and superfluous, as well as dangerous to the

faith of a Christian. Let the sinner, say they, be convinced of his guilt and condemnation by the law, and his need of the redemption unfolded to him in the Gospel; let him be assured of his interest and participation in its benefits; and a sentiment of gratitude will constrain him to regard the injunctions of his Lord, and to aspire to a resemblance of his example: whereas, by maintaining the necessity of personal holiness to justification, you exhibit salvation as an object of purchase or achievement by man; and thereby encourage an unwarrantable reliance on our own merits or righteousness. Now, how manifest it is that Christians who have adopted, and who circulate this notion of the true scriptural method of instructing mankind in the knowledge of Christianity, must have failed to remark, or must have entirely forgotten, the example of our Lord himself; and that they are, doubtless most unwittingly, and, it may be, with a purpose as pure as their zeal is ardent, inferring a disparagement on *His* manner of preaching the Gospel, no less than on that of St. James his Apostle.—For did He, we ask, adapt his instructions exclusively to their view of the working of religious principles in the human mind — to their view of the effects

which a belief of His own mediation in our behalf is adapted, and may be expected, to produce? Did he account it sufficient to exhibit the proofs of his Messiahship; and to apprise those who believed on him of the deliverance which he was about to accomplish for them, by laying down his life as a ransom for the transgressor? Or did he content himself with even explaining and inculcating the moral law, as a permanently authoritative rule of life; or with delivering a number of commands and prohibitions; *and take for granted* that their gratitude for his voluntary and exceeding humiliation and sufferings on their account would attract, would constrain them to observe and keep them? Did he abstain from a distinct and specific affirmation of the *necessity* of obeying his precepts, lest those who believed on him might misconceive the nature of that economy which he was about to institute: lest they might disparage the sufficiency of his own work, and arrogate something of the glory of their own salvation? What, then, was his purpose, or where shall we look for his wisdom, in making the declaration in the text?—a declaration which did not escape him on a solitary occasion, but was, in substance, repeatedly and emphatically.

made 'by him during' his wonderful sojourn and most gracious ministry in our world. Why did he, again and again, declare, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father who is in heaven?"—It would not, surely, be alleged that any will eventually enter the kingdom of heaven,* who shall not have been justified; or acquitted before God; or that any of the finally justified will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Entering the kingdom of heaven is, unquestionably, the glorious and beatific result of our justification, or the actual and complete fruition of that salvation which is the property of those who are justified. However we may discriminate the specific sense of the term justification, certain it is that any definition of it which should disjoin the *fact*—not the offer or capacity—the fact of our acquittal from the guilt of sin, from a *coexisting* certainty of our entering the kingdom of heaven — any definition of it, which should infer the possibility of our being

* It must be manifest from the spirit and drift of the passage, that "the kingdom of heaven" cannot here mean the visible church of Christ merely, or his kingdom as externally constituted in the present state.

actually justified by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ without being admissible into the kingdom of heaven, or of our being admissible into the kingdom of heaven without being justified—must be, to say the least, a purely arbitrary one, and without foundation in the word of God. When our Saviour declared that none should finally enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who kept his commandments, he virtually declared that none but they should be justified. The opinion, then, that it is superfluous, or detrimental to the purity of our faith, to inculcate the necessity of personal holiness or “works” to our justification; and that these should be expected to flow from the gratitude of the believer, or be regarded as the certain fruit, the necessary consequence of his faith, cannot be preeminently evangelical—cannot be peculiarly conformable to the mind of Christ. On the contrary, it betrays an inattention to his own example, and the wisdom on which it was founded.

That wisdom is immediately intelligible, and above all question. It may be as certainly affirmed of knowledge communicated from God, as of any production of the human intellect, or instrument fashioned by the hand of

man, that we shall use and apply it according to our opinion of *the purpose* for which it was imparted, and our desire to effectuate that purpose. If books, for example, be valued for the amusement or occupation of the passing moment, they will be merely read: the eye will run over the pages as it receives the impression of human faces, and other objects, which pass it in a crowded thoroughfare, or as the mind receives the images of a dream: that is, the arrest of the attention, or the excitement of the feelings, will be wholly the effect of circumstances, or purely accidental. But if books be valued as repositories of science and learning, and appreciated for the great and various uses of knowledge, the attention will be deliberately fixed upon the ideas which they express and illustrate; the judgment awakened to approve or reject, and the memory tasked to preserve them. If they be prized yet further as specimens to assist our own research, to stimulate our own thoughts, and to guide us in the communication of our own ideas, it need hardly be added, that a more minute and earnest scrutiny will light upon them; and the mind of the reader receive a more vivid and perfect impression of that of the author. But if books be not esteemed for

any one of these purposes, they will be of no farther use than to disguise the ignorance, or to adorn the mansion of their possessor. Equally and unavoidably palpable is it, that if we account and value our Christian knowledge, our religious faith, as a means of effecting the amendment of the character, or the renewal of the mind after the image of our Maker, we shall apply the contents of the Scriptures as a collection of unanswerable arguments against the temptations which beset us on the right hand and on the left; entertain the appeals which it makes to the dictates of the conscience, and our aspirations after virtue and true holiness; embrace its promise of everlasting happiness to the righteous; retain a wholesome awe of its threatenings against "those who do evil;" and doubtless, nay, especially, acquiesce in its claims upon our obedience in virtue of the atonement offered for us by the Son of God—responding to that most touching appeal of the Apostle—"Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." *

Inasmuch, however, as we regard our faith as matter for discourse and speculation, or

* 1 Cor. vi. 20.

as a means of approving and signalizing our orthodoxy, we shall be satisfied to arrange and systematize its parts, and to retain them in their order and particularity. If we esteem the substance of scriptural communications rather as grounds of confidence in the mercy of God, than as inducements to an upright and holy life, we shall be proportionately engaged in meditating upon the divine goodness in our redemption, or in contemplating the prospect of future happiness, rather than in seeking, by "patient continuance in well-doing, for glory, and honour, and immortality." If we suppose that the guilt and depravity of mankind have been set forth and impressed upon us in the sacred writings, for no other purpose than to abase us in our own eyes as transgressors, and to exalt our conceptions of the infinite mercy of God, we shall be content—so far as *the conviction of our own demerit* as the objects of the divine goodness is calculated to influence our feelings and operate upon our character—to perceive and acknowledge our offences against Him; to dwell upon our own unworthiness; and to confide in the abundant grace of God, and the sufficient merits of our Redeemer. But it will be far otherwise, if we contemplate the amazing

condescension and mercy of God, in our redemption by Jesus Christ, as an example for our own imitation in our conduct one towards another: an example which the inspired writers enjoin and conjure us to follow, in the dispositions which we cherish towards the offending and destitute of our fellow-creatures. In a word, if we embrace the Gospel, not only as a proclamation of mercy to the guilty, but as a call to holiness,* and regard its announcement of the former as an encouragement to our obedience of the latter—then our reliance on the help and promises of God, and our hope of immortality, will operate upon us as incessant and stirring motives to the fulfilment of the divine commandments. — So manifest is the wisdom of our Saviour in declaring the necessity of *doing* thus and thus, as well as *believing* thus and thus, in order that we may be effectually redeemed from our fallen state, and admitted into the kingdom of heaven.

But, farther and more particularly, such is the opposition existing between the bias of our natural propensities, and the conduct prescribed to us in the word of God, that we have especial need to be admonished—repeatedly and earnestly admonished, of the practical end

* 1 Thess. iv. 7.

of the Gospel, and the absolute necessity of regulating our lives by its precepts, in order to realize its great and exceeding promises. And here—without dilating on the depravity of our nature, and the acknowledged force of the passions in perverting the understanding, and superseding, for a season, the calm and deliberate conclusions of our reason—it may at once be observed, that were we to forbear enforcing the necessity of personal holiness as conditional and preparatory to life eternal, in the presumption that the gratitude of the believer would spontaneously produce it, we should overlook the specific fact, certain as it is lamentable, that mankind can live in habitual disobedience towards God, evade the proofs of his will, or disregard the nature or extent of his commandments, and, notwithstanding, at the same time, accredit themselves for gratitude, for love to God: in other words, that they are prone to deceive themselves in estimating the sincerity and efficacy of their gratitude towards the Divine Being, as they are prone to deceive themselves in estimating their gratitude towards a fellow-creature.

Suppose a man deeply beholden to some individual, to be touched with a sense of his kindness and liberality, of which he makes

frequent unlimited acknowledgments. Suppose him, however, to be informed, or, by some means, to have received an impression, that the friend and benefactor whose name is so often on his lips, and whose generosity appears to be so much in his thoughts, is desirous of, or would be greatly advantaged by, his doing some particular act, which would task his powers, demand some vigorous exertion, or a sacrifice of his feelings and inclinations. Suppose him unequal to the resolution which such an act would require from him — faltering and giving way under this trial of his gratitude. What, then, would be the direction of his thoughts? He could not take to his breast the conviction of his own ingratitude, of his own turpitude and vileness. He could not rest under such a conviction. Every criminal shuns, if he can, the frown and lash of his own conscience. He would, of course, take refuge in some plea of excuse or vindication. He might persuade himself, notwithstanding he had owned himself incalculably a debtor to his benefactor, that the service desired from him was more than commensurate with his own obligation, and could not with reason and justice be expected from him. Or he would have recourse to a doubt of the fact that it

was desired and expected from him, or of the truth of his first impression that the act in question would be positively beneficial to the individual who was the object of that gratitude which he imagined to be a ruling principle in his mind: he might even admit the supposition that it would be detrimental to his interests. Or he would solace his dissatisfied and unquiet conscience by the *intention* of reciprocating the kindness of his friend in some other and no less effectual manner. Meanwhile, it is highly probable that he would be more than ever fervent in protesting his willingness to serve him, and devotedness to his welfare.—In the same manner as men can thus succeed in blinding their own eyes to the turpitude, and even the existence, of their ingratitude towards a fellow-creature, while they are exposing it to the scorn and detestation of observers; so, it must be confessed, they can flatter and deceive themselves in appreciating the strength of their gratitude towards God; whether for temporal or spiritual blessings; for the happiness of this life, or the prospect of happiness hereafter. They cannot, indeed, demur to the obedience of any one of His commandments, on the pretext that it would demand a larger sacrifice of their

own inclinations than he could justly claim at their hands ; but it is surely no recent discovery, no new deduction from the history and experience of our race, that though averse to know, or careless to remember and obey the will of God, they can, all the while, satisfy their sense of obligation towards him by verbal acknowledgments of his goodness, and professions of zeal and devotion in his service—by various methods less arduous and self-denying than a steadfast and impartial obedience of his commands and prohibitions.

And, doubtless, it is this most sinful perversion of the understanding, which the word of God exposes to our religious dread, and most careful avoidance. It does not impute to mankind an actual insensibility to the goodness of the Creator, so much as it warns us against a proneness to rest in that gratitude for his mercy and beneficence which terminates in a superficial and temporary excitement of the feelings: a gratitude which prompts or can support no strenuous resolution in his service, and endure no sacrifice of self and the present world in the promotion of his glory: a love which does not attach itself to the *holiness* of his character, and fails to operate as a predominating and uniform principle of obedience.

Such was the gratitude, the devotion of those Israelites whom the Almighty thus rebuked by the prophet Isaiah:—"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."* They were profuse in acknowledgments of the divine beneficence, and scrupulous in the observance of a number of rites and ceremonies,—for these cost them no inward struggle with a corrupt will and depraved passions,—but they could not sacrifice their vices on the altar of devotion: they could not "cease to do evil, and learn to do well;" but answered the demand of the conscience towards God, and even pleased and flattered their devotional feelings, by a "multitude" of offerings; filling the air with the smoke of their sacrifices, and the voice of praise and thanksgiving.

It was against the same species of self-delusion that our Redeemer's admonition in the text was directed—an admonition which, be it observed, was addressed, not to unbelievers, or to persons who were indifferent to his instructions, but, on the contrary, to those who had received him as the predicted Messiah, and who, in virtue of their faith in

* Matt. xv. 8.

his doctrine, and zeal for his honour, were looking for admission into the kingdom of heaven. Such were the persons whom he admonished to approve their fidelity in his service, not by fervid exclamations of Lord, Lord, but by doing the will of God as he had declared it to them: to ascertain the depth of their devotion towards him by its efficacy as a principle of obedience to his precepts. "If ye love me," he repeatedly admonished them, "keep my commandments."

And do we want any argument for enforcing this admonition of our Saviour in our own time? Is it our happiness to be so generally intent upon obeying his commandments, and so completely imbued with the sanctifying virtue of his Gospel? Is there no common propensity to shun the conviction, or to narrow the compass, of our duties?—to allow of shallow excuses for neglecting them, and to cherish unwarrantable presumptions of divine mercy? Is there no common liability to the error of supposing that a zeal in the profession and diffusion of the christian faith, or an observance of the merely outward forms of religion, will suffice for a subordination of the passions to the precepts of the Gospel, and a life of active virtue after the Christian

model? And if there be, do we seriously believe that we obviate the necessity of such an admonition—that we escape the danger of relying on a vapid profession of gratitude and love to God, or a merely speculative, lifeless faith, by barely knowing and confessing our utter unworthiness as sinners; by disclaiming any part or power in the accomplishment of our own salvation; and by ascribing it to the pure grace or gratuitous favour of God? Surely, we may entertain such sentiments without applying them as inducements to *do* the will of God—as inducements, in particular, to the exemplification of a benevolence towards our fellow-creatures, akin to that which characterizes the dealings of the Almighty with ourselves. But unless we are making this practical application of such sentiments, it is certain that in uttering them we are but exclaiming Lord, Lord. We repeat, then, that those who would leave the fulfilment of our religious and moral duties, as inculcated in the Scriptures, to the spontaneous operation of our gratitude for the mercy of God in our redemption by Jesus Christ, overlook the important fact, that we are exposed to a most dangerous error in appreciating the strength of our gratitude itself, as a

principle of practical religion : an error of which the inspired teachers in general, and our Saviour especially, have most impressively forewarned us.

Moreover, it were obvious on general grounds to urge the necessity of applying to our corrupted nature, and circumstances of strong temptation, *all* those various inducements to a devout and virtuous life which are addressed to us in the word of God ; and, more especially, those promises of enduring happiness, and denunciations of eternal misery, which make so powerful an application to the hopes and fears of mankind. But it must here suffice to observe, that when we speak of the gratitude of the Christian, as a principle of obedience to the divine commandments, it should be well considered that the Scriptures demand our gratitude to God, not properly for the actual, certain attainment of eternal salvation ; but for the means, the capacity of attaining it. There are, indeed, ministers of our religion who are said to preach a full, free, and *finished* salvation : but if such a phraseology be used to signify that Christians may account *their own* salvation as actually finished, or as absolutely certain, we are bound to assert that we can find no warrant for such

phraseology in the word of God. The final accomplishment, the certain fruition of salvation, is described, in the Scriptures, as a rest for which we are to labour; a crown of righteousness for which we are to contend with temptation; and, as if for the very purpose of repressing the presumption that our salvation can be reckoned upon as finished in this state of trial and preparation, we are instructed to “fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it;”* and we are expressly premonished that it is “he that overcometh” —he “that endureth to the end,” that shall be saved. Happily, however, those who use such phraseology, or entertain the opinion which dictates it, are wiser than at all times and consistently to adhere to it, in their views and representations of the Gospel. They affirm, indeed, that our works, our personal holiness, should be left to flow from the gratitude of the believer; but they do not scruple to speak, and are not unaccustomed to hear, of other incentives to a practical obedience of the will of God—of the rewards and punishments of a future state—the momentous alternative which awaits us there — the eternal issue of *our*

* Heb. iv. 1.

doings. Nevertheless, inasmuch as the design of the divine revelation is to stimulate our desire, and to fix our resolution to *do* the will of God, it must suffer in its efficacy, in proportion as any one of those arguments on which it grounds its claim to our attention, is assumed to comprehend the whole of its import, the entire scope of its appeals and exhortations.

The fact, however, that this partial, exclusive view of the divine revelation should be often adopted, can hardly excite our surprise. Numerous are the instances, in which the mind is so greatly occupied with the contemplation of *one* truth, and, it may be, so powerfully excited by the feelings which it tends to awaken, as to be scarcely percipient, or, rather, entirely forgetful, of other truths, apparent to the most common observation, in the same department of knowledge. And this is, not unfrequently, a condition even of the most active and capacious minds, which a single truth, seen under its diversified relations, or traced to its remoter consequences, may more than suffice to engage and fill :—“ What truth” —is the exclamation of Burke—“ what truth is there which does not branch into infinity !” In the investigations of natural philosophy—in

the study of morals, government, legislation—in every path of inquiry thrown open to us in the natural, and, more particularly, in the moral world, it is common to remark a propensity to fix the attention almost entirely on *one* class of facts—the effects of *one* cause—the operation of *one* principle. We observe a similar *exclusiveness* in the conduct of the mind with relation to the various forms of sublimity and beauty in nature and art, and, most remarkably, in the admiration of any production of human faculties; which is often accompanied, as though it were intended to be expressed and seconded, by a manifest indifference to other productions of the same nature, and aspiring to the same or an equal excellence, and even by a disposition to disparage and condemn them. The causes of this propensity—that of attaching the thoughts to a single, isolated view of objects demanding inquiry and appreciation—are, for the most part, sufficiently apparent; and it is easy to perceive that it places a powerful engine in the hands of those whose aim is to work upon the feelings, whether good or bad, of the mass of mankind: that it casts some light on the nature of popular oratory, on whatever subject, religious or otherwise; ex-

plaining, in no small degree, the source of its power, and the secret of its charm. But we merely point attention to the general fact, that we are more or less prone to mistake a strong perception, a lively impression of *one* truth—of *one* excellence, for a comprehension of all truth—of all excellence ; inasmuch as it would prepare us to expect the prevalency of a similar error in religion. In the instance under consideration, it is certainly a very natural, and a most excusable error. The great subject of divine revelation is the redemption of mankind through the mediation of the Son of God : a fact which makes its appeal more immediately, and with a peculiar force, to our gratitude. It is consequently natural that Christians, intent upon and affected by such a manifestation of the goodness of God, should deem the claim which it urges on that affection to be an all-sufficient inducement—*experimentally* and *practically*—to their obedience of his known will and commandment, and should infer that believers can stand in need of no other. It is natural, moreover, that they should conclude that the disciples of practical godliness are in reality actuated by no other consideration than that of the mercy which God hath shown

them ; and should accordingly become indifferent to the assertion of other reasons, however cogent and persuasive, for a conscientious observance of the precepts of Scripture—to the assertion, for example, of rewards and punishments in a future state, or the necessity “of doing the will of God,” as a *condition* of being admitted into the kingdom of heaven:—nay, that they should contract a fastidious distaste, a morbid repugnance to the *mention* of such reasons, and decry the *enforcement* of them as betraying an undue regard to the agency of man in the promotion of his spiritual welfare, and derogating from the redeeming power or the sufficient grace of God. We call such repugnance *morbid*, in the conviction that those reasons are actually and repeatedly impressed upon us in the word of God—that inspiration of an Intelligence which, in addressing man as an accountable and immortal being, has not contemplated him as the subject of *one* principle of conduct only ; but has embraced every motive of which he is susceptible in the relation which he bears to the Deity, and by which he may be persuaded to enter and pursue the path of rectitude and life eternal. We are solemnly convinced that a ready admission, an earnest consideration,

of every inducement set before us in the Scriptures to promote obedience of God's commandments, is needful to the sustenance of human piety; that no good can result to any individual Christian, and still less to the cause of religion in general, by a disregard and unintentional disparagement of any portion of the divine revelation; and that, at all times and generally, we need to be reminded of the admonition of the Apostle — "*All* Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."*

There is yet another topic to which we would advert before we dismiss this subject. We have combated the opinion that it is *superfluous* to insist on the necessity of "works" to justification. The opinion that it is calculated to promote a presumption of our own desert before God, we had examined in a preceding discourse. On that opinion, however, we would farther observe, that it may be traced, in a very great measure, to a dread of relapsing into an error which was disowned at the Reformation. Because the ministers

* 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

of the church in its corruption, appear to have taught the merit of personal holiness or good works, the ministers of the church in its reformed and purified state, have been timid, vague, inconsequential, and perplexing, in enforcing the immutable obligation of performing them, their indispensableness to the justification of the believer, and their sure and everlasting recompense in the world to come. It is manifestly concluded that the conceit of a personal desert, with relation to the Deity, has been the great delusion and master-heresy of past times—the rock on which the faith of Christians has been, for the most part, wrecked, and from which we are most conspicuously warned by the beacon of the Reformation. It were idle, in these limits, to attempt a close examination of the grounds on which this conclusion rests; but we may venture, and it may not be useless, to suggest a doubt whether the proneness of mankind to deduce from their *own* conduct a claim to eternal life, be precisely the fact illustrated, or the lesson taught, by the history of the papal domination. For by what dogma was it that the Church of Rome, or rather the Christian priesthood in general of past times, attracted most effectually the reverent attachment of

the multitude? Was it by insinuating into their minds a flattering persuasion of their own moral worthiness, and the sufficiency of their own virtues? No: with such a lie upon his lips, the priest would hardly have held so long possession of the conscience, and have been admitted to its inmost secrets. The bulk of mankind, however loath to entertain the impression of their guilt, however prone to magnify their virtues, and to find excuses for their vices, have owned a conviction of their sins;—and how many have drooped and pined in the memory of them! How many, in their last hours, have recoiled at the thought of appearing before the judgment-seat of God, unadvocated and alone! The artful priest devised a more specious tale—one better fitted to deceive himself as well as others. Though he could not befool the people with a notion of their personal innocence towards God, he might and did persuade them, in an age of ignorance, and when the Bible was shut, to believe that *others* had been better than themselves: so much better as to yield *them* something wherewith to appear before the Universal Judge. He beguiled them by an assurance that the good deeds, the pious labours and sufferings of Christians in past

time, had equalled—had surpassed their own obligations; and had left a surplus fund of merit in the treasury of the church, to be applied, at her discretion, in exchange for money or service, to supply the deficiencies of the less holy and deserving of mankind. It was not, we apprehend, by teaching men to parade their *own* works of supererogation to the eye of Omniscience,—not by blinding them to the perception of their own demerit, that a covetous and ambitious priesthood prevailed to deceive the world, but rather by coining devices for pacifying the reproaches of the conscience—for soothing that sense of guilt which, in all ages, has sought alleviation, in various ways; by sacrifice and other offerings to divine justice; by the voluntary endurance of sufferings; by pleading the virtues of other men; and even by preserving their relics. They succeeded mainly by a perversion of the doctrine of a mediation on behalf of the guilty—by an abuse and degradation of the principle of *substitution*.

But, allowing the actual prevalence of a notion, that mankind could individually exceed or fulfil their religious obligation, and merit eternal life by their own good works, such a notion must have originated in a most scanty

and erroneous apprehension of that obedience which was due from them to Almighty God—in a presumption that the practice of religion was wholly or principally comprised in the outward and visible act, performed with whatever aim and spirit; as, for example, in endowing monasteries or institutions for the promotion of religion, erecting churches, supporting a priesthood, or discharging other external duties of religion, *from whatever motives*; and, moreover, in acts morally indifferent, or essentially vicious; in treasuring relics, in worshipping saints, in undertaking a pilgrimage, or in detecting and punishing a heretic. Inasmuch as such may be supposed to have been the prevailing notions of practical religion, we need not wonder that the doctrine of human merit should have obtained some acceptance in the world.

But, however we may characterise and account for the errors of dark, unenlightened ages, nothing can be more evident than that a presumption of our own desert, or an inadequate impression of our own sinfulness, is the effect of an ignorance, misapprehension, or forgetfulness of our proper duties towards God and our fellow-creatures: as it was a defective and perverted sense of religious

obligation, which blinded the Jews to the discernment of their own depravity, in common with that of the human race, and laid them open to the imagination of their peculiar holiness as the people of God. The obvious and effectual means, then, of suppressing the presumption of personal merit, and promoting feelings of indelible and self-abasement before God, is, to enforce the divine law as expounded by Christ and his Apostles, as the abiding standard of our duty, the unalterable rule of life; and, especially, to insist upon the *necessity* of those earnest and persevering endeavours to obey it, which induce, with whatever imperfections, a progressive holiness of character, or the habitual performance of good works. It is, in truth, an important office of the law to impress us with a conviction of our sins—"By the law is the knowledge of sin;"* but, surely, it is in the *actual endeavour* "to perfect holiness in the fear of God," or to compass the "exceeding breadth of his commandment," that we become effectually convinced of our guilt and moral corruption—that we justly comprehend, and personally feel, the awful and humiliating truth, that "all have sinned, and come short

* Rom. vii. 25.

of the glory of God." Any individual, it is true, may be stricken with compunction or terror at the remembrance of some flagrant sins, or the review of a life consumed in the neglect of religion; but he only who is actually engaged in the strife with temptation, and contends in earnest with the strength of his passions, can attain an adequate and habitual sense of his defects and infirmities as an accountable being. So far, indeed, from there being a discrepancy, there is, on the contrary, an intimate connexion, between a belief of the permanent authority of the divine law as a rule of life, and a grateful ascription of our justification to the unmerited favour of God: since it is manifestly in the will and effort to obey the divine commandments in their full extent, that we retain the sense of our personal insufficiency and unworthiness, and prize, as the most joyful tidings which have ever reached our ears, the announcement of eternal life in virtue of other merits than our own—the all-prevailing merits of our Redeemer.

We revert then, in conclusion, to the fact insisted on at the outset of this discourse—namely, that the manner in which we deal with the Gospel must depend upon our con-

viction of the *end* for which it has been made known to us. Be it therefore our constant endeavour, and our earnest prayer, to be fully possessed, and habitually actuated, by a persuasion that the end of the Christian economy is to correct the depravity of our nature: to recover us from the dominion of the appetites and passions to the love of God, and that holiness of character which is the essential preparation for the happiness of a future state. We cannot but know that this *was* the end for which that gracious economy was established. We cannot but know that for this end a satisfaction was offered for the sins of the whole world, and the door of acceptance with a righteous God thrown open—for how could we offer him obedience with a sentence of condemnation on our heads?—that for this end the Holy Spirit “hath been given us,” to aid our endeavours to obey the divine will, and to render them effectual: that for this end the Gospel was announced by prophets as the introduction of a *kingdom*, the erection of God’s government in the mind and conscience: that for this end the forerunner of the Messiah “prepared his way before him” by calling mankind to repentance: that for this end the Son of God himself came laden with blessings

for “the poor in spirit,” “the meek,” “the hungry and thirsty after righteousness,” “the merciful,” “the pure in heart,” “the peacemakers,” and “the persecuted for righteousness’ sake:”—that for this end the Expiator of our guilt, did Himself explain and inculcate the laws of God, and the principles of all righteousness; and did Himself sojourn on the earth, a pattern of unblemished innocence, of active and various goodness, the perfection of piety towards God, and benevolence towards man; leaving us an example that we should walk in his steps.—We know these things — we preach them — we hear them:—“Happy are ye”—it is the monition which our Saviour hath given us—“happy are ye if ye do them.”*

* John xiii. 17.

SERMON XIV.

LUKE VIII. 10.

And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

VERY different senses have been affixed to these words. Some have inferred from them that our Lord addressed the Jewish people in parables, in preference to employing a more intelligible mode of instruction, for the express purpose of confirming and perpetuating their ignorance and unbelief; and, moreover, have alleged them in confirmation of the doctrine termed Calvinistic—namely, that the Almighty predetermined from eternity to render the Gospel effectual to the sanctification and redemption of a *definite portion* of mankind. Others, rejecting this last deduction from the

words, or disregarding it altogether, have understood them to import that our Lord made use of parables as a punishment upon his hearers for the inattention, prejudice, and hostile spirit with which they had received his more perspicuous communications; although he had offered them abundant evidence of his divine commission, and notwithstanding the especial, predicted proofs of his Messiahship. This, it appears, is the construction most generally put upon the language of our Lord before us, and it is certainly consistent with a rule of the divine conduct propounded by himself on the occasion when he delivered it:—"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables."* Nevertheless, we are not prepared to receive the declaration of our Lord in this sense, or, in other words, to understand his conduct in speaking to the Jews in parables as retributive or penal; but accord to the conclusion, that he announced the doctrines of the Gospel in the obscurity of parables because the minds of his hearers were so engrossed with things sensible and

* Matt. xiii. 12.

present, so inveterately prepossessed with the expectation of a temporal redemption and aggrandizement, that they could not have endured to contemplate the truths of Christianity through a more clear and transparent medium—could not have endured a distinct and palpable apprehension of them. We conceive that he mitigated the effulgence of divine truth, in pure condescension to a morbid imperfection in their moral vision; and, accordingly, that those parables of our Saviour which partook of a mystical or enigmatical character, or were of difficult apprehension—for the larger portion of his parables, be it observed, were but more lively and affecting representations of familiar truths, or enclosed their sense in a texture of allegory which might have been unravelled without difficulty—that those parables, we say, which were of difficult apprehension, so far from having been constructed for the purpose of impeding their acquaintance with the truths of the Gospel, were, in truth, the only means of engaging their attention to evangelical principles at all. Moreover, it has been justly alleged that our Saviour was placed in imminent personal danger by the malice of his enemies; and a more explicit, a less restrained and guarded

annunciation of his doctrines might have given him into their hands before the hour was come in which he was to lay down his life as a ransom for the sinner; and might thereby have obstructed the general and ulterior objects of his mission. Such parables, however, were not without a minor and intermediate utility. They kept alive a certain degree of interest in our Lord's discourses; attracted a curiosity towards them; and doubtless afforded occasions for the exercise of candour, and the proof of an upright purpose towards God, to individuals who had withstood the common degeneracy, and who, with whatever limitation in their views, awaited in a devout and humble spirit the "salvation of Israel."

It is undoubtedly true, that the Jewish people were punished for their guilty prejudices against Jesus of Nazareth, on the occasion of his speaking to them in parables; but not, as we conceive, by *Him* in employing that method of discourse. They were punished by their own inaptitude to understand and believe the Gospel, if plainly unfolded to them.—But we shall return to this topic in the farther prosecution of the subject.

That inference from the text which was first stated—namely, that our Saviour addressed

his hearers in incomprehensible parables with a design, *from the beginning*, to leave them as he found them, in delusion and impenitence, conformably with a decree of the Almighty to effect the salvation of a *particular* portion of mankind—appears to be completely at variance with the character of our Lord's discourses in general, and irreconcilable, in particular, with his express declarations of divine mercy to the Jewish people. But there is a particular *phraseology* in the sacred writings relative to our Saviour's use of parables, as well as to several other facts, which may appear to lend such an inference considerable support and plausibility, and which it may seem difficult to reconcile with the opinion, that, in adopting that mode of instruction, he contemplated the *benefit* of his hearers. In the first place, then, we shall consider that particular phraseology, and endeavour to explain its specific import.

From the account which St. Matthew has given of the answer which our Lord returned to the inquiry of his disciples, "Why speakest thou in parables?" we learn that he pointed their attention to the insensibility and unteachableness of the Jewish people as the fulfilment of a prophecy relating to them.

Now, if the terms in which the Evangelists, in this as well as in other instances, assert the accomplishment of a prophecy, were received in a strictly literal sense, we should be compelled to infer that the event predicted was the effect of a divine preordination: that the event fell out because it was predetermined by the Almighty, as well as foretold by the mouth of his prophet. In the instance before us, however, there is an important *variation* in the terms of our Lord's reply to the inquiry of his disciples, respecting his use of parables, as it is recorded by the several Evangelists. For example, the language ascribed to our Lord by St. Matthew affords no colour whatever for the presumption that the blindness and insensibility of the Jews were the effect of a divine decree; and presents no apparent harshness or difficulty at all. "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand. And *in them is fulfilled** the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross."

* Καὶ ἀναπληροῦνται ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ἡ προφητεία Ἡσαίου.— Matt. xiii. 14.

These words simply accuse the insensibility of the Jewish people — their untractableness to religious instruction and discipline; and inform us that their criminal hardness of heart was the verification of a prophecy concerning them. The language of our Lord, as set down by St. Luke in the text, differs, in an important particular, from the version of it by St. Matthew:—"Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; *that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*"* These words seem to affirm that the hardness and perversion of the Jewish mind was absolutely preordained by the Almighty, no less than predicted by the inspiration of his Spirit. The words of St. Mark are almost entirely the same as those of St. Luke; and these evangelists omit altogether our Lord's allusion to the prophecy of Esaias, though we can scarcely doubt that it was in the mind of each of them in recording this declaration of their Master. Again, St. John cites the prediction of Isaiah as a commentary of his own on the unbelief of the Jews:—"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him:

* ἵνα βλέποντες μὴ βλέπωσι, καὶ ἀκούοντες μὴ συνιῶσιν.

that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias when he saw his glory, and spake of him."* This variety in the terms in which the inspired writers record the declaration of our Saviour in question, merits especial observation; inasmuch as it seems to preclude a rigorously literal acceptance of the wording of it by any one of them in particular; and instructs us to receive it in such a sense as supports the analogy of Scripture, and, more especially, as is most in unison with the strain in which Esaias was wont to address the people of Israel. It must be immediately evident, however, that the sense which we dispute but ill accords with the spirit that breathes through the pages of that prophet: filled, as they are, with unlimited offers of divine mercy, and the most encouraging exhortations to repentance. But we

* John xii. 37—42.

can dispense with this consideration, auxiliary, as it undoubtedly is, to the force of our argument.

We grant that the Evangelists, in the instance before us as well as on other occasions, relate the fulfilment of a prophecy as if the prediction of the event had been equivalent to a declaration of a divine decree to bring it to pass, and as if the event took place in order to verify the prophecy, and to accomplish the predetermination of God. We have indeed a remarkable instance of this mode of speech in the following passage, in the Gospel of St. John: —“For this cometh to pass that the word might be fulfilled that is written in the law, They hated me without a cause.”* Again,—“While I was with them in the world I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”† These passages, if understood literally, would show an awful consistency with the words of the text, and inform us that not only the enmity of the Jews against Christ, but the treachery and perdition of Judas, were the result and fulfilment of a decree of the Almighty, which had been announced in the form of a prophecy.

* John xx. 25.

† John xvii. 12.

Several critical expositors of the New Testament have sought to escape the conclusion which such a phraseology appears to convey, by adopting a different translation of the original: as, for example, by substituting for the phrase "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet," the words "so that that which was spoken by the prophet was fulfilled."* But there are passages in the Scriptures, apparently conveying the same import, and consequently offering the same difficulty, which admit of no such verbal alteration: for example, St. John cites the prophecy of Esaias as the *reason*, it would seem, why the Jews could not believe the declarations of our Saviour: — "Therefore they could not believe *because that* Esaias said again."† The refinement then upon the original is of small value in the exposition of these parts of Scripture.

* Matt. xxvii. 35, ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ προφήτου — "Ἴνα, it is said, is not here a causal conjunction, but points to the event merely, without conveying the idea of a design in bringing it out.

† John xii. 39. Διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἠδύνατο πιστεῖν, ἕτι πάλιν εἶπεν Ἡσαίας — It must be manifest from these words, that ἵνα ὁ λόγος Ἡσαίου τοῦ προφήτου πληρωθῆ, in the preceding verse, is correctly rendered in our translation — "that the saying of Esaias the prophet *might be fulfilled*."

We apprehend, however, that with regard to these, as well as some other passages in the sacred writings, we need not be driven to resort to questionable expedients of verbal criticism, if we sufficiently consider the innumerable modes of speaking, customary at all times, which are the result of merely accidental or arbitrary combinations of ideas; and which cannot therefore be understood to assert what the words themselves would literally signify. The affirmation of St. John—"Therefore they could not believe because that Esaias said"—must appear, we conceive, on examination, to be one of these modes of speaking. It is certainly not uncommon to affirm of any event contemplated as future, that it *can* or *cannot* happen, for no other reason than that some individual, presumed to be of superior knowledge and sagacity, has pronounced an unhesitating judgment that it *will* or *will not* happen. If a surgeon, for example, were to assert, without hesitation and in absolute terms, that a particular operation proposed for the cure of a disease would prove fatal—a surgeon, in whose knowledge of the structure of the human frame, and of the peculiar constitution of the patient, we had been induced to place unlimited confi-

dence—it is not improbable that we should express our opinion of his judgment and foresight in such terms as the following :—“ The patient *must* sink under the operation, if it be performed upon him ; he *cannot* survive it—the surgeon has said that it will terminate fatally.” In other words, we should testify our confidence in the intelligence of the surgeon in language which, if literally understood, would convey the idea that his prediction of the fatal issue of the operation would be the cause of it—that the operation could not be otherwise than fatal because he had predicted it would be so : whereas we should virtually declare our conviction that it was impossible that he could be mistaken in his judgment. It were easy to multiply instances : indeed we are continually hearing from others, if not ourselves accustomed to make, the most positive and unqualified assertions—whether with respect to the possibility of things future, or the reality of things past—which, in the minds of the speakers themselves, rest on no other foundation than their strong conviction of the extensive knowledge, or unerring judgment, of some particular individual. Of course such assertions can be properly understood to express nothing more

than that strong conviction. It were beside our purpose to assign the origin of this custom of speech, even were it not easily perceivable. We have merely to direct attention to the general fact that, in proportion as persons are habituated to take their views and expectations from the judgment of others—in proportion as they are unable or careless to ground them on the results of their own investigations, they are accustomed to quote and urge the judgment of another, who may happen to have stepped into the vacant seat of authority; as though in alleging his affirmation, they were assigning the *cause* for any fact which they may assert—as though they were *explaining* any proposition which they may advance—as though his affirmation were declaratory of what was possible or practicable in the nature of things.

The language of the Evangelists in question, taken as it is from the ordinary dialect, and addressed to the common apprehension, evinces the same connexion of ideas: on an occasion, however, when such a manner of speaking should least of all surprise us, if, indeed, it might not have been naturally expected. Filled and wholly possessed with the persuasion—not of a *human* foresight, but of the prescience

of the All-perfect Mind, they speak of that prescience as if it were identical with the nature and constitution of things: as if it were the measure of all possible existence: as if God's foreknowledge of all things were the same as his creation and preordination of all things. Hence, in the words—"They could not believe, because that Esaias said"—the Evangelist simply declares that the Divine Inspirer of Esaias could not have been *deceived*, in foretelling the obstinate unbelief, and incorrigible character of the Jewish people. The phrase, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet," bespeaks the same impression of God's infallibility, with the additional and important persuasion, that it was his especial purpose to demonstrate the Scriptures to have been dictated by Himself, by the veracity of the prophecies contained in them. And such was the persuasion which suggested the words in the text—alluding, as they do, to the prophecy of Esaias—"that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." We hold these forms of speech to import that the Almighty could not have been deceived in having announced events that should come to pass, or the purpose be frustrated for which He had foreshown

them. We conceive them to be bent from their original purport, when, with whatever appearance of plausibility, they are applied, as they often are, to infer the necessity of human actions, or to uphold the doctrine of Calvin. When it is objected to the divine authority of the Mosaic account of the creation, that it appears inconsistent with the discoveries of modern astronomy, or, more correctly, that it does not anticipate them, we justly reply, that it was not the design of Moses to explain the structure of the universe; but to fix the devout attention of mankind on its Eternal Author; and that, in doing so, it was sufficient, and indeed unavoidable, to describe it as it existed in the apprehension of mankind. With a similar assertion we should answer the reasoning of theologians, who adduce the language of the scripture in question as disproving the freedom of the will, and declaring absolute decrees of the Almighty: we should maintain that it was not the design of the sacred writers, in penning that language, to arbitrate in the discussions of after ages concerning "free-will" and "predestination;" but merely to express their persuasion of the certainty of events which the Divine Spirit had "testified beforehand"

should come to pass, and of the demonstration which should consequently follow, that the doctrines of the Gospel were of God, and not of man.

Some, it is possible, may infer that, in thus arguing, we *depreciate* the phraseology of the sacred writers. But with regard to the phraseology of a divine revelation, there is, in our view, but one question of importance—Is its import easily intelligible in consistency with current modes of thinking, and prevailing usages of speech? Any objections to its abstract or philosophical propriety we regard as idle and frivolous; no less so than exceptions which might be taken to the grammar and rhetoric of the inspired Apostles. These are matters which, in relation to men of their high calling, are scarcely more important than were the texture and fashion of their raiment—the manner in which the men were clothed who announced the glad tidings of a Saviour to a guilty and fearful world. The *sense* of the Scriptures, we repeat, is our main and only concern: the cavils at the diction in which that sense is conveyed, and no less the ardent and lavish praise which is sometimes brought to it—as though it were almost essential to our belief of the Bible to rank it with the sublimest models of eloquence, and even to exalt

it above them—we cannot but hold to be of the lowest significance. What reasonable man, in a reasonable mood, can attach importance to the mere wording of a communication from God—describing the path of his wondrous dispensations, and illustrating the darkness of futurity? Or what matters the shape of “the cap of salvation”—its appearance to the eye—the devices, albeit they are noble, that are figured on its surface? Can we heed such things, when we are taking to our lips the element of life, and allaying the deep thirst of immortality?

The observations which have been offered relate to the phraseology of Scripture concerning the divine foreknowledge: we are aware, however, that many have maintained that the absolute decrees of God are essentially involved in his perfect foreknowledge: that whatever God foreknew he must have predetermined. This is a position which we are far from being prepared to admit; but it were apart from our purpose to inquire into the reasoning on which it is founded. We may observe, however, that those expositors of Scripture, who thus pronounce upon the prescience of the Deity, evince, in this instance, a far higher estimate of the powers of

the human understanding, than, on other occasions, and as believers in the mysterious doctrines of the Gospel, they are commonly willing to allow. It surely argues no small presumption of the reach of human faculties, to lay down the conditions of God's fore-knowledge : to describe the process or state of the Infinite Mind in its intelligence of the future : as if the path of Omniscience were as much within the ken of our philosophy as the sources and progression of human knowledge : — nay, as if we might trace that path with as much ease, or as little diffidence, as though we were following the steps of demonstrative reasoning, and had caught the pure light of science. For our part, we conceive that God's intelligence of the future is a fact not to be explained by the analogy of human knowledge ; and know not why his power of foreseeing should come within our comprehension any more than his power of creating, or of bringing the universe into existence. But we are not dealing with this subject on abstract or independent grounds : we are endeavouring merely to elicit the intent of Scripture.

Assuredly, a diligent comparison of various passages in the sacred volume would expose the impropriety and danger of inferring any

thing more than the infallible prescience of God, from such language as that which we have cited out of the writings of the Evangelists. Even the language of St. John which follows the words "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again"—namely, "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them"—even this language cannot be understood to assert an agency on the part of God in producing the darkness which had overspread the Jewish mind. For it is essential to take notice of a peculiarity in the prophetic style of the inspired writers. They not only speak of things future as though they were present, which every reader of the Bible must have remarked; but they frequently identify *in terms* the act of foretelling with that of effectuating or bringing to pass—the act of relating or describing any thing with that of causing to exist. This usage has not been unnoticed by commentators; but it is far from being generally known, or sufficiently considered. The following are the terms in which Jeremiah received his prophetic commission:—"See, I have this day set thee over

the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant;”—signifying clearly—“ I have appointed thee to predict the rise, and fall, and restoration of kingdoms.” Again, the words of Ezekiel—“ When I came to destroy the city”†—obviously mean—“ When I came to foretell the destruction of the city.” So the command given to Isaiah—“ Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes”‡—was, in other words, a command to account and declare the Israelites to be an insensate and impracticable people; and, as we learn from the Evangelists; to predict the same character of their posterity. We meet with the same use of the word “ make” in the Gospel—“ Either make § the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt;”—that is, Preserve a consistency in your view of religious principles and the actions which flow from them. We apprehend that this peculiarity in the style of Scripture clears up the

* Ch. i. 10.

† Ch. xliii. 3.

‡ Ch. vi. 9.

§ Matt. xii. 33. *H ποιησατε.

language of St. John—"He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts."

But even should an obscurity still seem to hover about these passages of Holy Writ, we have, in other parts of Scripture, the most direct and unequivocal testimony that it was originally the gracious will, the especial design of our Redeemer, to enlighten the Jewish people, and even to pour upon them the full, undiminished effulgence of the Gospel. For not only was his advent compared by Prophets and Evangelists to the rising of the orb of day on a benighted world—not only did he appropriate the title, "The Light of the world;" but he declared that the design of his own personal ministry on the earth was to lay open the treasures of divine grace to the children of Abraham. "I am not sent," he said, "but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* Moreover, it is affirmed of our Saviour by St. John—"The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not;"†—an affirmation which he could hardly have made, if our Lord, instead of endeavouring to dissipate the ignorance and prejudices of his hearers—instead of seeking to facilitate their comprehension and belief of

* Matt. xv. 24.

† John i. 5.

the Gospel, had designedly withheld from them the substance of its doctrines, and rather thickened than dispersed the gloom that surrounded them. How, on such a supposition, could the "light have shined in darkness?" These words alone, we apprehend, would suffice to prove that our Saviour had originally intended to address the Jews in the most intelligible language, and to instruct them without exception or reserve in the principles of Christianity,—on the presumption, we need hardly add, of a corresponding disposition on their part to examine his credentials, and to weigh his sayings,—and, accordingly, that the darkness which notwithstanding rested upon their minds was the effect of their own perverseness and cherished aversion to the truth. Indeed, the only debatable ground on the subject, in our apprehension, offers itself in this question—Did our Lord deliver himself in parables which, more or less, exceeded the comprehension of his hearers, in order to punish them for their previous inattention to his instructions, and wilful opposition to his claims? or did he use that method of discourse in compliance with the necessity of circumstances, and with a view to insinuate into their minds such a

degree of knowledge as they might be induced to receive, and could be expected to profit by? In the next discourse we shall offer some reasons for adopting the latter of these opinions.

But it were of little use to inquire into the just import of our Saviour's language, and the reasons of his conduct, if these had not been expressly recorded for our admonition. The declaration of our Lord concerning his use of parables, whatever additional ideas it may be supposed to convey, must be admitted, on all hands, to hold out a solemn warning to all who, at any period, and by whatever instrumentality, are distinguished as the objects of a divine revelation—a warning to beware lest they entertain a repugnance to the doctrines of the Gospel, and thereby disqualify themselves for a faithful examination of the evidences of its divine original. In making this use of the subject, the unbeliever may allege that we are assuming the divine original of the Scriptures—the very point which he disputes. But whether we assume it or not, is a question which in no degree affects the reasonableness and necessity of that warning, which it is the drift of the passage under consideration, as well as

of other parts of Scripture to convey—the warning that we harbour no prepossession of a proud, sensual, or worldly spirit against that volume which declares itself to be a divine communication — the very word of God. For that warning appeals to a principle of natural religion—a clear dictate of reason—an imperative judgment of the conscience—namely, that it is our first and highest duty to seek to know the will of God, that we may apply ourselves, at once, and from the heart, to fulfil it. That duty we may be tempted to evade, and are, possibly, in imminent danger of neglecting, and thereby incurring the severest punishment of remorse and self-condemnation. If any individual, then, be conscious of a secret repugnance to any of the obligations and restraints which Christianity claims to impose upon him, and a lurking desire to escape from the conviction of its divine authority, the words of our Saviour, as we have said, hold out to him a solemn warning to beware of the power, the continually increasing power of such feelings, to fix a bias on his judgment, and to render him morally incapable of a due examination of the question, whether the Christian religion be authoritative as an institution of God, or not.

Without such an examination, however, how can he be securely persuaded that its foundations were laid in imposture or delusion? How can he disbelieve the Scriptures in a rational certainty that he is not rejecting a communication from the Deity, and in danger of forfeiting the incalculable benefits which they offer him,—even the forgiveness of his sins and life everlasting?—And, whether the Scriptures be true or false, how can he appeal to the authority of his conscience to witness and justify his conclusions? We should not hesitate to press this warning on men of the most extensive knowledge and sharpest acumen in mundane matters; for no attainments in science or learning—no kind or degree of intellectual culture exempts a man from that darkness which falls upon the mind in its appreciation of religious and moral truth; and which the Author of our being has ordained shall punish a self-indulgent, unconscientious conduct of the understanding. In this, as in other instances, the great laws of the moral world, like those of the material universe, bring the ignorant and the wise, as we account them, to a common level.

But while the language of our Saviour forewarns us against a predisposition to re-

ject the evidence of the truth of the Gospel, it admonishes us also to watch against that which is, virtually and in the judgment of Scripture, much the same thing, and which, besides, is a more common example of unfaithfulness to the dictate of conscience—namely, a desire to evade the proof of any doctrine alleged to be affirmed in the Scriptures, or to discredit any particular construction of the word of God, because it may threaten the overthrow of some preconceived opinion, or disappoint any inclination which we have heretofore allowed and cherished: because it may oppose itself to the gratification of our passions, or cast a doubt on the efficacy of our religious principles; awakening a fearful but wholesome apprehension of the divine displeasure. It warns us that by admitting such a bias on our judgment, we are not only at present foregoing that inward satisfaction which is at all times the reward of a conscientious inquiry into the will of God, but we are incapacitating ourselves for prosecuting that inquiry in future. We are actually and increasingly disabling our faculties for the search of religious truth; blinding the understanding to the perception of its evidence, as well as hardening the heart to its

sanctifying and consoling power ; and exposing ourselves to the worst effects of ignorance in the midst of knowledge.

The Jews expected a Messiah who should put an end to their inferior and subject condition, redeem them from the yoke of the Heathen — to their indignant apprehension, a profane and sacrilegious usurpation—and enable them to take a signal and exulting vengeance on their enemies. They hoped, under his lead and auspices, to enrich themselves with the spoils of vanquished nations ; and after a series of conquests, to sit down in established supremacy over the kingdoms of the earth. They nourished and pampered this imagination by giving their exclusive attention to the ancient prophecies of the Messiah's victories and empire — such as these :—“ Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron ; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”*—“ He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him ; and

* Ps. ii. 8.

his enemies shall lick the dust."*—When, therefore, Jesus of Nazareth presented himself as the promised Messiah, the very reverse and contrast of all they had dreamed of; bare of the symbols of power and sovereignty; clad in humble vesture, and attended by plebeian followers; “neither *striving nor crying*,” “no man hearing his voice in the streets”† proclaiming battle, or hurling defiance against the power that had subjugated them;—when they heard him calling upon them to subdue their enemies no otherwise than by forbearance and a long-suffering charity; exhorting them to no other victory over the world than was to be achieved by an indifference to its pleasures, and a contempt of its glory—a successful contest with themselves; and promising them no other riches and honours but such as were spiritual and future;—when, instead of flattering the conceit of their own righteousness as a people, he addressed them in language of grave rebuke and solemn admonition, laid open the painted sepulchre of their religious profession, and exposed the inveterate corruption of their character:—the ambitious, covetous, and vindictive nature, which had grown up and had been so long

* Ps. lxxii. 8, 9.

† Matt. xii. 19.

nourished within them, revolted at the acceptance of such a Messiah. Hence a critical and momentous trial—brought indeed upon them by their own misguided passions and unfaithful handling of the word of God—whether any or what degree of fidelity to the Lord God of their fathers remained to them: whether they would deal uprightly with the pretensions of Jesus, or adhere, at any rate, to their fond prepossessions, and seek to compass, by whatever means, their own desires and expectations. They took the latter determination, and resolved to reject Him as the promised Messiah:—for the illiberal constructions and dishonest reasoning with which they encountered the instruction and miracles of our Redeemer, prove that it was no part of their intention to examine his credentials; but that they were eager only to discredit them—that the single determination by which they were actuated, was, that they “would not that *He* should reign over them.”* We know the punishment of their unbelief in this world: instead of regaining the eminence from which they had been degraded, they were pushed down the precipice of destruction, and broken to pieces as a nation.

* Luke xix. 27.

We must all be apprized that a trial of a similar nature, under different circumstances, is proceeding upon every one of ourselves,—a trial with which the Searcher of all hearts is pleased to prove us, and which must issue in everlasting shame or honour,—a trial whether we will not only impartially consider the evidences of the divine original of the Scriptures, but endeavour to attain a distinct apprehension of their actual import, and deliver up our minds to their full impression and absolute authority, or whether we will entertain such views and representations only of Christianity, as may comport with our ruling inclinations, prolong the slumbers of our conscience, or justify our course of life. It must suffice at present to suggest the important reflection, that we are in the act of undergoing such a trial, and the necessity of examining in what manner, with what spirit, we have heretofore met and are now supporting it. For inasmuch as we evade those statements and appeals of Holy Writ which most severely test the character, and probe the conscience—which accuse our slothfulness as Christians, or urge us to watch against “the sin which doth so easily beset us,” and to “strive” and “labour” for eternal life, we betray a resemblance to the

hearers of Jesus Christ, and are similarly obnoxious to the divine displeasure.

But it is, we trust, more consonant to our feelings and character to reflect, and to rejoice in the reflection, that there is no proper, rational cause to shun, were it possible, the light of knowledge; that Truth has appeared to us in a form so consolatory and attractive; that we are conversant with it as a friend and deliverer, an angel of mercy, a minister of immortality, represented and embodied in the Son of God, "who loved us, and gave himself for us;"*—that by hearkening to His voice, we are, in the highest, in a transcendent sense, providing for our well-being; redeeming our time, husbanding our powers, and laying out this little life to an infinite advantage;—ensuring the lasting repose of our conscience, and our part in a glorious resurrection.

* Gal. ii. 20.

SERMON XV.

LUKE VIII. 10.

And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

In the last discourse, we arrived at the conclusion, that the only doubtful question, relative to our Lord's having addressed his hearers in parables which surpassed their comprehension, was the following:—Was our Lord's conduct, in this instance, an act of retribution on his hearers, for the inattention and even repugnance with which they had previously received his communications, accompanied as they were by adequate proofs of a divine commission and authority?—or was the use of such parables imposed upon him by the character of his hearers, and by the peculiar

circumstances in which he was placed by their proceedings towards him, and, accordingly, a method of discourse which, however inferior and defective, was the best or only means of engaging, in any profitable manner, their debased and prejudiced minds? Dr. Doddridge, as well as some other estimable commentators, adopted the former view of our Lord's conduct. His words are these:—"A late learned
 " writer has endeavoured to prove that Christ's
 " use of parables was not in displeasure, but
 " in tender condescension to their aversion
 " to truths delivered in a less pleasing man-
 " ner; but this is, in effect, supposing both
 " Mark and Luke to have reported what
 " our Lord said in a sense directly con-
 " trary to what he intended; for they say,
 " in so many words, it was *that they might*
 " *not perceive nor understand. . . .* We must
 " therefore submit to the difficulties which
 " attend this natural interpretation; which
 " are much lessened by considering, that
 " this happened after Christ had upbraided
 " and threatened the neighbouring places
 " (from whence, doubtless, the greatest part
 " of the multitude came) which was some
 " time before this sermon."*

* Expositor, *in loc.*

Now we should not say, with the writer to whom Doddridge refers, that it was not in displeasure that our Lord addressed his hearers in parables. On the contrary, we may be sure that it was in the highest displeasure that he had recourse to that method of instruction, in accommodation to the prejudices of his hearers: this must have been obvious from the nature of the case, even had we not been expressly informed that, on one occasion, "he looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts."* Again, it is impertinent to the subject before us, to speak of "the aversion of his hearers to truths delivered in a less pleasing manner;" for the fact demanding explanation is, not that our Lord employed the most agreeable vehicle of instruction, but that he employed one deficient in perspicuity; not that his parables exercised and pleased the imagination of his hearers, but that they appear to have eluded and baffled their comprehension. But we hold to the opinion, which is far from being peculiar to the writer in question, that our Lord was actuated by a principle of condescension, and not of retribution, whether in the use of parables in general, or in the structure of any

* Matt. iii. 5.

one of them in particular—that his displeasure towards his hearers, his “grief for the hardness of their hearts,” was mingled with a deep compassion for their ignorance and spiritual destitution; inclining him, at all times, to make known to them so much of the end of his mission and the nature of his kingdom, as might engage any willing attention on their part, and contribute, in the smallest degree, to their religious improvement.

Having already endeavoured to elicit the actual import of the terms employed by the Evangelists with reference to the declaration of our Lord before us, we have, it is hoped, sufficiently anticipated the objection of Doddridge, that to attribute the use of parables by Christ to condescension, is to suppose that St. Mark and St. Luke have reported what our Lord said “in a sense directly contrary to what he intended.” Passing this objection, therefore—which, expressed as it is in so absolute terms, the writer will be found in the sequel to have virtually recalled by his own admissions—we proceed to support that view of the conduct of our Lord, by some general considerations arising out of the evangelical history.

In the first place, the fact is indisputable,

that the Jews were, generally speaking, deeply averse to the instructions tendered them by our Lord, and so inveterately prejudiced against his doctrines, as to be insusceptible of any benefit from a lucid exposition of them. The objects and interests of this world, magnified as they were to their apprehension by unauthorized conceptions of the object of the Messiah's coming, had, in a very extraordinary degree, preoccupied and engrossed their minds; rendering them proportionately indifferent to things unseen and future, and unapt to the perception of moral distinctions. They were accordingly insensible to the excellence of the Gospel, as well as impervious to the conviction of its truth. It was the solemn declaration of Christ himself, made after repeated exemplifications of their character, that, conformably to the prophecy of Esaias, the "heart" of that people was "waxed gross;" that "their ears were dull of hearing;" and that "their eyes they had closed; lest, at any time, they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and he should heal them."* There is, therefore, nothing to wonder at in the fact itself, that our Saviour addressed such a people in the

* Matt. xiii. 15.

obscurity of parables; far less to incline us to infer that he intended to punish their resistance to the truth by withdrawing from them the means of knowledge: for had he unfolded the Gospel to them in language as plain and intelligible as that in which we are privileged to read it, he would have spoken in vain, and have wasted his time and powers: That this, however, was one reason for the reservation which our Lord maintained before the multitude, on subjects of transcendent interest and moment, is not our own suggestion. It is furnished us by himself; in the following injunction, which he gave to his disciples: — “ Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine.”*

But farther—direct and explicit statements of evangelical principles, besides being useless to the mass of our Saviour’s hearers—the effusion of a light too strong for their distempered organs to use or suffer—would have exposed his life to imminent and premature danger, and, to human apprehension, have obstructed the fulfilment of those ends which his mission was divinely ordained to accomplish. For not only had the Jewish people in

* Matt. vii. 6.

general evinced a decided repugnance to the teaching of our Lord; but their rulers had conceived a violent, unmitigated hatred against his person, and had plotted to betray and destroy him. These "dogs" and "swine" would not only have trampled under their feet that which was holy, and have buried pearls in their own mire; but they would have "turned again" and "rent" the hand that had cast such things before them. Doddridge himself remarks:—"It is not improbable that the scribes and Pharisees, who had so vilely blasphemed him this very morning, might with an ill purpose have gathered a company of their associates and creatures about Christ to ensnare him; which, if it were the case, will fully account for his reserve." But it *was* the case. The enmity of the scribes and Pharisees had actually ripened into a determination to take his life; and it was to frustrate, for a season, their atrocious purpose, and to disappoint their thirst for his blood, that, on some occasions, he suddenly withdrew himself from their presence, and on others, baffled their insidious endeavours to entrap him into the utterance of language convertible into matter for accusation against him before the Roman

procurator. It is far from being easy to fix the order of events recorded in the Gospels; but it is sufficiently apparent from those of St. Matthew and St. John, that it was immediately previous to the conversation of Christ with his disciples, touching his use of parables, that the Pharisees, in the words of St. Matthew, "held a council against him how they might destroy him :"*—a council that stood opposed to the will of the Most High, which had decreed that "the hour" in which Jesus should be delivered into the hands of his enemies "was not yet come." If, then, a design on the part of the Pharisees to ensnare our Saviour would "fully account for his reserve," and it be unquestionable that there was such a design, what remains to be explained? or why should we be compelled to submit to those difficulties which confessedly encumber the opinion, that our Lord delivered his parables in order that the multitude who heard them might not comprehend the meaning of his words, and remain as ignorant of the Gospel as before? At least, if still it be argued that this is the obvious—inevitable import of the language of our Lord "as reported by St. Mark and St. Luke," it is idle

* Matt. xii. 14.

to allege the confederacy of the Jewish rulers against him as "fully accounting for his reserve:"—but we have already, it is presumed, made it manifest that that language admits, or rather demands, a very different acceptation.

Had it been, strictly speaking, the intention of our Saviour to punish the perverseness and obduracy of his hearers, and their cruel machinations against him, it seems greatly more probable that he would have maintained a total silence on the principles of his religion, than have adumbrated them in allegory or parable—an inference which conducts us to a farther and a more decisive argument in support of our view of the question.

Hitherto we perceive no resemblance to a penal or retributive procedure in the use of parables by our Saviour. We perceive only that he abstained from making a clear and full disclosure of truths, which the bulk of his hearers were peculiarly, and, at that time, incorrigibly averse to hear, in whatever shape or with whatever palliations their attention might have been called to them; at a period, moreover, when many of them were eagerly bent on procuring his conviction of a capital offence, and were watching his expressions for no better purpose. But, more conclusively,

the effects which his parables were calculated to produce, and which in some instances actually followed the delivery of them, are inconsistent with the supposition that they were used as an instrument of punishment or retribution. On this head, we are not at liberty to quote the ancient custom and benefits of allegorical instruction; or to allege the advantages, so liberally expatiated upon, of figurative language in general — its use in enlivening the conception, and impressing the memory; and in quickening the attention to known and trite but important truths, by lending a pleasurable stimulus to the fancy of the hearer. These advantages of a figurative style presume the substance and drift of the language to be understood; whereas the peculiarity of the parables under consideration, was, that they involved a sense which was imperfectly, if at all, discernible by the crowd that heard them. Nevertheless, it must be allowed, as we have already intimated, that these parables were not without a partial and intermediate utility. They kept alive the general attention and curiosity. They served to distinguish inquiring and candid individuals from a prejudiced and besotted multitude. Moreover, they invariably inculcated the principles of

natural religion and moral rectitude, and were consequently initial and preparatory to a clear knowledge of the Gospel. Indeed the wonder is, that under the circumstances just stated, and regarding them as an imperfect method of instruction, they were so replete with truth and significance. We are not, it is true, very competent judges of the measure of knowledge which they were originally adapted to convey, reading them, as we do, with so ample a commentary; but, to our apprehension, the scope of most of them—the fact represented, or the moral conveyed—is so immediately evident, or discovered with so much ease, that had not the Evangelists made us acquainted with the inquiry of Christ's disciples respecting his use of parables, and the answer which he gave to the question, we should scarcely have conceived it possible that they could have been, in a considerable measure, unintelligible to those who heard them. We should rather have received the following passage in the Gospel of St. Matthew, as an exact and literal description of the parabolical teaching of our Lord, without suspecting that it was to be understood with any exception or qualification:—"All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in

parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, saying, I will open my mouth in parables: I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundations of the world:"*—a passage, it should be added, which, whatever was the amount of knowledge actually communicated by the parables of our Saviour, appears to be sufficiently declaratory of his own most gracious intention in delivering them.

One important advantage in the use of a parable, considered as an appeal to the conscience of the guilty—though indeed it belongs to fiction in general as a vehicle of moral instruction—is matter of very common observation, and must not here be passed without notice; inasmuch as it unquestionably appertained to the parables of our Saviour. It is, that the narrative in the parable, having no suspected tendency to implicate the guilt of the hearer, but apparently relating to a person indifferent to his love or hatred, his bias of self-love is suspended; his prejudices are laid asleep; and whatever turpitude of character the parable may exhibit is left to make its just impression on his mind. The features

* Matt. xiii. 34.

of crime are seen in their utmost enormity, and the judgment is freed to pronounce upon them their full desert of condemnation. Thus the wrong-doer is beguiled into an impartial estimate of his own conduct, and surprised with emotions of shame and compunction. Every one will remember the effect of such a parable upon David, when the prophet pronounced the words "Thou art the man!"—how his anger, which had been enkindled against the oppressor, and was flaming out to destroy him, was suddenly driven back into his own bosom, and well nigh consumed him in an agony of remorse. And such was the tendency and, in some measure, the effect of the parables of our Saviour: that of the husbandmen, for example, who, entrusted with the care of their lord's vineyard, maltreated his messengers, and slew his son. When the Pharisees heard that parable, it is related, "they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people; for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them."* At the moment they were watching his words for grounds of accusation against him, they found themselves engaged in a conflict with their own conscience, accusing them of an enormous impiety—even a murderous confederacy

* Mark xii. 12.

against the incarnate Son of God, and were wrestling with the dreadful conviction of its truth.

It forms no exception to the gracious design of that parable, that the Pharisees, instead of being moved by it to repentance, were yet more exasperated against Jesus, and hardened in their wickedness. Had David, instead of hearkening to the rebuke of Nathan as to the voice of God and justice, been roused to a furious indignation by the revolting charge brought against him, and in revenge had sought the life of his accuser, we need hardly say that the mercy of God to the transgressor would have been just as signally displayed in the skilful endeavour of the prophet to bring him to repentance. Whatever was the result of the parable of our Saviour, it was expressly adapted to alarm the conscience of his adversaries and persecutors—to cause them to perceive Who it was whom they were gnashing their teeth upon—Who it was whom they waited to seize with the hand of violence. The Son of God arrayed himself in mystery, not in order that his enemies might not perceive him; but lest, unwilling as they were to know and confess him, they should escape from his presence before he had directly

confronted them. He appeared before them in disguise, that, stealing upon them unobserved, he might approach them so nearly as to force them—were it possible—to recognise him. In plain terms, so far from judicially consigning them to the imagination of their own righteousness, and sealing them in a false security, he employed the parable as a means of convincing them of heinous sin, and awakening them to immediate repentance. Nor have we reason to conclude that this and other parabolical representations of the character and doings of the Jews as a people, were wholly unavailing, or, indeed, to doubt that they were accessory to the conversion of those amongst them—a considerable number, both of the common people and their rulers—who, it is recorded by the Evangelists, believed on him.*

* “Here was a people,” it has been forcibly observed on this subject, “who, collectively taken, were altogether inaccessible to instruction openly and directly delivered. Plain free-spoken truth they suddenly hurled back. What then remained but to disguise the truth in parable and fiction, and then to leave all who heard it at their peril to find it out, and to apply the moral? . . . A fictitious though simple story would first awaken the attention, and then it would stimulate the curiosity. It might be designed to shadow forth the sins and calamities of the church; or it might be a representation applicable, more

We are not begging the question, in asserting a provisional or introductory utility in the parables of our Lord. Their instructive character, their useful tendency, is acknowledged, and even urged, by our opponents on this question. Doddridge, for example, in commenting on the words of our Saviour, "He that hath ears to hear let him hear"—an admonition with which, it should be observed, he introduced the very parable, that of the Sower, with reference to which the conversation with his disciples respecting his use of parables transpired—remarks:—"This solemn proclamation was sufficient to declare, that they were to regard the following similes as intended to convey some useful instruction, and not as a mere matter of amusement." Indeed, inconsistent as it may seem, those expositors of Scripture who ascribe to our Lord a retributive purpose in the delivery of his parables, are careful to allege, not only the aversion of the Jewish people to the doctrines of the Gospel, and the design of their rulers

"or less, to whole classes or communities of men; or perhaps it might exhibit a group of shadowy and figurative resemblances, wherein each man might find a revelation of himself. And thus there would be a searching trial of the spirits in the very effort to divine the exact meaning of the tale."—*Le Bas' Sermons*, vol. iii. p. 351.

on the life of Christ, but the utility of his parables in general as a method of teaching the people, and the instruction which they were fitted to convey to well-affected and impartial minds. The position, then, on which we mainly rest the defence of our opinion, with regard to the motive which actuated our Saviour in the use of parables, is, that such considerations, of the use and adaptation of parables, properly belong to our view of his conduct, and are entirely subversive of that of our opponents. We hold it to be incongruous, to assert, on the one hand, that his delivery of parables was an act of punishment, and, on the other, that the parables themselves were instructive in their character, and beneficial in their tendency. The end of punishment, it is true, is very often the benefit, and not the detriment, of its object: the punishments of the Almighty especially, inflicted in this world, contemplate the reformation and welfare of his creatures. But the use of parables by our Saviour, as explained by these commentators, cannot be classed with corrective punishments at all; but must be accounted exclusively retributive; for, on their principles, they were delivered, not to stimulate the slothful and disobedient in the path

of holiness and life eternal, but to prevent them from discerning it—delivered in order that “in so many words” they might not *see nor understand*—that is, that they might continue as impenitent and disbelieving as before.

It is undoubtedly true, that our Saviour spoke of the mass of his hearers as the subjects of a punishment, on the occasion, or at the period, of his addressing them in parables; as is obvious in the words, “Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.” But this punishment, as we apprehend, was not inflicted upon them by our Saviour himself in his use of parables; but consisted in that indocility and obtuseness of their own minds to divine instruction, which compelled him to employ such a method of discourse, and disqualified them for deriving any benefit from a luminous exposition of Christian doctrines: a punishment incurred by the abuse of their own powers, and neglect of the means of religious improvement—by their tenacious adherence to prejudices which had sprung out of ill-ordered passions or the unrestrained indulgence of their worldly inclina-

tions: a punishment brought upon them in the operation of those principles by which the Almighty has ordained that immoral dispositions and vicious habits in general shall work their own penalty. This, we conceive, was the punishment to which our Saviour referred, as having been incurred by the negligence and perverseness of his hearers; and, *accordingly*, he did not regard it as final or irreparable; inasmuch as he still warned them to take "heed how they heard"—to beware lest they strengthened their own prejudices against the truth, increased the darkness which already lay upon their understanding, and diminished, yet farther, the possibility or likelihood of their conversion.

But if this explanation of our Saviour's language be disputed as evasive and unsatisfactory, we contend that, in rejecting it, there is no alternative but to deny the utility and advantages of his parables altogether: to deny their inherent fitness as a mode of instruction, and the possibility of their being productive of good to the multitude who heard them:—a consequence which would be attended with more and far greater difficulties, than any supposed to be involved in the explanation which we have just offered of the words of Christ.

It was manifestly a punishment to the Jews for their negligence and perversion of the means of knowledge, to have contracted an unteachableness of mind; but, we must insist, it was no punishment upon them to be offered in the parables of our Saviour any measure of instruction—any particle of information which they might be induced to receive, or which could, in the smallest degree, be expected to profit them. It is a punishment to the man who has wasted his strength and apparently abridged his life by intemperance, that the most wholesome aliment fails to excite his appetite, and scarcely affords him nutrition; but, surely, he is not undergoing a punishment in the opportunity remaining to him of taking such morsels of food as may, in any degree, prolong his existence, or of using any means which may conduce, by the remotest possibility, to the restoration of his strength. It is a punishment to the man who has neglected the cultivation of his memory, to want its incalculable advantages; but who would say that he would be punished by an endeavour, however unpromising, to instruct him in the rudiments of a language, which it had become essential to his welfare to acquire? Can those, however, be acquitted of a similar

eccentricity of speech, who, pushing the literal and superficial import of the terms in which the Evangelists record the declaration of Christ respecting his parables, maintain that he was actuated by a principle of retribution in the use of them, and notwithstanding allow and even descant upon their instructive properties—their aptitude to profit the hearer? But, unhappily for the settlement of controversies among Christians, for the elicitation of truth, and a harmony of opinions, the expositors of Scripture, as well as the public teachers of religion, are, not unfrequently, more concerned to bring together an abundance and variety of matter, than to preserve a congruity in their statements, and to sustain the identity of their views: notwithstanding their adoption of most *specific* opinions, and, it may be, the utmost pertinacity in maintaining them.*

* A remarkable instance of this disposition *to say all that can be said*, in connexion with a zeal for particular doctrines, may be seen, as we apprehend, in a collection of observations on our Saviour's use of parables in Scott's well-known, and doubtless, for some reasons, valuable Commentary on the Scriptures. For example—"It was God's *sovereign will* to leave many of them to final obduracy and unbelief." . . . "Christ spake in parables *because they refused to improve their faculties and advantages*." . . . "God judicially left them to be blinded, so that it became impossible for them to understand and believe the doctrines of

One consideration farther it is essential to bear in mind in the discussion of this question. The conclusion, that our Lord adopted an obscure method of discourse in order to punish the wilful and obstinate prejudice of the Jews, appears irreconcilable with that most gracious disposition, and unwearied solicitude for their spiritual welfare, which he evinced on very many occasions, and even to the last moment of his life. It harmonizes but little, surely, with that bitter and heartfelt sorrow for their continued impenitence, and the calamities, in consequence, impending over them, which drew from him such lamentations as he uttered over their city doomed to destruction; still less with the prayer which broke from him on their behalf, at the period when their malice against him had reached its height, and they were "filling up the measure of their iniquities;"—but how should we reconcile such a conclusion with his conduct towards them after his resurrection — with his command to his disciples "that repentance and remission of salvation." . . . "Parables are a kind of pictures of spiritual things, *which we are slow to understand*, under the similitude of external objects with which *we are more fully acquainted*." These observations, surely, include the several and most opposite opinions entertained on the subject.

sins should be preached in his name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem ?*"*

In applying this subject to our own improvement in the preceding discourse, we regarded the language of our Saviour in the text as admonishing us to watch against the power of uncontrolled appetites and passions to impress an *increasing* bias on the judgment in dealing with the claims of the Gospel to be received as a divine revelation; as well as to guard against the tendency of any favourite preconception, or heretofore cherished inclination, to influence our apprehension of its doctrines. The effect of early education, however, and the diffusion of religious knowledge, may secure even the indolent and careless Christian from a disbelief of the Scriptures, or a misconception of their essential import; and, speaking generally, we stand more in need of the reflection, that by neglecting the cultivation of religious principles, or by devoting our thoughts and affections to the objects of this world, to the exclusion of divine commandments and the issues of futurity, we disqualify ourselves for exemplifying the *practical* efficacy of the Gospel—for feeling our own most essential interest in the scheme

* Luke xxiv. 47.

of redemption by Jesus Christ which it has unfolded to us—for valuing and securing, as our own property, that better and enduring substance which it holds out to us as our predestined inheritance, and the main object of our hopes and exertions. And be it observed, that this is what is commonly signified in the Scriptures by “understanding” and “believing” the Gospel. The sacred writers, except when they aim at a special and exact discrimination, do not dignify with the titles of “knowledge,” “understanding,” and “belief,” that conviction of the truth of the Gospel which terminates in the intellect, or that acquaintance with its doctrines which enables a person to express them in propositions, or to convey them in words; but that which enlists the affections in the belief of them, and decides the tenor of our conduct. “He that doeth not his commandments,” writes St. John, “knoweth not God;” the “forgetful hearer” is described by our Saviour, in his explanation of the parable of the Sower, as “without understanding;” and, in numerous passages of Scripture, a defect of holiness, or of practical religion, is identified with a want of “faith.” The phraseology is amply justified on the ground that the use and end, the proper and only value, of Christian knowledge

consists in its efficacy on the dispositions and conduct. We are ourselves accustomed to use the same language with regard to persons who are not properly affected by the circumstances in which they know themselves to be placed, or whose feelings and conduct are inconsistent with their condition. If an individual convicted of a heinous crime, and sentenced to perpetual exile from his country, were notwithstanding devoid of shame—retaining the firm step and bold front of innocence itself—we should hardly say of such a person that he *understood* his condition ; and yet we should not violate probability, or admit an incongruous supposition, in presuming him to be abundantly competent to describe his own guilt and degradation, as a flagitious offender against the laws of God and man, a traitor to his country and his kind, an excrescence separated from the social body—we may suppose him to have all the apprehension of his worthlessness, and the punishment awarded him, required to set them forth and do them justice in words. Nevertheless, we should say that he did not understand his condition, because his apprehension of it was ineffectual to awaken the feelings appropriate to his situation. For the same reason, and surely with equal propriety, the

Scripture pronounces of that individual, who, though not actually condemned before the tribunal of Eternal Justice, nor sentenced to perpetual banishment from the presence of God, is yet heedlessly exposing himself to so awful a destiny—a destiny compared with which a banishment from his country, from human society, or any other, the worst calamity that could betide him, were but as a partial and temporary eclipse of the orb of day, to the impression of a total and eternal darkness;—the word of truth, we say, pronounces of such an individual, that he is “without understanding;” that he does not “know” or “believe” his situation as set forth in the Scriptures.

That obtuseness of the mind—that insusceptibility of the practical influence of the Gospel, we may bring upon ourselves, and continually increase, as certainly as the Jews had disqualified themselves for the actual belief, or even an intelligent apprehension of Christian doctrines. Indeed it behoves us to regard the admonition which our Saviour delivered to that people, on the occasion of his speaking to them in parables, as universally applicable to the hearers of the Gospel:—
“Take heed, therefore, how ye hear: for

whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." These words must surely admonish us of a very important analogy existing between the intellectual faculties and the religious principles — those principles which fit us for the service of God, and the happiness which flows from it — and they forbid the supposition that that analogy is superseded by the aid of the Holy Spirit, so clearly and repeatedly promised in the Scriptures to the earnest suppliant, in his endeavours to fulfil the will of God, and secure his salvation. The words of our Saviour instruct us, that, as a man suffers in the strength of his memory, his judgment, or any one of the faculties of his mind, by neglecting to use and exert it; so he degenerates in the energy of his religious principles, by allowing them to remain in dormancy or inaction. To speak more precisely, in proportion as a man resists and disobeys the dictates of his conscience, as it takes cognizance of his duty towards God as well as towards man, he not only fails of fulfilling that first and greatest obligation at the present time, but he incapacitates himself for discharging it at a future period. It is an awful con-

sideration, that he aggravates the imputation of guilt which lies upon him, and collects the reasons of a more bitter repentance ; but the height of his folly, and his worst punishment, is, that he enfeebles the mind for the work of repentance itself. He hardens his conscience to the sense of demerit before God, and contracts a growing indifference to the overtures of divine mercy in the Gospel—even the offer of a full absolution through an all-sufficient Mediator.

It is the grossest of mistakes to imagine that we can merely *postpone* the practice of religion—that we can answer the terms of the Gospel, and fulfil our Christian vows and profession, at a future period as readily as at the present moment. The truth is, that we become less and less sensible of the nature of our spiritual condition, as well as increasingly averse to the duties of religion ; and consequently, in the most important sense, disabled for the prosecution of our eternal welfare. We degenerate in the feeling, the realization of our wants, our danger, and our capacities as responsible and immortal beings : till at length we discern nothing in the Gospel, in the representations which it has given us of human nature, and the appeals which it makes to our

affections — nothing personally applicable, nothing profoundly interesting, nothing of unspeakable concernment—“ We have eyes, but we see not; we have ears, but we hear not:” or, though we “ hear,” we do not “ understand;” though we “ see,” we do not “ perceive.” Meanwhile, that condition to which we are thus becoming daily more indifferent, is continually assuming a more decisive and urgent character.—Truly, there is infinite weight in the admonition of our Saviour—“ He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”*

But it must not be forgotten that His language, so pregnant with warning to all who are procrastinating and loitering in their Christian vocation, is no less fraught with encouragement to those amongst us who have heard the word of God in thankfulness, and are striving in sincerity to “ keep ” it; but lamenting the “ weakness of the flesh ” which retards and troubles our “ willing spirit.” “ For whosoever *hath*”—whosoever valueth as his *own*, or useth to his profit, the aids already tendered him from Heaven—“ to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.”† In the habitual exercise of our conscience towards

* Matt. xi. 15.

† Matt. xiii. 12.

God, in the faithful application of his word as the test of our character, and the rule of our conduct, we need not doubt that we shall attain a more instant and prevailing impression of our spiritual state and destination—that we shall better “understand” and “believe” the Gospel—that we shall feel and act more consistently with the conviction of its truth and authority. We shall attain a better appreciation of the inestimable privileges to which it has called us; and, influenced more powerfully by the motives of our religion, we shall acquire an increasing promptitude and facility in the contemplation of its objects; and the discharge of its duties; and experience in them a higher relish, and a growing satisfaction. We shall withdraw the mind farther from the engrossment of present objects, and subject it to “the powers of the world to come.” We shall be more and more strengthened by our faith against the temptations of the world as well as its afflictions; “enduring” both, as “seeing Him who is invisible.”*

* Heb. ix. 27.

SERMON XVI.

2 COR. V. 17.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

IN discoursing on this passage, we purpose to inquire into the import and propriety of the epithet *new*, in its application to the Christian character as it appeared in the Apostles and their contemporaries; with the view of fixing the sense in which we ourselves should understand it, when we describe the true disciple, the humble imitator of our Saviour, "the man in Christ," to be "a new creature." It is the opinion of many, that the formation of the Christian character, or the transition from our state of natural depravity to a spirit of obedience towards God, through our knowledge of Christianity, and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, is generally—we might almost say universally—attended by a

change in the habitual state of the mind—a revolution in the thoughts and feelings, so complete and evident to the consciousness of those who undergo it, as to bear a resemblance to the conversion of Jews and Heathens to the faith and practice of the Gospel—that, in a word, every one who is “in Christ” reads in the language of the Apostle his own experience:—“Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Now, we do not dispute the reality of such changes—on their supposed *frequency* we shall offer an observation in the sequel—we do not, however, dispute the reality of such changes—we do not deny that individuals are sometimes brought to repent of their sins, and to apply themselves in earnest to the work of their salvation on a sudden: in such a manner, we mean, as that they can recall the particular occasion, when the Gospel, for the first time, produced an effectual impression on their minds, turned the current of their thoughts, and altered the whole complexion of their lives. We do not question that there are individuals who recollect the period of their deliverance from the tyranny of their passions, or the power of evil, as distinctly as persons are wont to remember an escape from fire or

drowning, or a rapid, unhopèd-for cure of a dangerous malady.

But if we consider the sense in which the first Christians were called "new creatures," or the reason for which that title was applied to *them*, we shall find that it is entirely repugnant to the original design and proper tendency of the Christian economy, that there should be any necessity for such a change in our own habits and practices as took place in the earliest converts to Christianity—for such a change as is laid down by many as an evidence of real piety, or a saving faith in the Gospel, and demanded as a proof of our being "in Christ." We shall find that, inasmuch as any of us stand in need of a radical or entire change of heart and character, we have especial ground for humiliation and concern—a reason for self-reproach and dread of the divine displeasure, which had no existence previous to the Christian dispensation. This, we feel assured, can be readily made evident; and, if so, it is a conclusion which cannot but demand especial enforcement, and a far larger share of consideration than, generally speaking, it appears to have obtained.

Our Saviour and his Apostles inculcated the necessity of a *change of mind*, the signification,

as is well known, of the word rendered repentance.* That change is so often treated of or referred to in the New Testament, that we need have no difficulty in understanding its nature. In St. Matthew's Gospel, for example, we find the following account of a most important conversation which took place between Christ and his disciples, in which the words of our Lord, if considered in connexion with the occasion on which they were spoken, are sufficient to determine in what that change mainly or substantially consists:—"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."† Now, there can be no doubt, we conceive, that the conversion which our Lord described as becoming like little children is equivalent to that second birth, the necessity of which he so impressively declared to Nicodemus:—"Except a man be

* *Μετάνοια.*

† Matt. xviii. 1—5.

born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* Our Lord, we say, must have referred, on both these occasions, to one and the same change of heart. The difference was, that, in his language to the disciples, he called their attention to the dispositions in which their actual conversion would be made manifest to themselves and others—namely, the dispositions of little children; whereas, in his language to Nicodemus, he made known the Divine Agent of that conversion, the Holy Spirit, whose purifying influence on the soul was symbolized by the affusion of water in baptism, and conditionally pledged to the subjects of that ordinance. But we have proposed to consider the “new creation” of the mind inasmuch as its effects are matter of human experience, or evident to our own consciousness. It will be perceived, therefore, that the agency of the Holy Spirit, and the instrumentality of external ordinances of divine appointment in effectuating the renewal of our nature, are properly distinct from, however importantly related to, the subject of the present discourse.

To proceed then—if, as we have already stated, we refer to the occasion on which our

* John iii. 5.

Saviour made the declaration to his disciples which we have just cited, we shall immediately perceive what that conversion was, which he demanded from his followers as a qualification for the privileges of the heavenly kingdom, and which he described as becoming like little children. Our Lord made that declaration to his disciples in reply to the following question:—"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" They had evidently given utterance to that illusive expectation which had possessed to infatuation the Jewish nation—namely, that the redemption which the Messiah was about to accomplish for his people was of a temporal nature, and that the kingdom, which he was on the eve of establishing, was of *this* world. They were, obviously, coveting offices and distinction in such a kingdom: hence they had disputed who was the greatest among them. It was this low and contracted view of their reasonable and immortal nature, and the design of his own embassy to our world, which our Lord rebuked and aimed to correct in the language which has just been cited. Clearly, then, the conversion which our Lord inculcated on his disciples, and which he described as becoming like little children, consisted in being

no longer actuated by a predominating desire of the wealth, or the honours, or the pleasures of this world; but by a predominating desire of a spiritual and eternal good made known to them in the Gospel — of that happiness which especially concerns the soul, in its capacity of serving God here, and enjoying his presence and favour hereafter. We contrast these desires as they *predominate* in the mind, because, as it is scarcely necessary to observe, our subjection to the authority of Christ cannot involve the extinction or suppression of those desires which take their impulse, and seek their gratification, from this world; but their subordination to such precepts and institutions as contemplate the renewal of our nature after the divine likeness, and our fitness for the heavenly state.

It was a *vacancy* of selfish and inordinate desires with regard to this world, and a readiness, in consequence, to receive his own instructions relative to an unseen and future state, and thus to begin their life *anew*, so to speak, which our Saviour signified by the innocence and docility of little children — an explanation which remarkably accords with his repeated injunction to his hearers, to “labour, not for the meat that perisheth, but

for that which endureth to everlasting life :”
“ to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven,
where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt,
and where thieves do not break through and
steal.”* Such admonitions of our Lord took
for granted, and might suggest to our reflec-
tions, that depravation of religious and moral
principles which is the natural consequence
of a prevailing attachment to the interests and
pleasures of the present life ; and the close
connexion subsisting between the rectitude
of human beings, and their pursuit of happi-
ness in a future state. What, indeed, is it
but the absorbing influence of the *present*,
that constitutes the power of temptation ? and
what is so effectual to obstruct the perception
of moral distinctions ? It must suffice, how-
ever, on this topic, to observe that a covetous-
ness and idolatry of earthly good had darkened
the understanding of the Jewish people to the
import and design of their religious institu-
tions, and the true intent of the “ word of
prophecy” which was read amongst them ;
and had caused them to substitute a precise
observance of the external rites of religion, for
a mental devotion towards God, and a faith-
ful discharge of moral duties. The Heathen,

* Matt. vi. 20.

moreover, as we well know, had proceeded to the most vicious excesses of the passions; had brought to maturity the corruption of human nature; and were sunk in the lowest depths of moral degradation.

Now if we examine the connexion in which the text stands, we shall find this engrossment of the mind by the objects of the present life directly and powerfully contrasted by the governing principle of conduct which distinguishes the man who is in Christ Jesus, and become a new creature. Having asserted and vindicated his claims to be received as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, St. Paul expresses the earnest desire, entertained by himself and his fellow-labourers in the Christian ministry, of that "life and immortality" which the Saviour had "brought to light by the Gospel." The whole strain of the chapter from which the text is taken bespeaks a prevailing solicitude with regard to the invisible and eternal world, and a comparative indifference to the interests of the present state. "We walk by faith, and not by sight." "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all

appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." He instructs us, moreover and especially, that a man who is "in Christ," the "new creature," is actuated to the restraint of his depraved propensities by a constraining principle of gratitude to Christ—by the reflection that the immortality which awaits him is not only a condition of existence above all human worthiness to claim, not only a pure donation of the Deity, but the result and purchase of the humiliation and sufferings of the Son of God:—"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." . . . "Therefore," he almost immediately adds, "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Of what nature those old things were which had passed away, we are informed in the Epistle to the Colossians and elsewhere:—"But now, ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the

new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."*

We have seen, then, that the first converts to Christianity, by the powerful succour which it brought them, surmounted the inordinate, corrupt propensities of human nature, and escaped from the bondage of the passions by which, in common with their fellow-creatures, they had been enslaved and degraded. Their previous unacquaintance with the Gospel, indeed, was no ground of acquittal or justification before God: but it was his merciful purpose to apply an effectual corrective to the depravity of our nature—to establish a most gracious constitution, which, including large communications of knowledge, the application of extraordinary motives, and the presence of a supernatural aid, should be abundantly adequate—(always assuming man to be a *responsible* agent, and his state *probationary*)—abundantly adequate to change the governing principles of mankind, and transform the aspect of the moral world. We do but paraphrase the following language of Holy Writ:—"The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."†

* Col. iii. 8.

† Acts xvii. 30.

But the light and efficacy of the Gospel were not to be restricted to the age in which it was originally promulgated — were not to illumine the path of the Apostles and their contemporaries only, and to disappear with the splendour of their virtues: on the contrary, as their Master had been an example of a resurrection of the human body from the grave, they were themselves to be the first-fruits of a resurrection which was to pass upon the human spirit, from a “death of trespasses and sins” to a life of holiness and peace. They were the earnest only of an abundant harvest. The “Sun of righteousness,” which at length had risen “with healing in his wings,”* was not again to withdraw his beams; but was set in the moral firmament, to give light to all succeeding generations; and is still shining in meridian strength to inspire and sustain the regenerated life of man. Whatever may have been the lot of other ages and nations, no fatal catastrophe has happened to intercept his rays to this people—to replunge us into the gloom of Jewish prejudice, or Pagan superstition—to renew the vices of an unchristian state—to resuscitate “the old man.” The instruments of sanctification have de-

* Mal. iv. 2.

scended to us from their first possessors ; and we enjoy, as our heritage, "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."*

The change wrought in the earliest Christians, therefore, would instruct us, we apprehend, to account "the man in Christ Jesus" to be a "*new creature*," with relation to the dispositions and conduct of mankind when unenlightened by the Gospel, and unaided by the Spirit of God. It would not incline us to expect, far less to desire, that individuals who, at no former period of their lives, had been ignorant of Christianity, should experience and manifest a change in *their* principles and conduct ; should become experimentally new creatures, different from themselves at a former period. It would rather incline us to infer that an early initiation into a knowledge of the Gospel would obviate the necessity of such a change ; would anticipate and suppress the inordinate force of the passions ; and impart a right direction to our earliest thoughts, and springing affections—thus overruling the original bent of our nature, constituting us new creatures from the birth of our reason,

* 2 Pet. i. 3.

and supporting and promoting the principles which it implanted throughout the whole of our lives.

For, be it observed, if the faith which we profess was so efficacious as to control the natural depravity of the human mind, when it had been matured and become inveterate by habit, it cannot be unequal to restrain it in its earliest movements, its feeblest operations. That power which overcame the evil nature when it was "a strong man armed, and keeping his palace," which "took from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoils," can, assuredly, take captive that nature in its infant weakness and defencelessness. Those "weapons of warfare" which were "not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"*—those weapons are surely available to retain possession of the territory which they were employed to invade, and served to conquer—to prevent the rebuilding of those "strong holds" which they were "mighty to pull down"—

* 2 Cor. x. 4.

the reappearance of those towering imaginations against the rule and authority of God, which they overthrew from their loftiest and firmest elevations. The religion which so prevailed as to bring "every thought" of a stubborn manhood, and yet more stubborn age, "into captivity to the obedience of Christ," can doubtless form our childhood and discipline our youth to the service of the Redeemer. At least, it was predicted that the Messiah should thus secure his conquests over Satan, and erect a kingdom on the ruins of the usurper's empire. It was foreshown by the Prophet, that the Almighty would establish and perpetuate his dominion in the conscience:—"After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts; and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."*

In urging this presumption of the effect of Christianity on the youthful mind, we do not forget that the truths which it discloses are more clearly understood, more powerfully grasped, in the full vigour of the faculties; and that so far the Gospel may appear to have naturally exhibited a superior efficacy in the reformation of the first Christians, to that which

* Jer. xxxi. 33.

can be expected to attend it in the guidance and control of youth. But we need not stop to argue that men are, at all times, greatly more impeded, in their practical obedience of Christianity, by the power of immoral habits, than aided by the assent of a fully matured understanding to its reasonableness and value. Moreover, the opinions adopted in our advancing years, as well as the habitual cast of our reflections, are materially dependent on the knowledge acquired, and the sentiments formed in earlier life; and even the lessons of experience are read by the light of received conclusions. In truth, the fact that the Gospel opposed itself to prevailing practices and established opinions, is justly held to account for its rejection by many who lived at the period of its first promulgation; while, for the same reason, its reception by multitudes is, with equal justice, regarded as a signal testimony to the force of that evidence on which it was grounded.

We repeat, then, that it comports with the design of Christianity, and is agreeable to the nature of things, to regard the faithful Christian, "the man in Christ," to be a "*new creature*," in relation to that type of the human character which preceded the introduction

of the Gospel, and pertains to our nature in its ignorance of true religion; and not in relation to his personal experience in the former part of his life. Accordingly, we conclude that those err widely from the scope of the Gospel, who infer and enforce the absolute necessity of such a *change* in the mind of every individual as to constrain or allow him to say, in reference to his feelings and doings in past time:—"Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

We do not say that there are none—alas! we must admit and deplore that there are many—who stand in need of a change as great, it may be, virtually or substantially, as that which passed upon the first believers in Jesus Christ—many who, with the "form of godliness," the knowledge and profession of the Gospel, are wilfully strangers to its power in supplanting the love of this world by a desire of a spiritual and eternal good. But if a far larger portion of nominal Christians were of this description, so awful and melancholy a fact could furnish no reason or apology for asserting and preaching the *necessity* of an entire change in the human mind, as it grows and develops itself under the Christian dispensation. For this is tantamount to

affirming that God has not afforded us the means of becoming holy in our early years; and, so far from exalting Christianity in our esteem as a school of religious and moral discipline, is most unjustly to disparage it in comparison with the tutelage of the Mosaic institution. The subjects of that economy were commanded and encouraged to inform the mind in youth with the knowledge of the true God and his commandments, on the very reasonable presumption that it was greatly less difficult to mould the character to religion at that season than in mature age:—“And thou shalt teach them” (the divine statutes) “diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”*—“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”†—The disciples of that comparatively rude and merely preparatory system of divine instruction, were not left or allowed to suppose that the education of youth in religion would of necessity prove useless; or that the earlier portion of a man’s life, if it should result in any advantage of a religious

* Dent. vi. 7.

† Prov. xxii. 6.

nature, would be found to be valuable principally as its carelessness or profligacy might present a contrast with the earnest piety of his later years, and thereby supply him with a convincing proof of his repentance; of the renewal of his nature, and conversion to the ways of righteousness. And, surely, the Apostles of Jesus Christ cannot, with any reason, be assumed to have lent their sanction to so eccentric a presumption. It was, doubtless, a necessary result of their circumstances, or their peculiar position as teachers of the Gospel, to be conversant with sudden and conspicuous changes of character as the fruits of their labour in that office; but they were far from concluding that such changes would necessarily, or properly, attend the progress of religion, and signalize the success of the Gospel, in a professedly Christian society; among persons initiated into the doctrines of Christianity in early life, and trained to the observance of its sacred institutions. On the contrary, we may cite their authority in confirmation of the presumption for which we are contending—namely, that such persons might, by a timely and proper use of Christian instruction and ordinances, be raised above the necessity of an actual change in their own

character, however much it would behove them to expect temptations; to watch the movements of their own minds; and to seek the continual improvement of their principles, aspiring even to perfection. The injunction of St. Paul to Christian parents, "to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,"* obviously implies that the purification of the corrupt elements of our nature should commence from the earliest exercise of the mental faculties; and that the religious course of the Christianly educated should be — as we find "the path of the just," under an *established system* of divine instruction, illustrated in the Sacred Scriptures—"as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."† It was judged a fair presumption by St. Paul, that if children were nurtured in Christian doctrines and ordinances, the principles of holiness would operate and develop themselves with the powers of reason; growing with their growth, and strengthening with their strength; until they reached the stature, and showed the lineaments of a perfect man in Christ Jesus: thus rendering the whole life, in its successive stages, in the fulfilment of the

* Ephes. vi. 4.

† Prov. iv. 18.

duties appropriate to each of its seasons, an acceptable service to Almighty God, a tribute to his praise and glory.

We must add, especially, that the opinion which we combat is, with no propriety, inferrible from the agency of the Divine Spirit in effecting the renovation of our nature; for the Scriptures, which assert that agency, insist, as we have seen, on the advantages of an early acquaintance with the doctrines unfolded in them. Indeed, it merits our especial observation that the word of God, while it asserts the need and efficacy of a divine influence in the fulfilment of our religious duties, assumes and presses on our attention, together with the influence of early instruction, the power of example and companionship, the force of habit—in a word, the operation of all those principles which are observed to originate so manifest a difference in the minds of individuals : to determine the bent of the thoughts, and the motives of conduct—to found and build up the human character. It is replete with maxims and injunctions which entirely harmonize with the knowledge acquired by observation and experience of the human mind; and prescribes those identical rules for the improvement of our religious prin-

ciples, which our reason would itself have suggested, if the divine assistance had never been revealed and proffered :—carrying us to the unavoidable and most important conclusion, that the agency of the Divine Spirit is exerted in conformity with the laws of our mental constitution ; as far as these are subject to our examination, or come within the scope of our philosophy ; uniting and concurring with them in a manner indiscernible to our consciousness, and inexplicable to our understanding.

We have abundant proof, then, that to lay down the universal necessity of a *change* of mind in persons who were never unacquainted with the doctrines of the Gospel, or unprovided with the means of Christian improvement, is to disparage the sanctifying power of our religion, and to merge a most essential distinction, which, however many of us may desire, it is at our peril, to forget—a distinction between that necessity of conversion which adhered to a condition of heathenism, and that which is superinduced and wilfully incurred under the Christian dispensation. It is to disguise that aggravation of sinfulness and folly which is now imputable to a careless and unholy life.

But it may be alleged, that, with whatever

reason it might have been presumed that an early acquaintance with the Gospel would anticipate the necessity of such a change of mind as the Pagans and many of the Jews underwent, in becoming Christians, yet that, in reality, the great body of true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have experienced such a revolution in their moral nature, as to warrant them in appropriating the language of the text, "Old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new"—that whereas, before that period, the salvation offered them in the Scriptures was a matter of habitual indifference, it is now the supreme object of their desires, and the principal aim of their lives—that whereas, before that period, they were at all times accessible to the seductions of forbidden pleasure, and an easy prey to every temptation, they now "stand in awe" of the word of God, and turn with dread and loathing from the way of the transgressor—that whereas, before that period, the Lord Jesus Christ was a personage of no greater interest to their feelings than any one of the numerous individuals who have figured on the world's stage, any other teacher of morality or leader of a sect, He is now the minister of peace to their conscience, and the

Founder of their immortal hopes—the adorable Medium of access and reconciliation with the Divinity.

Now if such an account of the experience of real Christians in general were strictly true—that is, *virtually or by implication*, if a more or less considerable portion of their lives were wholly useless, as a season of preparation for a future state, and entirely lost to the great purposes of their “high calling of God in Christ Jesus”—such a conclusion would, in no degree, invalidate the inference which has just been drawn from the actual efficacy of the Gospel at the period of its first promulgation. It would properly expose an absence of all congruity in the experience of Christians with the present circumstances, with their spiritual privileges and capabilities. We should have before us this egregious fact—that a religion which once wrought a rapid and a thorough change in the minds of multitudes, whose innate corruption had been strengthened by the power of habit, and a concurrence of most demoralizing influences, commonly, if not invariably, finds our youth untractable to its discipline—the youth of those who are eventually brought under its yoke, and become the willing captives of divine grace, the glad sub-

jects of the Redeemer's empire—seldom or never, at that season, controlling the natural proneness to evil—the egregious fact that an apparatus which, in numerous instances, corrected a full-grown deformity of moral structure, is applied in vain to restrain the tendency to such a deformity; to prevent that distortion of the mind's rectitude which it even availed to cure; to support the weakness of its virtues, and to aid its growth to symmetry and its full proportions;—that it is applied in vain at a period when the mental frame—to use the phraseology which was applied by Burke to a young and thriving people—“is still in the gristle, and not yet hardened to the bone of manhood.”

But that account of the general experience of Christians which involves so anomalous a conclusion, is, we apprehend, as little sustained by facts as it is agreeable to antecedent presumption, or theoretical probability. There are many who, as far as they know the history of their own minds, have never undergone the change in question; who, however, appear to want none of the characteristics of the “new creature,” unless that circumstance itself be an evidence of their natural, unrenewed state. There are many who have no reminiscence of a portion of their lives when

they were wholly devoted to self-indulgence, and entirely strangers to a reverential love of God; when religious principles had no existence in their minds, or lay in dormancy and torpor. And the number is still greater, who cannot recall and specify a *particular period* when a revolution took place in the tendency of their minds—an occasion when they not only felt more powerfully than at any former period the excellence, the authority, and the value of the Gospel—not only received a more effective stimulus to activity in their Christian calling, but when they could with propriety be said to have realized, for the first time, a sense of religion at all—an occasion which separated their history into two parts, as distinct and opposite as light and darkness, life and death.

It is true, there are numbers, on the other hand, who affirm and sincerely believe their conversion to have been as sudden, and evident to the consciousness, as that of the original converts to Christianity; who, on hearing the Gospel preached, were immediately conscious of an influx of ideas of God, of their own nature, and of their future destiny, which were wholly new and unprecedented; and it may seem presumptuous to dispute the account which persons deliver of their own

experience. But, in truth, we often deal with the facts of our own experience, or the processes of our own minds, as we deal with the phenomena of external nature—that is, we unconsciously search out and dwell upon *such* facts, or expound and classify them in *such a manner*, as may suit and corroborate an accepted, favoured doctrine, or preconceived hypothesis. If a section of Christians be taught to believe that sudden and extensive changes in the mind, from a state of alienation from God to a habitude of piety, are proper to the Christian dispensation, and that, so far from showing exceptions to the ordinary mode in which the Holy Spirit operates on the human mind, they indicate the ordinary mode itself, we can scarcely wonder that a multitude of such changes should be collected and placed on record. If they were instructed otherwise, if they accorded to the view now insisted upon of the original design and primitive effects of Christianity, they would be prepared to observe a considerable diminution in the number of such changes. They might then be disposed to admit, that the Christian instruction which they received at an early age was not entirely useless, as an instrument of their spiritual renovation; but that the effects

which it produced were virtually preparatory and incipient to the present habit of their minds; if not in prompting them to an actual obedience of the Gospel, yet in preventing a wider departure from the divine commandment, or in sowing the seeds of a future repentance. They might then allow that, however great and sudden the transformations of character which are occasionally effected by the Gospel, religion more commonly enters and possesses the mind in a manner which eludes immediate observation; pervading it as the sun's light steals across the landscape, and gains upon the face of nature till it glows and rejoices in his beams. They might perceive, that the growth of our religious principles exhibits no such abrupt and total departure from the analogy of human faculties in general, as their account of our "regeneration" would appear to establish; and that our experience with relation to this life—that experience which rarely acquaints us with a sudden exaltation of the *mind* of man, his elevation in an instant, and without effort, to heights of intelligence and power, but which presents him as attaining those heights by repeated endeavours, and a succession of steps — might teach us something — might

teach us greatly more than is commonly imagined, in the advancement of our enduring nature, and our preparation for immortality. Moreover, that account of the new creation which we judge to be given on insufficient data, carries with it a current of human feelings and inclinations, to bias the judgment of those who receive it in deciphering their own experience. If it be assumed that the more sudden and palpable is the change which takes place in the mind of an individual when he repents of sin, and embraces, in sincerity and thankfulness, the overtures of the Gospel, the more decisive is the proof of his being "in Christ," "a new creature," it follows that the Christian who believes himself to be the subject of such a change, will find that remorse and dread of the divine displeasure which might otherwise have punished his neglect of the Gospel in past time, to be overpowered and lost in his certain assurance of the mercy of God, and his meetness for the life to come. Can we wonder, then, that when persons are powerfully, and, to all appearance, effectually impressed with the truths of religion, they should so readily believe that they have never, in the smallest degree, experienced such impressions before; never felt

an uneasiness and weight in the apprehension of their guilt before God ; never breathed an earnest prayer for his forgiveness and guidance ; never performed a single act from a sincerely religious motive ;—that, during the whole of their past lives, they have felt no touching impressions of the goodness and mercy of God, no real concern to obtain his approval and blessing—in a word, no approaches to the present state of their minds, no symptoms of amendment preceding their sense of spiritual health and restoration ? We must surely have observed human nature somewhat more closely than to accept such a statement as necessarily and literally true ; though we may not for a moment doubt the conscientiousness, the *moral* truth with which it is laid before us.*

* The opinion here disputed, it should be remarked, is materially supported by the notion that there is no distinction between a *deficiency* and a *destitution* of religion in those who fail of acceptable obedience to God. In other attributes of mind, other principles of action, we readily admit this distinction. Thus, although we are not accustomed to describe a person as honest, or temperate, or benevolent, who is not habitually or characteristically honest, or temperate, or benevolent ; yet we do not deny him to be occasionally, or to a certain extent, capable of honesty, or temperance, or benevolence. But if the conduct of an individual be not habitually such as to entitle him to be described as religious, there are many who suppose him to

The *practical* effects of that opinion which we have sought to disprove, have often been the subject of regretful observation. Its influence, generally, can hardly be otherwise than unfavourable to the cultivation of religion, if, as we have particularly argued, it keeps out of sight the aggravated sinfulness of ungoverned passions and an unholy life in connexion with the knowledge and institutions of Christianity. Its tendency, however, is more directly pernicious: it counteracts and tends to frustrate, in one most important instance, the great aim of religious instruction. That aim, consistently with all Scripture, is

be destitute of religion altogether. The supposition, we conceive, however well it may square with a particular system of doctrines, is ill supported by the testimony of experience, or the representations of Scripture. We must be contented, however, to refer to the language of our Saviour to the individual who inquired of him what he should do to inherit eternal life. (Mark x. 21.) "*One thing thou lackest.*" Does such language infer that that individual lacked *every thing*?—that he was entirely devoid of the dispositions required in the service of God?—or does it imply that he had made some progress in religion, but failed of that determined, unreserved obedience which Christ demands from his disciples, and less than which he will not deign to acknowledge? It is customary, we may add, to speak of decision and perseverance in religion; but with what propriety, unless our piety may be merely *partial* and *occasional*—may be deficient *in degree*?

to induce an immediate, continual, and persevering application of the mind to the practice of religion, the duties of our Christian calling. Accordingly, it is customary, and of vital importance, to urge the power of habit in the formation of the character; to insist that every action which we perform reacts for good or evil on the principle from which it springs, and reflects a vigour on the better or worse part of our nature; that, on the one hand, every successful resistance to temptation reduces the power of that temptation over the mind, and that, on the other, as every act of intemperance has been said to *tell* upon the stamina of the physical frame, so every vicious and ungodly deed *tells* upon the moral constitution, and affects the probability of our final preparation for the last judgment:—consequently, that all the years, all the days, all the hours, of this our “accepted time,” our space for repentance, our “day of salvation,” are of essential use, uncounted value, and should be redeemed and husbanded to the great work of recovering the integrity, from which we have fallen, and answering the gracious purpose of God in our redemption. But how can such arguments take their just and full impression—how can they be other-

wise than obscured in their evidence, clogged and impeded in their efficacy, by the prevalence of the opinion in question — or any method of explaining the operation and progress of religion which savours of that opinion — the opinion that there is in the lives of all who are in reality renewed after the image of God, and qualified for the fruition of heaven, a particular occasion, a memorable period, when, through a *special* energy of the Divine Spirit, (for special it must be on such an assumption), the appointed means of human sanctification prove, for the first time, to be actually availing?—an auspicious moment, when the film which gathers on the mental eye from the disordered working of the passions is effectually removed, and the man, who was spiritually blind, sees—when the fetters of sin and Satan are broken, and the soul emancipated and regenerated for the acceptable service of God, and the successful pursuit of life everlasting?—Such an opinion, it must surely be allowed, supplies some pretext and apology to the general proneness to indolence and procrastination in religion; and, though its influence may be considerably counteracted in that variety of knowledge, and that mixture and contrariety of opinions, which, happily,

very much correct the hurtful tendency of particular doctrines, and, in some instances, even neutralize their noxious qualities, yet it too evidently begets a notion that the renewal of our fallen nature is absolutely the effect of a divine influence on the mind, and, consequently, that the attainment of a "new heart," a "right spirit," is a result which, if it take place at all, will do so, independently of ourselves; or which it is without our power to retard or promote:—a notion which is fraught with more error, and productive of more mischief, than we can now even glance at.

That opinion, moreover, is often the source of groundless disquietude to persons who have never been the subjects of such a change as that of which we have spoken—*groundless* disquietude, because the word of God instructs us to ascertain our spiritual state from the *present* bent of our affections, the immediate tenor of our lives. It particularizes those dispositions which *are* the "fruit of the Spirit."* It assures us that it is infallibly and perpetually true, that "he that doeth righteousness is born of God."† The manifestations of the "new creation," then, are as distinguishable as the attributes and deeds of

* Gal. v. 22.

† 1 John ii. 29.

righteousness. But these, surely, require not the aid of powerful contrast to render them discernible. We need not the recollection of a dangerous and lingering sickness to assure us of the presence of health; nor the recollection of a total loss of appetite to acquaint us with the sensations of hunger; nor of a blunted or vitiated palate to communicate the relish of a discriminating taste. But still less is it necessary, in order to convince us of our present faithfulness in the service of God, to be reminiscent of a period when we were wholly swayed by the love of pleasure, or the fear of man. Holiness, like light and truth, is manifest in its own lustre: else unfallen beings and the Deity himself were strangers to its evidence. And if the opinion under consideration be, on the one hand, a cause of needless disquietude, it is, on the other, no less productive of a dangerous presumption of spiritual security:—but we must bring this discourse to a conclusion.

Our aim has been to set forth the original design of the Gospel, and its inherent adaptation and sufficiency, at all times, as the instrument of our spiritual renovation. We cannot then conclude the subject without observing, that the prevalence of the opinion

which we have combated suggests a topic of the deepest humiliation and concern. An opinion that a conversion similar to that of the first Christians is generally and permanently necessary — a literal application to ourselves of the language which *they* used concerning their own spiritual renovation — could never have obtained, had not the design of the Gospel been extensively defeated in the lives of its professors. It could never have been imagined, far less assumed and maintained as a dogma, that an entire change of heart and conduct was universally necessary among a Christian people, had not many of them closed their eyes to the light poured upon them from heaven, and repeated those excesses which stained the life of Pagans; perpetrating, with remorseless obduracy, those offences which the blood of Christ had been shed to expiate—in the appalling words of the Apostle, “crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame:”* or had not many of them, like the pharisaical and worldly-minded Jews, been satisfied with a merely speculative belief of the Gospel, and the outward observances of religion. It is, we repeat, a most humili-

* Heb. vi. 6.

liating reflection, that our religious privileges should have been so greatly underrated and foregone, the injunctions and promises of the Gospel so frequently unheeded, as to have given colour and plausibility to a notion that the formation of the Christian character is denoted by a change of which the mind is distinctly conscious, and to which the conduct bears immediate and obvious testimony. The opinion, it is true, may have been suggested, and is doubtless promoted, by a superficial, undistinguishing construction of the language of the sacred writers; but it must have sunk by the weight of its own improbability, had there not been a palpable opposition, a grievous contrast, between the laws of our Redeemer's kingdom, and the conduct of a large portion of professing Christians.

Are we ourselves, brethren, supplying argument to such an opinion by our unchristian dispositions and practices? Are we chargeable with the vices and immorality of the nations that knew not God?—wholly intent upon our worldly aggrandizement and pleasure, and careless of the eternal life made known and proffered to us in the Gospel? Are we unmoved by gratitude to the Son of God, who

became man, and endured the cross to enable us to obtain it—strangers to that constraining love of Christ which, we are assured by St. Paul, is a commanding principle of the “new creature,” the “man in Christ?” If so—we do, indeed, stand in need of a change of mind. We must, indeed, be conscious, if not of new knowledge or convictions, yet of new desires, new aims, new hopes—new principles of action. We must “put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”* But we deceive ourselves in presuming that we stand in the same relation to God, as the objects of his mercy, as did the heathen, when the “true light” first shone upon them, and the treasures of divine goodness were laid open to their view. For we have persisted in those sins which many of them abandoned with penitential shame: “What fruit had ye,” wrote the Apostle to them, “what fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?”† They surrendered themselves to the dominion of the passions under the depraving influence of idolatry, and with little help from the received morality;—but under what teaching—what precepts—what examples have we

* Ephes. iv. 24.

† Rom. vi. 21.

followed in their steps! Still, it is true, we have the utmost encouragement "to repent and be converted, that our sins may be blotted out," however we may have heaped up matter for humiliation, and, by our former negligence, have incurred especial need to "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure;" for "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* But in a careless and impenitent state the expostulations and warnings of Holy Writ address us with a most awful urgency:—"For how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!"† "It had been better for us not to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us."‡

But many, it is hoped, amongst us—would it might be said all!—are practically concurring with the divine purpose, however much our need of increased activity and perseverance; in promoting the renewal of our minds after the image of Christ; treasuring his words in the heart, and seeking the aid of his Holy Spirit. Let us, then, apply the subject as an incitement to entertain still higher views of the peculiar privileges derived to us from the

* 2 Pet. iii. 9.

† Heb. ii. 3.

‡ 2 Pet. ii. 21.

knowledge of the Gospel, and the establishment of Christian ordinances, and of the corresponding extent of our obligations. Let us hold ourselves as predestined and capacitated to be new creatures; in the language of St. Peter, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that we should show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light."* And with such a persuasion of our character and destination, may we recoil from sinful practices of any kind, as though by consenting to them we were voluntarily resigning the incalculable advantages of a civilized state, and relapsing into barbarism, consenting to become savages;—rather, making an infinitely worse exchange;—for what is our share in the benefits of civilization—our heritage in the fruits of science and learning—of a merely intellectual cultivation, compared with our part in that redemption of our species which has been accomplished by the Son of God—which, of culprits before the Almighty, and outcasts from his kingdom, hath given us the inheritance and confidence of his children; made us "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ!"†

* 1 Pet. ii. 9.

† Rom. viii. 17.

SERMON XVII.

MATT. XXII. 39.

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

IT must be evident, on the least consideration, that this commandment assumes the existence of a preestablished standard of moral rectitude as the basis of universal happiness; without a reference to which standard, it conveys a sense most deficient and unsatisfactory. In other words, the injunction to love our neighbour as ourselves takes for granted a law by which the love of *ourselves* is to be governed—a rule by which our own good is to be sought, our own happiness advanced and perfected:—unless, indeed, we premise that the selfish principle in man, or the desire of his own advantage, is guided by infallible wisdom, and uniformly determined to that mode of thinking, and that course of conduct,

which secures to him his purest and most enduring felicity. But no such wisdom, no such worthiness, can be predicated of the love of self. To say nothing of the positive ignorance and speculative errors which beset mankind in the pursuit of happiness, and the endeavour to better their condition, the love of self is a perverse and wayward propensity: the *will to be happy* is itself averse to the light of reason, and imperfectly subject to the power of truth; and not, in every instance, because we are wanting in benevolence, or indifferent to the welfare of another. The commandment, we say, to "love our neighbour as ourselves," must be based on a pre-existing determinate rule of righteousness.

Accordingly, St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, instructs us that our obedience to this commandment is equivalent to a fulfilment of the divine *law* relative to our fellow-creatures:—"He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh

no ill to his neighbour : therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* St. James also has given us an identical explanation of the precept under consideration. Indeed, our Saviour himself had previously and most expressly declared the commandment to "love our neighbour as ourselves," to be one of those two great ordinances which sustain and comprehend the entire law of the Creator :— "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."†

Here then must occur the momentous reflection, that the love which we are commanded to extend to our neighbour is in strict conformity with the love of God : that the *two* great commandments, on which is suspended the whole law, must never be detached or stand alone in our thoughts and estimation ; but regarded as inseparable columns supporting the entire edifice of religion and virtue. It must be evident that the love of our neighbour as ourselves may be in direct opposition

* Rom. xiii. 8.

† Matt. xxii. 40.

to the love of God. Suppose, for example, we find our pleasure, or imagine our advantage, to consist in practices which are sinful and forbidden by the Divine Word: the love of our neighbour as ourselves would unquestionably incite us to abet and encourage him in the commission of sin, and thus our conformity to the second commandment would aggravate our departure from the first. It is a self-love, then, that allies itself with a spirit of obedience towards God which is to regulate our sympathy in behalf of a fellow-creature: a self-love which consequently prompts us to the practice and promotion of all goodness; coveting supremely the approval of the Deity, and expecting his unclouded and eternal presence. We are admonished, then, and be it our care to remember, that all that affection, if so it may be called, which is entertained towards a fellow-creature in a disregard of our duty towards God, is of small account in his judgment; and, so far as it operates in a manner repugnant to his laws and institutions, it must needs be regarded as fomenting and diffusing a spirit of disaffection to his government: as tending to an universal alienation from the God and Father of us all. And thus it is that the love of our neighbour may

become no better in its nature, while, in this aspect, it threatens infinitely worse consequences, than that sympathy of feeling and community of purpose, which combine and inspirit men in insurrections against lawful governments; in their resistance to equal laws, and a monarch to whom they owe a most affectionate allegiance. To proceed:—

If the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves be a compendious expression for that branch of the divine law which relates to our conduct towards our fellow-creatures, we are relieved from the necessity of vindicating the precept to the letter. Considerable objections, it must be acknowledged, would lie against its literal, unqualified interpretation; for it must seem irreconcilable to the constitution of our minds, that we should love our neighbour—every individual, as the term is justly understood to signify, who may come within the reach of our influence, or whose interests may be affected by our conduct—in the same degree that we love ourselves. It must appear impossible that the circumstances of another should affect us with as lively emotions of pain and pleasure, joy and grief, hope and fear, as our own. The feelings of sympathy appear, in their very nature, to be

inferior in intensity and duration to those of self-love; and to be so for manifest and the wisest purposes. Moreover, we are especially dependent, as individuals, for the supply of our wants, and the materials of enjoyment, on the continued exertion of our own faculties; on our own knowledge and prudence and activity:—a condition of existence which seems to exempt us from an obligation to consult the interests of another equally with our own; with equal ardour, penetration, and sensibility. And, farther, the precept, if interpreted to the letter, would imply a prohibition of degrees, or allow no scale of proportion, in the benevolent affection; whereas the instinct of nature and the constitution of society have marked out, as the objects of a peculiar sympathy, the individuals connected to us by the ties of kindred. These and similar considerations would present undeniable obstacles to a rigidly verbal exposition of the commandment. But all such objections are obviated by the simple and repeated explanation which the sacred writers have given us of its drift and import:—namely, that the love of our neighbour as ourselves is exemplified in the practical fulfilment of the law.

The law which says, "Thou shalt not covet," assumes the principle of appropriation, or confirms the right of property, and therefore distinctly recognises that law of nature and society which commits to each individual the pursuit and custody of his own happiness, or renders him the founder and the guardian of his own wellbeing and prosperity. The fifth commandment approves and consecrates the love of kindred as a principle of action; and as the claim to filial piety is founded on the affectionate solicitude and unwearied kindness of parents to their children, that commandment commends, by implication, the affection of gratitude, as a motive of conduct. The Christian religion, then, would stand acquitted of the imputation of inculcating a benevolence which might justly be regarded as a forced or exotic, were it a possible, production of the human mind. It lends no countenance to any system of philosophy which, in order to improve the happiness of the world, and to refine and sublimate the human character, would supersede the principle of personal appropriation, or equalize the conditions of mankind; and which, under the show of a purer philanthropy, holds in disdain or indifference the relations of kindred as reasons of prece-

dency in our affections, as well as the principle which prompts a return of generous offices, or reciprocates the feelings of kindness and beneficence. It were needless, and beside our purpose, to examine such a system on other or general grounds: we affirm only that the religion of Christ affords no support to a theory so imaginative in its character; so incongruous to our natural and apparently insuppressible feelings; and so incapable, as may securely be asserted, of permanent practical illustration. Undoubtedly, the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves contemplates the welfare of the *whole* community: and hence we may observe, in passing, that it supplies a firm, immovable basis for the right of self-defence, and the institution of penal laws. It also imposes, we may add, a control on the emotions of pity, or, rather, it makes it our duty, in the exercise of our benevolence, to study the most effective methods of alleviating the sufferings of mankind in general; to strengthen the hands of that fervid and aspiring philanthropy which kindles the intellect in its service; which traces so many streams of misery to their hidden fountains in the waste uncultured mind of man; and seeks that the wretched-

ness incident to our species may be, as far as practicable, averted, as well as universally allayed. But the affirmation of Holy Writ, that a due benevolence is exemplified in the fulfilment of the law, is tantamount to a declaration from the Divine Legislator, that the greatest amount of happiness in general is attained in the allowance and cherishment of all those principles which the law supposes and approves.

Taking, then, the explanation which the Apostle has given us of the second great commandment, it follows, that that commandment binds us to pursue the happiness of our neighbour, inasmuch as it is dependent on our observance of the law. Accordingly, it is allowed that we cannot absolutely value his personal safety, his property, his reputation—an instrument of his welfare, or element of his comfort and satisfaction, as though it were our own; yet in whatever instance, *any thing that is his* may have been brought into danger, or may suffer diminution, from an excess of our passions, from an arbitrary, capricious, or inconsiderate indulgence of our inclinations—in that instance, we are bound to hold it to be as precious and inviolable as our own: to exercise a sympathy in behalf

of our neighbour as sensitive and vigilant as the love of self.

We can do little more, in these limits, than suggest some primary and general positions on the comprehensive subject before us; but, in adverting to the liability of our neighbour to suffer wrong from the excess of our passions, it is important to intimate, that as *property* is the most effectual means of self-gratification, the instrument and representative of an indefinite variety of pleasures, accommodations and luxuries, the desire of wealth, it is evident, must become the ruling passion of a civilized community. The Christian, therefore, must perceive that in the strict subjection of that desire to a scrupulous conscience, to the supremacy of truth and justice, will he especially manifest his love to his neighbour; demonstrate the moral energy of the faith which he professes; and illustrate the excellence of the Christian religion; — that excellence which a farther consideration of the commandment under discussion may bring more particularly into view.

Having referred thus generally to the rule by which the love of our neighbour is to be guided, we proceed to remark the necessity of that *love itself*, in order to the observance

of the rule, and the consequent use and value of the second great commandment, inasmuch as it founds the fulfilment of our duty to our neighbour on a principle of universal benevolence.

There is, confessedly, a law of equity which prescribes the conduct of man towards his fellow, whether unfolded in the exercise of reason, or more explicitly revealed in the Holy Scriptures, awakening universally a sentiment of moral approbation. That law, as its Great Expositor has admonished us, is the foundation of the precept, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise:"*—a precept which mankind are continually urging in their transactions one with another; which we are very rarely in the condition of not *knowing* in what manner to apply; and at all times *profess* to venerate and obey. But we lack that affection of the mind which alone can prompt us to fulfil the law: we fail of that love to our fellow-creatures which moved "the Father of all" to promulgate it to his rational offspring; to place it among the elements of their knowledge; to impress it on the conscience; and

* Luke vi. 31.

even to restore the characters in which it had been originally written, and, by signal manifestations of his own interposition, to attest its rectitude, and confirm its authority. The precept adverted to has at all times received the assent and plaudits of mankind; but how scantily it has been honoured in their observance, appears in a humiliating saying, which has obtained an almost equal currency with the precept itself—namely, that every one is unjust in his own cause—and why? Clearly, because he is careless to cherish, he does not aspire after, a righteous sympathy in the cause of his neighbour—a sympathy which restrains, or rather supersedes, the selfish and injurious propensities; operating a quickness to discern, as well as an anxiety to avoid, the danger or possibility of inflicting wrong; and in all oppositions of interest, or conflicts of feeling, predisposing to adjustment and reconciliation. We are wanting in that concern for the welfare of others which alone can kindle and sustain the love of justice; which, rather, under the guidance of an active intelligence, is itself the love of justice;—for what is this high attribute of character, but a desire of that happiness which it is the end of justice to diffuse and perpetuate in the world? Our

moral convictions, our intellectual perceptions of the right and the wrong in human conduct, are of little value to our practical virtue, any farther than they meet with a response in the feelings of the heart, and are seconded by the strength of congenial affections; for these are manifestly the incentives to upright conduct; these are the active powers of goodness. To fulfil the rule of duty towards our neighbour, it is essential that we sympathize with him in the sense of his equitable claims, and actually desire his possession of that happiness which the law of all righteousness demands for him. Accordingly, it is the purport and excellence of the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves, to engage us in the cultivation of such a benevolent disposition towards mankind *universally* as induces, in our conduct towards every *individual*, the easy and spontaneous observance of that rule of equity between man and man which commends itself to our reason, and binds the conscience as just and good; which we approve as impartial spectators; and which, in the clear, unbiassed exercise of our judgment, we should demand to be exemplified towards ourselves.

The affection of sympathy, that principle by which the human being extends or trans-

fers himself into the condition of his fellow-man, participates his state and prospects, and communicates alike with his painful and pleasurable feelings—that tendency which the Almighty has impressed upon our nature to restrain the force, and overrule the career, of those passions whose immediate object is self-gratification—a force which is ever threatening to bear away the mind from the circle of social concord, and to propel it (if we may so speak) in one direct, continuous, unbroken line of selfish and interested exertion—that principle of attraction in the rational universe—that law of kindred spirits, which, if not essential to the being of society, is, at least, the source of its virtue, and the fount of its purest enjoyment, the Christian religion would exalt into an active vital principle of social virtue—would render effectual to the fulfilment of all rectitude towards our neighbour, by indefinitely enlarging the sphere of its influence, or increasing the number of its objects. We say by *indefinitely enlarging* the sphere of its influence; for the whole worth of sympathy, as subservient to the practice of the right, is derived from its impartial nature, or the universality of its objects. As a limited and arbitrary principle, it is essentially perverted from this

purpose, and transmuted into an opposite quality. Instead of expanding and purifying the heart, it nourishes and matures the unsocial and malevolent nature; exasperating all private and public animosity, the dissensions of friends, the feuds of families, the strife of sects and parties, and the hatred of nations. It multiplies the occasions of transgression, and extends the community of crime: actually banding men together, and emboldening and inflaming them, in a war against justice, and tending to exterminate the love of man, the human being, our neighbour. It is the degenerate proneness of our sympathy to be continually contracting itself within some narrow circle, and expending itself upon particular individuals and communities; thus inclining us, in innumerable instances, to partake of the feelings, not of the sufferer, but of the doer of wrong; to appropriate his causeless or unappeasable anger, his contentious temper, or malignant purpose, and even the spirit which, without provocation, can work the evil of another. But, like the vital fluid in the animal frame, our sympathy must support the life of virtue by an uninterrupted, equable flow, though with a difference of volume, through the entire social body. Its merely local, partial activity is

symptomatic of irregularity and disorder in the moral functions. Christianity, we well know, inculcates a sympathy which is essentially *philanthropic* in its character. It allows no invidious prejudicating divisions of mankind into friends, and strangers, and enemies; but rejects such distinctions as abhorrent to its nature, and subversive of its purpose; and realizes in the principles of a common nature, and the universality of the divine law, a tie of brotherhood with every individual of the species, constituting every one our neighbour whose happiness is subject to our influence; who pleads his rights, or makes known his sufferings; or whose circumstances appeal to our justice and compassion.

And as the Gospel allows no exceptions in the objects of our sympathy, so it requires us to evince that sympathy in every one of those numerous relations which we may sustain towards them. It sanctions no exclusive or disproportionate attention to any *one* office of benevolence, or to any one claim which our neighbour may prefer to our regard for his welfare. We can scarcely be surprised, indeed, that mankind should regard the distribution of *alms*, or the communication of their *property* to the indigent, as the distinctive province of

benevolence, and appropriate to it the name of charity:—not surely because that exercise of love to our neighbour is less obviously a *duty* than any other virtuous action whatsoever; for not more certainly does the instinct of man impel him to seek the relief of his necessities at the hand of his neighbour, than his reason and conscience bear testimony to the rectitude of that appeal which is made to his sympathy by his fellow-man. In truth, the duty of relieving the indigent and distressed, though commonly distinguished from justice in the ordinary acceptation of the latter, is an essential branch of that more comprehensive rule of equity which directs us to do unto others as we would they should do unto ourselves; and accordingly, no duty is more expressly enjoined both in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. But as property is the principal means of self-gratification, it is no less effectual as an instrument of charitable and philanthropic exertion. It is this which invests its possessors, in an eminent degree, with the power of doing good, of succouring and befriending their neighbour. With this we save our fellow-men from hunger, cold, and nakedness; we provide for the sick a physician, for the ignorant an instructor, for

the oppressed an advocate; we make the poorest of mankind partakers of the blessings which attend the progress of knowledge and the arts, and even engage in their behoof that exquisite ingenuity in which man seems especially to imitate the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, and aspires to work miracles in behalf of his species; repairing the defects of nature, supplying a destitution of the senses, imparting the uses of language to the speechless, and faculties of perception to the blind. —We need not wonder, as we have said, that the commendation and praises of charity should principally rest on the donors of their property to the poor and necessitous. It might rather surprise and humble a Christian people to reflect, that the extensive applicability of wealth to the promotion of the common welfare, is a consideration which operates so feebly as a motive to its acquisition. In the esteem of St. Paul, the ability to benefit his fellow-man was the choicest privilege which gold confers upon its possessor. Accordingly he enforces it as an incentive to industry, as a motive to productive labour:—" Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, *that he may have to give to him that*

needeth ;"*—fit disciple of Him who had said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."† Still it must be insisted that liberality to the poor is but one office of that benevolence which opposes itself to the desire of self-indulgence and aggrandizement in general; which claims to control every selfish propensity to which we are liable, and to preside over the whole of our conduct towards our fellow-creatures:—a benevolence which sympathizes with our neighbour, whatever be the relation which his circumstances bear to our own; and, moreover, consults for his feelings as they are naturally modified by his particular rank, pursuit, or occupation, or the stage which he has reached in the journey of life; by his position among the members of a family, or the subjects of the state—by any one of those causes which so manifestly vary the working of individual minds, and so endlessly diversify and complicate the phenomena of the moral world. Our religion inculcates, and is competent to realize, an habitual regard to the interests of others, in whatever manner they may become implicated in the prosecution of our own wishes and designs—a sympathy in their behalf which takes pre-

* Ephes. iv. 28.

† Acts xx. 35.

cedency of every selfish gratification and enterprise, and, in a word, corresponds to the supremacy and comprehensiveness of that law, of which it is the living exemplar, and which binds us in every condition, and at every period, of our existence.

We have considered the second great commandment as enjoining such a degree of interest in the welfare of others, as may supply a competent incitement to the fulfilment of that law of equity which is revealed in the Divine Word, and approved by the conscience—such a sympathy as may enable us practically to recognise the rights of every other individual to be as sacred as our own rights, his sufferings equally deserving of relief as our own sufferings, and his errors of judgment and infirmities of temper, equally with ours, occasions for toleration and forgiveness. Now it is observable, and has often been matter of remark, and sometimes even of objection, that our Saviour has occasionally inculcated the love of our neighbour in the most absolute, in wholly unqualified terms—in language which, if strictly understood, would compel us to forego the right of self-defence; to relinquish the claim to restitution or reparation for wrongs inflicted on us; and even to forbear

remonstrating against an unjust demand of our neighbour. But this unmeasured language is sufficiently explained by the exceeding deficiency of human benevolence in general, and ought impressively to remind us of the excessive, prodigious energy of the selfish principles in our ungoverned, unsanctified nature—the universal and violent proneness to err from the law of righteousness. That insatiate love of self, which craves its own indulgence, and works its own ends, in a total indifference to the claims of others, whether we call it an inordinacy or misdirection of the selfish principle, is, palpably, the instigator of all injustice; of the manifold crimes which disfigure the lives of men, and embitter the experience of the world. This it is which creates the energy of the injurious passions; the endless craft of avarice, the capacious, unbounded grasp of ambition, and the pest of a callous, remorseless sensuality. “Love,” writes the Apostle, “worketh no ill to his neighbour.”* The words are a manifest truism: but it was the weighty and enduring import of his declarations which St. Paul regarded, and not a perishing novelty to the apprehensions of his readers. How preg-

* Rom. xiii. 10.

nant, how momentous a truism!—Had man retained in his bosom the love of his fellow-man, there never would have appeared in the human family, a murderer, a thief, an adulterer, a slanderer—a worker of ill to his neighbour. The human dwelling would never have been sought by the spoiler, nor approached by the steps of the assassin—nay, the homes of uncounted multitudes would have been saved from the stroke of the invader. Man would never have trembled in his weakness, nor have been corrupted by his power; nor would his energies have bred the worm of conscience, corroding his prosperity with the secret dread of final retribution. If the sense and charities of a common nature were not extinguished by the rage of the passions, there never would grow up amongst us men who can obtain the confidence of a fellow-creature to defraud him of his property—can reduce him to beggary to glut their own cupidity and appetites—can even betray the charge of the dying parent, and prey upon the food of orphans; nor would there be living amongst us men who can use the hospitalities and friendship of a fellow-creature to profane the sanctuary of his affections; nor men and women who can requite the purity of affection,

and fulfil their most sacred vows, by treachery and desertion. And if there prevailed a cordial sympathy for our neighbour, the pure incentive to rectitude, there would be none solicitous for the name, the reputation only; of probity: resenting, as an almost inexpiable offence, a whisper of suspicion, a breath of imputation on their character; but retiring into solitude to the memory and furtherance of deeds that offend the conscience, and shun the light. The professions of integrity, loudly and everywhere heard, would not be answered by a mutual apprehension, and the steps of a distrustful caution. For there would be no insidious schemes, no deceptive contracts, no unscrupulous, delusive promises, no smiling enmities, and secret defamation. The unrighteous act, the injurious purpose, would be unknown—nay, the envious wish unfelt; the hard, discourteous word unspoken, unwritten; nor should we so often dwell upon the verge of mutual disgust and alienation. There would be no appetite for resentment, no relish in revenge, no mood for detraction—the spirit of injustice would cease from the life, and vanish from the consciousness of man.

Reflecting, for a moment, on the guilt and

unhappiness of mankind through a general defect of benevolence—on the worth and necessity of that attribute in all time, and in eternity, it need not raise our wonder, and far less provoke our cavil, that our Saviour should have enjoined the duty of loving our neighbour in the strongest, in unmeasured terms. Indeed, when He inculcates a principle of conduct in language of unlimited import, when he overlooks terms of comparison and proportion, are we not forcibly admonished, that the principle itself is above all comparison—that it spurns competition? “If any man,” said our Saviour, “come to me and *hate* not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”* In perusing this passage, do we need to be informed that, to “*hate*,” in the Scriptures, often signifies not to love supremely or exclusively, and to be thereby guarded against the inference that Christ inculcates the hatred of relatives? Do we not rather feel ourselves admonished, with an infinite force, of His claims to our supreme, undivided affection? and taught to loathe the bond of the nearest relationship as oppressive and ignominious fetters, if applied

* Luke xiv. 26.

to corrupt our principles of religion, and to deter us from obedience to the Gospel? In the same strain, he has enjoined our duty to our neighbour:—"If any one strike thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."* Are we disposed to infer from this injunction that our Saviour has left his disciples exposed and defenceless in the world? Do we not rather perceive that he has laid a most imperative interdict on the malevolent passions, and published an absolute proscription of revenge?—instructing us, that we had better abandon the defence of our own persons, than assail another in a vindictive spirit—better tempt the malignity of our neighbour, than for an instant indulge or tolerate our own—better admit the weapon of the adversary into our own flesh, than, after having wrested it from his hand, deliberately plunge it into his bosom.

But, unqualifiedly as the duty to our neighbour is occasionally enforced in the Scriptures, there are many, it is to be feared, who entertain a most inadequate conception of its actual and indubitable import. Indeed, it is too evident, that there are professing Christians who, instead of receiving the divine command-

* Matt. v. 39.

ment, to love their neighbour as themselves, in its true and comprehensive sense, and hearing in the utterance of it a wholesome rebuke and admonition, are flattering themselves with the presumption of their innocence with regard to their duty towards their fellow-creatures. However they may acknowledge their offences against God, they often assert that they have done no harm to their neighbour; implying, it would seem, that they had fulfilled the whole law with relation to their brethren, achieved an entire mastery over the selfish passions, and discharged aright the duties of the second table. By such language, however, it is hoped, they mean to signify only that they have done no more harm to their neighbour than is compatible with a sincere *desire* to fulfil the divine will concerning him, and may consist with a state of acceptance with God, in virtue of the sacrifice of their Redeemer: but if this be their meaning, let the love of God to the penitent transgressor be the theme of praise; not the love of the transgressor to his fellow. Yet it is possible that, by having done no harm to their neighbour, they would intimate that they have inflicted no more injury than they have suffered, and have cultivated so much of

a charitable and patient spirit as that of which they have been themselves the objects. Now, it is not surprising that mankind should look hard and doubtingly on a commandment which requires them to love another as themselves; but it is matter of amazement that they should interpret it to import only that they should love their neighbour to the same extent, or in the same circumstances, as their neighbour loves them; and, consequently, to enforce nothing more than a reciprocity of benefits, and, by the same rule, to permit the return of ill-will and indifference. But not to dwell on so palpable and gross an error—one so adverse to all human improvement, and repugnant to the very nature of virtue—a just apprehension of that cardinal precept of our religion cannot but remind us that we have all very greatly erred, in whatever difference of degree, from the divine rule of our duty towards our fellow-creatures; and must surely excite us to seek, with the help of God, an amendment of our conduct and dispositions towards them. It behoves us, then, to fix our thoughts more steadily on a future and eternal happiness, in comparison with which the objects of this life, which stimulate our cupidity and ambition, and obstruct our fulfil-

ment of the great law of equity between man and man, are reduced to insignificance, and become in a manner annihilated; and thus to lighten the task of self-denial by nourishing the desires and capacities of our immortal nature. And, when discouraged in our fulfilment of the sacred precept by the conduct of our fellow-creatures, the Word of God has counselled us to contemplate the unsparing and long-suffering goodness of our Heavenly Father; and so to pacify and abash our irritable nature, and exacting spirit—especially, to look upon the aspect of the Divinity “in the face of Jesus Christ,” that, when severely tried in our patience, we may “consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds;” * ever keeping before us that perfection of charity exemplified by our acknowledged Master, and our Guide to everlasting life.

* Heb. xii. 3.

SERMON XVIII.

LUKE VI. 35.

Love ye your enemies.

WHEN, in the last discourse, we cited, as a key to the sense of this commandment, the assertion of the Apostle, that "love is the fulfilling of the law," we regarded the law, more particularly, as it was expounded by our Saviour; for, as Christians, it is incumbent on us to bear in mind that whereas the Jews, after the manner of human nature, had narrowed the sense and application of the divine law, He, besides having convicted them of an actual perversion of its meaning, has elicited its full import, and placed it clearly before us. In one most important instance, his construction of the law relating to our neighbour was conveyed in the very terms in which it was delivered—namely, in his teaching that the

law prohibited, not only the actual infliction of injury upon a fellow-creature, but the indulgence of such ideas and feelings as naturally predispose us to acts of aggression and injustice, or render us more easily accessible to temptations to commit them. This has been justly inferred from the terms of the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet;" but it should be remembered also, that the commandment under consideration was imposed upon the disciples of Moses in precisely the same language as that in which it is enjoined upon the followers of Christ;* and it would be manifestly absurd to suppose that a commandment to *love* their neighbour as themselves applied a restraint to the outward conduct only, of those to whom it was delivered; leaving their feelings and dispositions, or the movements of their minds, to their own absolute choice and direction.

There was, however, a comprehension in the import of the divine law with regard to our neighbour, which appears to have been rather left to be collected by the more devout and considerate among the Israelites, than positively affirmed or specifically inculcated: conformably with the rude conceptions of an

* Lev. xix. 18.

early age in the history of our fallen species, and that state of minority with relation to spiritual privileges, in which the subjects of the Mosaic dispensation are represented in the apostolical writings. Our Saviour, indeed, very clearly recognised, or, rather, directly affirmed, a principle of condescension in the Deity, in the adaptation of his conduct towards the Jewish people : for example, in the matter of divorce. “The Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?” (He had previously asserted one exclusive ground of divorce, and they now sought to fasten on him a charge of contravening the authority of Moses, the minister of the laws of God.) “And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this precept;” * or, as his language is recorded by St. Matthew, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so.” † In all consistency, then, we may conclude, that

* Mark x. 5.

† Matt. xix. 8.

the commandment, "to love their neighbour as themselves," was imposed on the Jews on a similar principle: that is, that the Almighty forbore to correct, and in a manner tolerated, a partial apprehension of their duty towards their fellow-creatures; reserving the special requirement of an universal and persevering benevolence to a future period, when His gracious purpose in behalf of mankind would be more clearly revealed, and more commanding inducements be supplied to the "fulfilment of all righteousness" towards God and towards man.* To this view of our duty towards our

* The following consideration, however, on the application of the term "neighbour," insisted upon in a valuable work on the religion of the Jews, may be of some weight on this subject:—"The Jewish religion introduced and inculcated the great principle of benevolence, as far as it was possible to practise it under the circumstances in which the Hebrew people were placed, and the design for which it was selected. All the surrounding nations were idolaters, any intimate society with whom they were commanded to avoid: and no strangers could be permitted to dwell amongst them, until they had renounced idolatry; for such permission would have exposed the Jews to temptations too powerful for them to resist, as subsequent experience clearly proved. Hence the law particularizes the children of their people, and the stranger who dwelt among them, having renounced idolatry, as the objects of their benevolence, lest it should be conceived to contradict those injunctions of the same law, which

neighbour we would direct some farther attention; reminding Christians that *they* are called to cultivate a benevolence of a far higher character, more enduring in its nature, as well as wider in its scope, than was expected from mankind either in an ignorance of the Gospel, or a merely partial acquaintance with its principles—even a benevolence which takes for its pattern the goodness of the Deity; seeking to be “merciful, as our Heavenly Father also is merciful,”* “perfect, as He is perfect.”†

The fact which remarkably distinguishes our Saviour’s exposition of the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves, is, that he has extended the application of the term “neighbour” to our enemies; and, moreover, has instructed us that it is in our observance of that commandment towards *them* that the Almighty regards us with especial approbation, and expressly vouchsafes us his acceptance

“prohibited all connexion with their idolatrous neighbours, “and all tolerance of idolaters within their own community; for it cannot be doubted, that had the Jews been “expressly commanded to love their neighbours, though “idolatrous, they would have mistaken the precept as a “permission to tolerate their worship, and to partake their “festivities.”—*Graves on the Pentateuch*, p. 187.

* Luke vi. 36.

† Matt. v. 48.

and reward. His words are these:—"As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same But love ye your enemies."* Now it is at once observable, that every one is in danger of appearing in the character of an enemy whose advantage appears to have come into competition with our own; and a dread of inconvenience or detriment is not very easily separated from a feeling of dislike or hostility towards the individual who has been the instrument of awakening it. Our Saviour, therefore, has enjoined us, in the first place, to single out *that* individual as our neighbour, in our obedience of the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves. The same important application of the term "neighbour" is virtually impressed upon us in the narrative, entitled "the Parable of the Good Samaritan," delivered in reply to the particular question "Who is my neighbour?" In that narrative, our Saviour told the querist, that the man who performed the duty of a neighbour

* Luke vi. 31—35.

“unto him that fell among the thieves,” was the man who checked his own wish and purpose, to answer the claim of a fellow-creature on his sympathy and compassion; or preferred the act of succouring a neighbour in his wounds and helplessness, to the enjoyment of his own ease, or the prosecution of his own journey. We are especially admonished, then, that the more our inclinations are opposed, or our interest appears to be threatened, in any engagement or transaction with another—in other words, the greater the sacrifice of selfish dispositions which we are required to make, in order to accede to his just claims, to respect his feelings, or to relieve his distress, the more specifically the term “neighbour” applies to that individual; and, in our conduct towards *him*, the divine rule of our duty is peculiarly commended to our Christian estimation, our reverent observance.

It was remarked, in the former discourse, that the commandment under consideration, being a summary of the whole law with regard to our neighbour, entirely sanctions the especial love of our kindred. Now the words of Christ, which we have just cited, cannot be reasonably understood to cast a disparagement on that particular affection: on the

contrary, inasmuch as our relatives are most immediately affected by our conduct, or their happiness is most directly entrusted to our keeping, the divine commandment, as it bears upon them, must be, in the highest degree, imperative and indispensable. But, surely, the words of Christ must remind us of an essential distinction, between the love of our kindred as it is sustained and invigorated by a sense of duty, and as it is the natural result of their affection to ourselves; or rather of the pleasure or advantage which their affection is found to communicate, the "good" which we conceive them to have "done unto us." It can hardly be disputed, that much of the affection between relatives—that exquisite ingredient of human happiness, and signal instance of the bounty of God—is of the latter description, and can rank no higher in the scale of moral excellence. It is true, there is no virtuous principle which we more readily assume to be a part of our character than the love of our kindred, or the conscientious discharge of the duties which we owe them. Nothing is more common to mankind in general than to applaud others, and to esteem themselves, as excellent husbands, or wives, or parents, or children; and too often an

unblamable conduct in one or more of these relations, is pleaded as a counterpoise to the neglect of devotion, or a general laxity of self-government. But in how many instances would this presumed fulfilment of our relative obligations be found to be little more than the spontaneous return, the unbidden growth, of the love of another. The husband has a confiding and compliant wife, the wife a gentle and considerate husband, the parent a hopeful or tractable child, the child an indulgent parent—there is, speaking justly, a reciprocity of affection, an interchange of benefits, a community of good. In all such instances, the relations of kindred bring with them a large accession of happiness, and call loudly upon us for a return of gratitude to the Giver of all good; but it must be manifest, that where there is no contact and pressure of adverse tempers, no collision of interests—nothing to operate dislike or estrangement in ungoverned minds, there can be no decisive proof that the love of our kindred involves any steadiness of moral principle, or a predominating regard to the divine commandment. The affection or good-will which thrives under circumstances so entirely congenial, may be rooted in nothing more virtuous than the tendency everywhere

manifest to "love them which love us," and to "do good to them which do good unto us." We would nowise be thought to depreciate the reciprocation of an affectionate kindness; especially inasmuch as there are *some* whom no expressions of affection in their homes can win or propitiate; whom no gentleness can soothe, and no submission can satisfy—persons who vex the bosom of families with an irritability and spleen which, elsewhere, they find it easy to control, or dare not venture to indulge. But, unquestionably, we estimate our duty to our relatives (as well as to others) perniciously low, if we judge it sufficient either to abstain from "doing" them "evil" aggressively, or without provocation, or to "do" them "good" merely as a return for the benefits or happiness received from them: forgetting that we *prove* the moral strength of the love we bear them, by steadfastly resisting the access of those feelings whose nature it is to divide the hearts of relatives, and break up the concord of families; by checking the secret growth of alienation and disgust; and consulting their welfare, even though urged by unkindness and ingratitude to forsake them—"doing them good, hoping for nothing again." We are not, however,

unmindful, that the harmony existing amongst kindred is frequently, and in all its fulness, the fruit of a mutual forbearance, and an actual cultivation of Christian principles, which, assuredly, will not fail of their reward hereafter, because so abundantly compensated in the present world.

But to attain, in any adequate measure, a conformity to the divine commandment with regard to our neighbour, we must not be satisfied with an examination of our conduct or feelings towards any individuals whatsoever who stand in the relation of friends and benefactors; or whose ends and interest are blended or consentaneous with our own. We are directly cautioned against such a resting-place in our character as a member of the family of man—nay, we are taught to account it as the outset merely of our course—the starting-post in the career of Christian benevolence. Friendship and gratitude, we are warned, are but instances of a partial and occasional benevolence which mankind, in all ages, have practised, and of which the worst of men are not incapable: our charity must reach a far higher pitch to answer the end of the Gospel, and characterise the followers of Christ:—“For if ye love them

which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same."

This view of the precept to love our neighbour as ourselves being expressly commanded and urged upon us with regard to individuals with whom we may happen to come into collision, should dispose us to estimate, at its intrinsic worth, the sympathy which we may feel towards the inhabitants of distant countries, or those of our own country with whom we have no such intercourse and engagements as prove the habitual tendencies of the mind, or with whom we have no important conflicting interests to adjust and reconcile. We need hardly say, that the truly benevolent person recognises a bond of union with his fellow-creatures in every clime and condition, and will cultivate the sympathies sown in our common nature; and that, in his pecuniary contributions to their relief and welfare, he may largely exercise that charity which giveth or "lendeth" to others, "hoping for nothing again." But we have reason to beware lest we compute the degree of our benevolence as if it expanded with our ideas of distance

and extension: as if it fully occupied the ground beyond which it could penetrate, or overspread and filled up the spaces through which it passed. A great poet indeed, philosophizing on "man," has compared the gradual enlargement of our affections to a sequence of circles formed by a pebble thrown into a lake; embracing successively our friends, our neighbours, our country, and all humankind. But this account of the matter must be taken with very considerable limitations. It is possible that the benevolence of an individual may seem to reach, in its fulness, the extremity of the globe, while in the sphere in which he immediately moves, there may be a lamentable deficiency of kind and charitable offices; a heartless void of generosity, and even of justice. It is possible that a man may grow indignant at the injustice and oppression prevailing in a remote part of the world, and, at another, be incapable of resisting a temptation to secure a trifling advantage by deceiving the ignorance and credulity of some individual. Can it much avail him that the effect of his liberality is felt in the opposite hemisphere, if it be banished from the little circle of his daily transactions? Is it of much account that he feels an enthu-

siasm in the cause of universal justice, and in behalf of the indefeasible rights of mankind, while he makes a reserve of truth and rectitude in dealing with his neighbour? Every one must have remarked how possible it is to flatter ourselves with a show of generous emotions—with feelings awakened by the power of the imagination—a philanthropy that kindles with abstractions and generalities; but expires under a personal annoyance and vexation;—how possible it is to advocate the claims and plead the miseries of our fellow-creatures, and yet be bereft of all pity and compunction in our conduct towards an individual who has offended us; unmerciful to his errors, reckless of his sensibility, converting whatever pertains to him into matter for scorn and exasperation against him;—how possible to appear, in the advocacy of all mankind, a minister of justice, an angel of mercy, and exhibit a ruthless power, a fiendish malignity, in a contest with one of our species.

Our love to our neighbour is to be computed, not by the number or distance of its objects, but by the sacrifices of selfish or irascible feelings which it enables us to make, whether in behalf of communities or individuals, in a public capacity or in private life; and, if this

be not assiduously acted upon, our character for Christian charity will be essentially deficient, and an absolute failure. The portrait may exhibit some relief and boldness in the outline, but it will be a miserable daub in the detail. Our charity is to be estimated by the ascendancy which it acquires over the propensities most opposed to its exercise:—over the cupidity that would tempt us to cast obscurity on a question of right or obligation,—over the indolence or luxuriousness that obstructs our exertions in behalf of the distressed,—over the pride that subjects our inferiors to disdain and contumely,—over the irritable self-esteem that disposes us to the excitement of anger, and gives us to the impulse of revenge,—over the envy that repines at the success of a rival, and suffers in the prosperity of another. We manifest the love of our neighbour in proportion as we exemplify it towards one who is crossing our path—a competitor for the gains which we are aiming at, or the honour which we are striving to win;—towards an antagonist who confronts us with ignorance, misapprehension, and even perverseness; making equitable allowances for such infirmities of human nature, and, notwithstanding, estimating his pretensions as we would our

own; weighing them with the impartiality, if not with the composure, of a judge, and becoming the advocate of our very opponent:—nay, more, in proportion as we can avoid the taint of ill-will against those who dislike and contemn us, and our patience holds out against a sense of injury, or under actual provocation.

We have hitherto considered the injunction in the text as incumbent in our conduct towards any who advance upon us claims repugnant to our own inclinations, or who aim at objects which apparently clash with our own pursuits and advantage; inasmuch as we are apt to account and deal with such as our enemies; to forget their title to our sympathy as neighbours; and to eye them with fear and aversion. But, obviously, that injunction is equally binding on us in our procedure towards those who have actually done us wrong, or who, in reality, bear us enmity. To these, indeed, the words of our Saviour more immediately refer:—"Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you; bless them which curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer him also the other." It will be readily perceived, that our Saviour has not here made it our duty to

submit unresistingly to the injustice of our fellow-creatures, or denied us the right of self-defence. The precepts of our religion cannot, any more than its doctrines, be clearly ascertained from detached, isolated passages in the Scriptures : the import of a particular admonition in the Gospel must be examined through the medium of its general ordinances, and the prevailing tenor of its exhortations. The great rule of our conduct under consideration inculcates a principle of universal benevolence ; but it were a strange species of benevolence which, by a toleration of injustice, should tend to a dissolution of society, and prevent the possibility of its existence. It merits observation, however, that, as members of the social body—we speak of the intelligent and reflecting community—we disown the right of *retribution* on our fellow-creatures. We justify the enactment of penal laws as a means of preventing the commission of crime ; and we urge the execution of those laws, on the ground that the prevention of crime is dependent on the certainty of its punishment. In thus defending ourselves against the aggressions of our neighbour, we act, in no degree, inconsistently with the commandment to love him as ourselves ; for.

surely, we should betray a most misguided concern for his welfare in casting the rein upon his worst propensities—in tempting him, with a license of which we, as Christians, should tremble to take advantage—in putting into his hands the weapons of his own destruction. Truly, that law is merciful which retards the growth of malignant passions by checking the power to gratify them, and prevents a more rapid and a worse demoralization of evil men; and even the terror of death is an instrument of benevolence, so far as it precludes or overpowers the temptation to enormous crimes. The fact, we say, that, as members of the social body, we repudiate the principle of retribution, is worthy of consideration; since it argues, as we apprehend, the great reasonableness of the Christian morality in its prohibition of *private* revenge; inferring the conformity of that prohibition with the last conclusions of this enlightened age. Every individual amongst us, be it observed, is aggrieved by the violator of the laws, by the assailant of the common security and welfare; yet, in our collective capacity, though in a better condition to estimate the guilt of the offender, in a superior freedom from prejudice and passion, we disown the right of retribution

on our fellow-man; responding to the voice of the Almighty in his word, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." By what argument, then, can any one justify the act of retaliation as an individual, the return of "evil for evil?" Where, indeed, the law fails him as a barrier to the injustice of his fellow-creatures, he must needs become his own protector; but on what principle shall he plead his right to take vengeance on his fellow, and assume that last prerogative which is disclaimed from the seat of public justice?—But we pass from this suggestion to the immediate drift of our Lord's injunction.

The love demanded for our enemy is simply a disposition to subserve his welfare, a repugnance to render him evil for evil. Love, as that term is commonly understood, is the effect of admiration, or gratitude, or consent of opinions and habits; it is constituted of feelings which shrink instinctively from the wrongdoer and the foe: and hence, in spite of our better knowledge, the divine precept to "love our enemies," wears an aspect of severity and impracticableness which is alien from the government of the Almighty; for "His commandments are not grievous,"* when consulted

* 1 John v. 3.

In the exercise of our reason, and with the knowledge of his "plenteous" mercy. The precept is fulfilled so far as we retain and cherish a disposition to promote the welfare of any who have done us wrong, or who hold us in aversion—a disposition which may not only exist in a total separation from all pleasurable feelings, but is compatible with the most painful and repellent ideas of its object; though hardly with a studious or unnecessary avoidance of his presence and society.* The *good-will*, however, which the commandment enjoins towards an enemy must be preserved as a treasure in the heart of the Christian—as a virtue that looks for its "reward in heaven," that strives for immortality, and must "endure to the end." In this respect the terms of the commandment, to love our neighbour as ourselves, are literally, as they are solemnly, binding, and can suffer no freedom of interpretation whatsoever. As we value and pursue our own happiness at all times, and under all circumstances, so at all times, and under all circumstances, are we bound to regard and intend the happiness of our neighbour. No view of our own character, no reproaches

* Such avoidance appears allowable and corrective in particular instances. Matt. xviii. 15.

of our own consciences, no sense of degradation or infamy, can annihilate the concern which adheres to us for our own wellbeing; neither should any baseness of our neighbour be permitted to extinguish our concern for his wellbeing. This should be felt independently of benefits which we may have received at his hands, and in spite of any injury which he may have inflicted upon us—lastingly, inextinguishably as the love of self. Such is that charity which the Apostle has so fully delineated, and so loftily eulogized in an Epistle to the Corinthians.

The disposition to return good for evil is, doubtless, alien from our natural mind, and demands a firm determination of purpose, with the concurrence of a Power superior to our own, to sustain it; but facility of obedience to a precept is, surely, not its most needful or proper recommendation to the Christian. The questions befitting our vocation are these:—Is the conduct in question virtue, moral excellence; and how far is it entitled to that distinction? Confessedly, it is virtue, virtue in its uttermost utility; in its undeniable tendency to assuage the irascible passions; to abate most powerful incentives to crime; to drain most copious sources of human

wretchedness. It is virtue in its highest character of self-renunciation, its severest struggle with the passions; virtue in its loftiest mood, its heroism, its sublimity—in a word, it is virtue pre-eminently worthy of our efforts and aspirations; if we would approve ourselves as disciples of Christ, as subjects of Him “who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, *zealous of good works*”^{*}—a people willing to appreciate, and even studious to discern, the purest forms of rectitude, and to embody them in their lives.

Indeed, to attain such benevolence, it is *peculiarly necessary* to reflect upon our Christian obligations, and to bear them continually in remembrance. In no instance, perhaps, does virtue so evidently lean upon religion for support and encouragement: in no instance is our perseverance in well-doing so ill sustained by considerations, however well-founded and valuable, derived from our experience in the present state. Notwithstanding such benevolence is abundantly commended by its pacific and reforming influence on human society in general; and although it amply compensates to the minds of individuals the

* Titus ii. 14.

labour of attaining it, yet are we constantly solicited by opinions which, if true, would disprove its utility; and which evidently tend to its utter discouragement and even extinction. Persons are continually asserting and maintaining that there is some stage in the progress of human differences, where the love of our neighbour should terminate in a total disjunction of interests and feelings; in a settled disgust, and even a perpetual hate; where the tone of remonstrance should give place to recrimination and invective, and the spirit of forbearance to the thirst of vengeance. Persons are everywhere judging that the offices of kindness, the expressions of goodwill towards a fellow-creature, should be dependent on his character and conduct; everywhere arguing as if the love of their neighbour, the practice of benevolence, were grounded on motives and calculations of an exclusively personal nature, and were reducible to a system of reciprocity, or transactions of barter between man and man; expecting an equivalent for every service which they render, every favour which they confer. We hear them alleging the neglect and ingratitude of individuals, or mankind in general, as a reason for withholding from them their sympathy,

and denying them their friendly offices and benefactions. We observe them folding themselves up in a sullen contempt of their fellow-creatures, or in a close, exclusive regard to their own pursuits and advantage; nay, even tutoring their spirits to a hard indifference to their neighbour, and actually resolving upon selfishness as the *rule* or *principle* of their conduct. The reason is, that in all such moods, persons look upon themselves and their fellow-creatures, no otherwise than as a number of beings associated for the brief period of a human life, and for no higher purpose than to compass, as they are best able, the circle of its pleasures—benevolence is estimated relatively to this world only—virtue is forsaken by piety, and is consequently unequal to the strife with temptation—unequal to combat the irascible passions with no better weapons than are supplied by human hands, and fabricated out of earthly materials. In this contest, especially, she must be furnished with arms of a celestial temper, and be even clothed with “the panoply of God.” To exemplify that benevolence to which the Gospel has called us, we must incessantly recur to the principles of our faith, and our especial vocation as Christians. As such we own an alliance with our fellow-

creatures, not in a community of temporary interests merely, a bond of present expediency, but in the participation of a nature which is immortal, and destinies which are eternal; and we are pledged, under a debt of gratitude which we cannot measure, to promote the kingdom of our Saviour on the earth, the principles of righteousness and peace. As Christians, we are not to exact a claim of desert in the objects of our regard and beneficence; for we are privileged to be "the children of the Highest," and "He is kind to the unthankful and the evil."* Nor are we dependent for the power of forbearance towards the man who has annoyed and troubled us—dependent for the heart to forgive him, on any favourable consequences which may immediately follow such a "ruling of our own spirit." For we are not to lay by our resentment because it is a source of uneasiness and disquietude—a mental incumbrance; or because the offender is distinguished by qualities which invite to reconciliation; but because the Almighty, whom we serve, has cancelled our offences, and has charged us to forgive, in like manner, the offences of our fellow-man—nay, has warned us that he will exact the full

* Luke vi. 35.

penalty of our sins against ourselves, if we do *not* forgive the trespasses of our brother. We are not to recompense good for evil merely because, by overcoming the soul of our adversary with generosity and kindness, we may convert an enemy into a friend; but because we thus adopt the most hopeful means of awakening him to a sense of his own misconduct and criminality, and of promoting the reformation of his character. These are the principles of our conduct as Christians—principles by which, if we faithfully revolve them, the murmurs of a selfish spirit are put to silence, and our charity is even provoked to zeal—all virtue effectually upheld, and powerfully urged to perfection.

The tendency of forbearance and good-will towards the individual who has injured or aggrieved us, to stimulate his sense of rectitude, is an essential fact, on which we here forbear to dilate. It must be borne in mind, however, that such a tendency remarkably illustrates the excellence of the Christian morality, the divine spirit of our Lord's injunction — "Love your enemies; do good to them which hate you; bless them that curse you." By indulging the propensity to retaliate on the aggressor, it is confessed and noto-

rious, that we merely reciprocate injuries, and multiply the pretexts for committing them; perpetuating hatred and contention, with "confusion, and every evil work."* By asserting our right of self-defence, we place, it is true, an important check upon the depraved propensities of individuals, while we minister to the common security. But if, when provoked to no causeless or forbidden anger, we control the emotions of resentment, and quell the vindictive spirit; if, when warranted or bound to withstand the injustice of our enemy, we evince an innocence of any hostile purpose or bitterness of feeling against him; if, when pressed by a demand, which justice would permit us to resist, we, notwithstanding, concede to it, in acknowledgment of the common fallibility, or of human defection, and as a sacrifice to the spirit of peace; if, especially, when an individual who has done us wrong, or bears us ill-will, feels his need of our assistance, or would be benefited by our interposition to befriend him, we embrace the opportunity of demonstrating our readiness to promote his welfare;—if we thus deal with our enemy, we make our single appeal to his moral principles—to his involuntary reverence for goodness—to the authority

* James iii. 16.

and power of his conscience :—we exemplify a benevolence and magnanimity of character, which, contrasted with, and exposing the turpitude of his own conduct, may haply penetrate him with a sense of his injustice or malignity, and may even cover him with shame and confusion. Such was the argument which the Apostles of our faith addressed to their converts and associates—such was their policy in their warfare with a hostile world :—“ If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink : for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.”* The Apostle exhorts us—for so we understand his language—to a kind of revenge altogether different from that which is most congenial to our nature, and lamentably familiar to the world. He exhorts us to punish the man who has injured us, by acting towards him in such a manner as to turn his reflections upon his own unprincipled conduct and malicious passions ; and thus, in effect, to bring together and inflame upon his defenceless spirit, the materials of self-condemnation, of acute compunction and remorse—“ heaping coals of fire upon his head.” But to what end, in this season of our common probation, this space for repen-

* Rom. xii. 19.

tance, this day of our salvation, should we aim to subject a fellow-creature to self-condemnation, the reproaches of an exasperated conscience? To what end but to subdue him to contrition, and to bring him under the dominion of better principles—"to overcome evil by good?"*

In concluding, then, a general view of the duty of love to our neighbour, especially as inculcated by our Saviour, we would again urge the necessity of imbuing our minds with *Christian* aims and expectations, in order faithfully and cordially to fulfil it. The consideration is sufficiently obvious, but preeminently needful. For it is an egregious practical inconsistency in the Christian world, and a special illustration of our Lord's assertion, that the wisdom which characterizes men as "the children of this world," no longer distinguishes them as "children of the light," that though we acknowledge the morality which the Gospel teaches to be our rule of

* The Apostle refers, we conceive, to the stimulus given to the conscience in the feeling of shame, to which we naturally apply the epithet *burning*; and not, as appears to be commonly supposed, to the nature of kindness to appease and mollify its object, as if he alluded to the fusion of a metal: though, doubtless, this effect of returning good for evil enters into and promotes the repentance of the offender.

duty, and while we purpose and endeavour, in some degree, to conform to it, we are prone to content ourselves with no higher or more cogent and effective motives, than would operate in the human mind, and incline the world to virtue, if the Gospel had never been revealed :—so far, neglecting those capacities for holiness which are supplied us in the economy of our redemption by Jesus Christ :—so far foregoing that provision which God has made for the renewal of our minds after his own image, in which we were created, and which is so manifestly obscured and defaced in the defect of our benevolence—the governing principle of the Divine Nature—for “ God is love.” In the exercise of love to our neighbour, as has been intimated, we are ever and anon, if not habitually, taking the doings of man for our pattern, and looking to some temporal advantage as our “ recompense of reward.” Can we wonder, then, if our hearts do not answer to the injunction of our Redeemer, “ Love your enemies ?”—if we take no impulse, if we catch no ardour, from the strain of such exhortations — if we hear them with utter apathy, and even with distaste and a certain impatience — if they bring into our view only a wide and discouraging disparity

between the spirit of the Gospel and the complexion of our own conduct, the tone of our own feelings? Can we expect to thrive in the virtues of a Christian, with no better aliment to our spirit than a Pagan could have given us? That "wisdom" "descendeth" from *above*, which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy." We must seek it in the pursuit of that end which Christ has set before us, and in the imitation of that example which he has left us; and we must "ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not."* When Christ delivered the injunction under consideration, these were his words:—"Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be children of the Highest." He tells us, that by gratuitously benefiting our fellow-creatures, and cordially forgiving their offences, we are imitating the glorious attribute of the Deity; doing his bidding of paternal kindness and authority; and maturing for a superior state of existence, where enmities shall have for ever ceased, with the base and miserable passions that engendered them: where the links of affection are never broken,

* James iii. 17.

and friendship is eternal. It is by His gracious promise of a "great reward in heaven," that we are encouraged and strengthened in the self-denying principles of Christian benevolence; and by His own example—His works of beneficence, his labours and sufferings, in behalf of a "faithless and perverse generation"—His forbearance towards his enemies!—towards men who spit upon the face, and tore the brows of Innocence, and mocked the Just One in his agony!—His love unconquerable to his enemies—which they could no more overcome than they could hold him in the sepulchre! Well might St. Paul exhort the emulous members of the primitive church, and Christians of all time, to "covet" and "follow after charity," thus taught, and thus exemplified by the Son of God!—to make the attainment of it the study, the labour of the mind, the great pursuit of life! Well might he expatiate on its incomparable excellence, and account all gifts and faculties, all treasures of knowledge, all powers of understanding, all supernatural endowments — insignificant in the comparison, as "childish things!" Well may we hold that principle which was thus distinguished and embodied by the Divinity in the person of Jesus Christ, to be of

supreme importance—to stand alone in excellence—to be of worth unimaginable—to be that in the mind which “never faileth”—the *immortal* principle—more precious even than our faith, dearer even than our hope!—“Now abideth faith, hope, charity; these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”*

* 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

THE END.



