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*S. H. 1825*

# S E R M O N S

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

BY

WILLIAM PALEY.



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EDITED BY

THE REV. EDMUND PALEY, A.M.

VICAR OF EASINGWOLD.

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*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following Sermons, now published for the first time in the third edition of the Author's collected Works, are given also in this detached form for the accommodation of the purchasers of former editions, who will of course accept this apology for the unconnected state in which they appear. It has been thought right to reprint, in these volumes, Sermons 7, 9, and 11, because they form part of the subject of two of the new Sermons.

E. P.





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# SERMONS.

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## I.

### WHY MEN RESIST AND PUT ASIDE THE THOUGHTS OF RELIGION.

ST. JOHN III. 19, 20.

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

OUR Lord, two verses preceding these, states the momentous truth, that "God had sent his Son into the world, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But in the works, no less than in the words of God, the intention is not always the same with the effect, but often of a nature entirely contrary. Who can doubt but that the intention of our Maker, in giving us the faculty

of speech, was mutual utility and pleasure? Yet the faculty of speech often produces the very reverse of these, mutual annoyance and offence. Our joints and limbs were formed, without question, with a design of being instrumental to action and motion; yet the effect not seldom is, that they are the seats of pain and disease. It fares in like manner with the Christian dispensation. Its intention was to redeem souls, to save them from sin, from the devil, and from death; to turn us from our sins; to lead us into the ways of life, and to conduct us in the paths of righteousness, which is the path to Heaven and to God. This was its intention, but far different its effects: its effects, in many instances, are altogether opposite; they are not unfrequently such as to increase the condemnation and punishment. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace?" It has been noticed, that this is no more than what happens in the gifts of nature: they are all intended for use, capable of abuse; calculated for good, convertible to evil; designed and suited for our benefit, turned by ourselves to our prejudice, perhaps to our destruction. What is generally true of the endowments which we receive from the hands of our Creator, may be expected to be true of spiritual things, of

the works and operations of grace, distinguished indeed from the course of nature, but proceeding from the same cause ; and more particularly true of those things which were meant and intended to be not only benefits but trials. Religion is a trial of character. The world we live in is a place, the life we live is a state, of trial and probation. Christianity itself is a part of this system. It is a trial to all, to whom it is proposed ; infinitely to their advantage, if accepted ; at their utmost peril, if put away and rejected. “ Ye put it from you,” says St. Paul, “ and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.” Therefore we are not to wonder as though it were any thing strange, that the intention of the Gospel is different from its effects. It is, in a certain degree, the case with all things which belong to us. It is more particularly true, as it was more particularly to be expected of every thing which partakes of the nature of a trial, which is the case with revealed religion.

And it may be observed, that it is not perhaps either a harsh or unauthorised interpretation of some prophetic descriptions of Christianity, to apply them to its character, spirit and intention, rather than to its effects, which are in so many other cases, as well as in this, contrary and opposite. “ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” This, in the strong eastern manner, as ap-

plicable to Christianity, to which it has generally indeed been understood to allude, paints the *spirit* and *tendency* of Christ's religion, which is exceedingly peaceable, rather than its *effects*, which are often in this respect frustrated and overcome by the perverseness of man.

Amongst many causes which occasion the thing we speak of, namely, why the effect of Christianity so frequently does not come up to the intention, is the cause assigned by our Lord himself in the text: "men love darkness rather than light." Light, he states, is come into the world, yet mankind continue unenlightened; and why, because men love darkness rather than light. This our Lord lays down as a *fact*: men love ignorance rather than inquiry; to be without a sense of spiritual things, rather than to search into them; a determined resistance of the thought of religion, rather than any indulgence, or perhaps it ought to be called, intrusion of it. Of this fact, of this observation, experience attests the truth; and irrational as such conduct may seem, the inducement to it, and the motive of it, is not difficult to find out. Ignorance is a great *flatterer*, a great soother of consciences, an opiate to the souls of men. While we remain in ignorance of the revealed will of God, we shall readily bring ourselves to think, that whatever it be, it must be a law of ease and indulgence to human infirmities; under which name of "human infirmities" we shall include every sensuality to which we

are addicted, every sin which we have set our hearts upon, every passion we feel, and every temptation we wish to comply with. The heathen world counted and thought in this manner, because they were ignorant; and many Christians count and think in like manner, because they are ignorant also.

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

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

Again : As ignorance of the laws of God encourages an opinion of ease and latitude in those laws, which is not true ; so an ignorance of our own religious character will make us at peace with ourselves, and cause us to fondle an opinion, that we are better than we seem to be, or, in reality, than we are. Here, if in any thing, men love darkness rather than light ; error without examination, rather than truth with it. For what shall we gain by examination ? Only more and more insight into the deep and numerous corruptions of our hearts, our lives and conversation. Things little thought of, or unthought of altogether ; circumstances unperceived, and slight failings without number, will start up to our view. In the negligent way of life in which we have passed our days, we found some degree of contentment ; at least, we were not very unhappy. We judged of ourselves by what we remembered of ourselves ; and if any thing troubled our memory of its own accord, it was some black offence, of which in some part of our lives we had been guilty. Recollections such as these can be, we must suppose, but very few with any, except with notorious offenders : with a very

great part of those who hear me, it is possible there may be no such things to recollect. That I can allow very well, and believe to be true; and the absence of such recollections keeps up a kind of peace in the soul; but is it a just, well-grounded confidence, which the event will verify?

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

They are at ease in their ignorance; but what is ease which ends in perdition? It is beyond all doubt an ease which will become the sorest of



all evils, worse than any terror, any disturbance, which inquiry and reflection can produce; and reflection is recommended by an assurance, that it will lead to good. You will allow it possible for a man to be in the wrong way, and not to be thinking of the way he is in; to be entirely careless about it. And how is such a person ever to be brought into the right way, except by opening his eyes, coming to the light, taking up the matter and consideration of religion in earnest, and with seriousness. It is utterly necessary that something should be done in order to save his soul, and this must be the beginning of the work. It signifies nothing to allege, that this disposition to religion and to serious reflection is natural to man. This may be allowed to be true, but is nothing to the purpose; for the question is really come to this, whether our souls are to perish, or this disinclination, whether natural or not, be got the better of.

One would suppose that light was always more grateful than darkness, knowledge than ignorance: but our Saviour knew it to be otherwise; he knew what was in man; he knew, that though lost and bewildered, though not seeking their way, but going on unconcerned, and not knowing whither, by reason of the darkness which surrounded them, yet they would turn away from that light which alone could guide them in safety;—that if they could obtain for themselves any thing like ease, though it were only that false ease which results from inconsider-

ateness, insensibility, and ignorance, and that upon the most unfit subject of which men can remain insensible or ignorant ; they would prefer even *that* to the anxieties which they foresee must follow, from entering upon religious meditation and inquiry. And to every argument and every plea which may be offered, or which may pass in our minds in favour of putting aside the thoughts of religion, this single string of conclusions is an answer : 1. That it is by religion alone that a sinner can be saved. 2. That religion can have no effect where it has no influence. 3. That until we come to think, to ponder, to ruminate upon religion, it is impossible that we should acquire its instruction ; and still more impossible, that we should feel its power, its authority, its rule and direction, in the regulation of our hearts, and in the government of our lives.

## II.

## FEAR A RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE.

## PROVERBS XIV. 16.

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

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

deep into the heart of one man, makes little impression upon another; and this depends not only upon a difference of disposition, which yet is very great, but upon a difference of circumstances, which are various beyond computation. Still, if we do but really become religious, from whatever origin we set out, we are authorised to hope that our religion will save us.

Thus it is, that religion sometimes, not seldom indeed, has a *violent* origin in the soul, and begins in terror: "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil." The punishment of men's crimes overtaking them in this world, brings them to reflection, and reflection brings them to God. And not only does the punishment of the law effect this change, but the punishment of misery which men endure in consequence of losses either in their health, or fortune, or reputation. These are stings which sin inflicts, and we hope that they are sometimes available to repentance. We know but too well that they do not always answer their purpose; because we know, that when the frights or pains are over, men go back to their old courses. This may be a frequent, but it is a deplorable case; for little can be hoped for from lessons and admonitions addressed to a conscience upon which even the experience of danger, and mercy, and suffering takes no hold: one cannot indeed say, makes no impression, but takes no firm and abiding *hold*. First, then, let those who have suffered either alarm or affliction by

reason of their sins, and under the visitations consequent upon sin, yet who, so soon as the calamity or fear is passed, forget it, and return to their vices with as much greediness as ever, let *them* know that they are far gone, and deep sunk in iniquity. "They have," as the Apostle expresses it, "yielded their members servants of sin unto sin;" not merely sinners, but slaves of sin, chained to their vices, under the dominion, and in no slight sense, in the possession of the father of sin. Secondly: Repentance, though violent in its beginning, though founded in what some will call a base motive, the dread of punishment, may yet be sincere; and if sincere, it will be effectual. The shock which the mind receives *may* loosen and unfix that hardness of the soil into which the seeds of religion would never before penetrate. All chastisement is not lost; grief is not always wasted. There is a "godly sorrow, a sorrow unto repentance." Many may cry out not for form, but in perfect sincerity of heart, "we are grieved for our offences, and laden with the burden of our sins;" and true religion *may* spring from the sense and weight of this burthen.

Again: It is in misery and distress, though not the misery and distress brought on by our sins, but unconnected with them, that religion sometimes has its origin. Ease, and prosperity, and wealth, and pleasure, and gaiety, and diversion, are sadly unfavourable to the impressions of religion; they are not *inconsistent* with these impressions; to say that;

would be to say more than the truth ; but they are *adverse* to them. “ How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven ; ” that is, one either intent upon acquiring riches, or addicted to the pleasures which riches procure, and lost in them altogether : and it may, perhaps, be difficult to find a person who is not in fault by one or other of these means. However, what ease and wealth efface, the troubles of adversity write and engrave deeply on the heart. Seriousness is, above all things, necessary to the reception of the word ; therefore, whatever makes men serious, prepares them for becoming disciples of Christianity. Sickness, poverty, disappointment, the house of mourning, the loss of our family, the death of our friends, do tend powerfully to produce seriousness, to show us the folly, and unreasonableness, and end of that levity and giddiness which have taken up our time, from which we have drawn our delights. It seems impossible to be serious, and not to think of God and of religion. It is possible in the height and flow of spirits, pleasures and enjoyments ; it is possible also in the eagerness and hurry of business, not to think of those things at all. But when pleasures fail, when pain and misery come in their place, when employment fails, when we can no longer follow it, or when distress is come upon us ; then we naturally draw and turn towards that which was, and is, and always will be a grand concernment, whether we have been accustomed to reflect upon it or not. Yet even in this

case, and even in any case, we may, if we please, avoid the subject; we *may* shut our eyes against, or turn them aside from any object, how great soever, or however near: but it is an unnatural effort so to do.

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

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



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

Fourthly : Pain itself, abstractedly considered, has a close connexion with religious sentiment, inasmuch as it induces us to reflect what creatures we are, and what we are liable to ; particularly, what inexhaustible stores of punishment and misery are in

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

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

## III.

## THE STIRRING OF CONSCIENCE.

## EPHESIANS II. 1.

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

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

The causes of this torpor and deadness, or rather the circumstances under which it is found, have been often assigned. In many cases, I am afraid, it takes place so early in life, that the person can hardly be said to have ever known what the remonstrances and admonitions of conscience were. His conscience may be said to be dead-born. He remembers not the time when he found any check concerning any action which he set himself to do. If there was any pleasure or gratification in view; if there was any thing to be got by the action; that was all he considered about it: its being right and its being wrong

formed no part of his deliberation, nor was he put upon asking this question by any thing which he felt within him. This state of complete depravity is the effect of a totally neglected education, and of being at the same time thrown, when very young, amongst profligate examples.

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

Again: Let the education, that is, *any precise* and particular instruction, have been ever so much or so culpably neglected, yet let even that rude uninstructed mind come amongst examples of goodness, or even keep clear of dissolute and profligate examples, and *conscience will be heard*. Examples themselves are education; good and virtuous examples the best of all education; even innocent and harmless society will produce (or, however, suffer) the natural growth and production of conscience in minds the most ignorant. But when a mind, perfectly ignorant, uninstructed, and uneducated, falls at first into debauched and

profligate society, then it is possible that conscience may *never* spring up; its influence over the heart may *never* have a commencement. This cruel case can never happen but in the instance of parents who are wicked themselves, and undesignedly perhaps, but very effectually, communicate their wickedness betimes to their children, or in the instance of children deprived from the beginning of a parent's care, and not only so, but from the beginning also thrown into bad hands, and into bad society. It is of these instances we were speaking, when we said that there are many unhappy persons in the world, who never remember the time when they were sensible of any feeling or compunction of conscience within them, of any distinction indeed between 'right and wrong.

But, secondly, I will now suppose a more general, and a more natural state, that of a conscience really formed in the breast, and, in some degree at least, performing its office. This once living conscience may, by various means, be reduced back to a state of death and insensibility; nay, it often *is* so. Almost any course of sin will do it, as to that sin. Men always *enter* upon sinful courses under strong temptation: they may go on in them afterwards under less; but the temptation which first seduces them into vice is usually strong. There is a conscience at first repelling, remonstrating, rebuking; but then there is a violent temptation to be opposed. Conscience is overcome: it resists afterwards with

less force, and is again overcome : its remonstrances are now weaker—they are not heard ; being heard, they are set aside. This takes place repeatedly and frequently, with a constant abatement and diminution of strength and force on the part of conscience. The sin, after this, is committed, and conscience is silent. This is the regular effect of any course of sin, as to *that* sin. Let any habitual sinner compare himself at one time with himself at another time ; his former sensations, his remorse, his uneasiness, his scruples, his fears, when he first entered upon a course of sin, with his sensations, or rather, with his want of sensations, now that he has for some time been confirmed in it—let him make this comparison, and say whether the case be not with him as we have described it.

But the misfortune goes farther : *any course of sin whatever* weakens the power of conscience not only as to that sin, but as to all. Either the person reflects that it is to no purpose to guard against other sins, whilst he knowingly, constantly, and wilfully goes on in this ; or else the principle itself of conscience, by being so often overpowered and beaten back in this instance, has lost its spring and energy in all instances. Almost all, even the greatest sinners, have begun with some particular vice. The first encroachment upon innocence and upon conscience was made by some single species of offence to which they were tempted ; but the rottenness spread. A general and complete depravity of character may

grow, and often does grow, out of one species of transgression ; because conscience, which has been put to silence, not by one or two oppositions, but by a course of opposition to its remonstrances, ceases to execute its office within that man's breast ; so that a conscience which was once alive may be reduced to a state of death and insensibility.

There are passages of Scripture which expressly relate to this state, and to a recovery and restoration from it, and which ought therefore to be remembered ; and in the first place our text, and what follows it : “ And you hath he quickened, *who were DEAD* in trespasses and sins ; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience : among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even *when we were dead in sins*, hath quickened us together with Christ.” Eph. ii. 1. And the same idea is repeated, Col. iii. 3.

There is also another remarkable text in the same epistle, v. 14. which has relation to the same subject, “ wherefore he saith, awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” The place in which this text is found, and the subject concerning which St. Paul is in that place dis-

coursing, show sufficiently that the sleep here meant was the sleep of the conscience. Awake thou that sleepest ; rouse thyself from that state of moral and religious insensibility in which thou liest, "arise from the dead," from being dead in sin and trespasses ; so deeply sunk in evil courses as to have become altogether without perception or consciousness of their guilt or danger, which is being dead in this respect.

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

Now this is a state of the soul, which of all others, perhaps, most requires the assistance of God's Holy Spirit. This, in some measure, is intimated by the very term, and metaphor, and comparison which are



made use of, that of *death*. A dead man cannot raise himself to life again ; it must be by an energy from without ; by the help and power of some other than himself that life is recovered, if it be recovered at all. In like manner, the voluntary powers, *without being aided and strengthened* by the holy influence of God's spirit, may be entirely unable to restore a dead conscience to its office in the human breast.

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

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

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

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

The *first* sign, I said—but it must still depend upon ourselves. From what we perceive, we have good reason to hope that power is given us from above, if we will use it. Whilst we were without all thought, all concern, all fear, all anxiety about

our religious state, we were in the worst of all possible conditions, we were in the condition which the Scripture calls being dead in sin. That is not our condition now. We trust that we are quickened, that we are raised again to a spiritual life by the operation of God's spirit.

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

## IV.

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

MATTHEW v. 29.

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

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

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

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

Now our Lord's rule would have taught them another doctrine, and a different train of arguing. It

does not suppose that what we are required to give up is of itself sinful ; but provided it draw or lead us into temptation or into sin, the text tells us, *that* is reason enough for avoiding or resigning it, nay, insists in effect upon our parting with it ; for without so doing, we shall not find the strength or violence of the temptation it brings, an excuse for the vice it tempts us into. The right eye and the right hand are of their own nature to be retained, are what God has given us, and must be supposed to mean, what is in its own nature allowable and innocent ; yet when this right hand and eye offend, that is, seduce, corrupt, tempt us to sin, they are nevertheless to be cut off and plucked out, otherwise the whole body will be cast into hell. It will not serve us to plead that we were led away by that which was most dear and natural to us, and, in other respects, most beneficial and advantageous. We were bound, our Saviour tells us, to part with it, whatever it cost us. So that on all occasions, before we urge or expect to avail ourselves of this plea, of this strength of temptation, it behoves us to weigh well, whether there be no way *of avoiding* it, if we cannot resist it ; if there be any such way, we are thus to avoid it, cost it what it will, be it ever so inconvenient or mortifying so to do. This is what our Saviour in the text commands us.

This much may serve to explain our Saviour's direction. As to the application of it, every one must apply it for himself, to his own particular case ; and

there are few that have not, one way or other, a case to apply it to. By way of making what has been said more plain, let one or two examples be taken to show the force and use of the precept before us.

Suppose now in our calling, or business, or profession, there be some underhand, unlawful gains or practices, about which we cannot satisfy ourselves, but which we have ever been accustomed to, and which, moreover, are so common in our way of life and occupation, that we cannot carry it on to any tolerable advantage without them, what is to be done? If we will believe our Saviour, and go by *his* rule, the advantage we gain by these practices, be it ever so considerable, and the calling too, if it be not worth the following without these advantages, must be given up. Here is a right eye to be plucked out, and a right hand to be cut off, and it matters not what we lose, or how loath we are to lose it. The way of life may not be unlawful in itself, nor reckoned so; yet if it have certain temptations to dishonesty, and if we, from habit, education, or any other reason, cannot withstand them, nothing remains but to get free from them, and betake ourselves to a course of life, if not so beneficial, more innocent and safe.

Or, secondly, it may happen that the situation we are placed in exposes us too much to the vices of drunkenness or debauchery; that is, affords temptations and opportunities, more than, with our propensities to those vices, we can withstand, or actually

do withstand. The same rule obtains in this case as in the last ; that is, we must not attempt to set up these temptations, or the violence of them, as an excuse for our compliance, so long as we had it in our power to get out of the way of such temptations. It is to be feared that many, instead of avoiding or abandoning a situation for the reasons mentioned, on the contrary seek and court such on this very account, in order to find the gratification which their vices and follies present to them : so opposite is the practice of mankind and their duty.

Another thing, which it is oftentimes necessary to give up on this ground, and what is given up with more pain and unwillingness than almost any thing, is company, and sometimes friendships. We do not choose our companions or friends always for their virtues ; nor, to say the truth, are men always agreeable in proportion to their virtues : so that it shall happen, that a very licentious unprincipled person may have found such means to delight and entertain us, to insinuate himself into our affections, that we may perceive very great pleasure in his society. Now admitting it possible, that a man may preserve his own virtue uncorrupted by a course of intimacy with a profligate companion, it is but barely possible. This is what we remember St. Paul says, " Evil communications corrupt good manners. Be not deceived." Let friends, or gay associates, cry aloud ; Eat and drink while we have life, for to-morrow we die : make use then of



the time ; for after we are dead, there is no more room for enjoyment—we become as we had never been born. Yet, says the Apostle, “ Be not deceived.” So here, whatever resolutions we may make, there are many unguarded seasons in a course of intimacy, when your friend will of course endeavour to bring you into some way of thinking and acting with himself ; and you will find your horror and fear of vice decline and wear off by degrees, when it is made familiar to you in the example and conversation of your friend. Now if this be the case, and we shall find it so in fact, however we may reason about it, there seems to be nothing left for a man who pays a proper attention to his virtue, and to our rule in the text, but to renounce and break off all such acquaintance absolutely. This is hard and difficult, we say ; but be it recollected, that Christ knew it to be so ; for he takes his examples from things the most painful and severe. This instance, it is true, requires more than ordinary resolution, for we may have the censure of the world, as well as our own inclination to struggle with. But I can only say that they both are to be set at nought, when our duty and the salvation of our souls are at stake.

But we proceed to consider the reason our Saviour gives for this command. “ It is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

Every sound plan of religion, and consequently the plan of the Gospel, is only putting men in the

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

with the particular kind or state of happiness we are to enjoy, or the punishment we are to undergo, in the next world ; but we may be sure it is in God's power to make them both such as will far exceed any thing we can get or lose in this world, any pleasure that sin can give us, any pain that virtue costs us. This much is intimated, or rather plainly declared, by the words of the text, that what we shall suffer hereafter for our sins is as much beyond any thing we can suffer here by giving them up, as the destruction of the whole body is beyond the loss of a single limb. And then, surely, our Saviour had a right to charge us to suffer the one rather than suffer the other.

It is to be lamented that men cannot be brought to understand, that they are to act in the business of their religion only upon the same principles and grounds that they act upon in their own common concerns and transactions. A situation or pursuit, however pleasant or delightful at present, if we foresaw that it would lead to nothing but ruin and disgrace, we should quit most certainly in common prudence. In like manner, if we had made any advantages for the present, though apparently considerable ; and if we observed that they were very uncertain advantages which the next day or even hour might take away, I suppose that we should prefer a smaller, but more regular return, which might be trusted to always. Now it is but this, and no more than this, that we

are required to do by Christ's command. Sin, be it ever so pleasurable or ever so profitable, must not be long; its pleasures and its profits must end with our lives, generally much sooner: but who shall count, who shall say what or when will be the end of the misery it brings us to? If we gain the whole world and lose our own souls, you may remember who it is that hath said it profiteth nothing. Few, or rather, be it said, *none*, ever went through more for their religion than St. Paul; yet he could say, and he had every reason to know, "that his sufferings were not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed:" all the struggles, all the self-denial, all the pains we go through to preserve our virtue, will meet with, we may be assured, a proportionable reward, a far more exceeding weight of glory.

Upon the whole, then—to sum up the doctrine of the discourse,—if there be nothing in our business, condition, or manner of life, which tempts us to practise deceit, injustice, or any thing which we cannot reconcile to our consciences; if it does not breed in us pride, covetousness, desire of worldly wealth, and the contempt of every thing beside; if there be nothing in our way of life, company, or pleasures, which leads to drunkenness, revelling, or excess of any kind, we may think ourselves very happy, and have cause to be thankful. If there be any such occasions or temptations more than we

can withstand, or in fact *do* withstand, it is the command of our Saviour—and the express command which none can alter—that we fly from them though it oblige us to suffer as much as the loss of a right hand or eye ; though we give up an advantage ever so great, or part with a pleasure we are ever so fond of.

## IV.

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

## PSALM XL. 15.

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

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

Now all who feel within themselves a strong con-

viction of their sin, I desire they will go to the text I have read to you. It describes their case; it exposes their feeling and their sufferings, and it leads them into the right direction. The words of the text bear about them the marks and tokens of reality. It seems impossible to entertain a doubt but that the person who wrote them was at that time labouring and struggling under powerful workings and impressions of conscience; under a deep sense of guiltiness before God, and of the shame and misery, self-condemnation and debasement, which belong to such a condition when it is perceived. Perhaps it is more than we ought to presume, and more than the truth, that this person was a greater sinner than the generality of men. It might be only that he perceived his condition; and there is as much difference between the man who does, and the man who does not perceive his situation, as between two sinners of very unequal magnitude.

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

First, He is covered not only with remorse and fear, but with confusion. "My sins have taken such hold upon me, that I am not able to look up." It is a strong, significant expression, "have taken such hold upon me," for they do indeed take hold; they seize the mind. The remembrance of sin, with the reflections which belong to it, possesses, where it

enters, the whole soul ; and it ought to do so. As they take hold of the thoughts, so they do of the spirits. Men are disturbed in their spirits by the evils of life : but sin, when understood, makes the evils of life nothing ; it displaces them, by presenting something more near to us than they are. The force with which sin perceived, sin understood, seizes the spirits and the thoughts, is well expressed by the Psalmist, when he tells of their taking hold of him. “ And they overwhelm him with shame and confusion.” It was not the shame of men, for his sins might be unknown to them : it was not *that* sort of confusion which he alludes to, but it was shame and confusion before God. And this very often exists in reality ; nay, so much so, that the man who has never felt it ought to doubt with himself whether religion be indeed within him. It is a different thing from the shame of men : it is a secret humiliation and debasement, when we call to mind our behaviour, as towards God. The Publican in the Gospel would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven. He felt his humiliation and self-debasement ; yet was it entirely between his God and him. The Pharisee saw him afar off, but it is not said that he saw the Pharisee, or that he was moved by the presence of men, or by any consideration of the presence of men : nay, the contrary must be taken for granted, to give proper force and significance to the parable. It must be taken on the Publican’s part, to have been a secret and close communication with his Maker.



Now observe the progress of the Psalmist's meditations : " My sins have taken such hold upon me, that I am not able to look up ;" and why? You hear the reason : " They are more in number than the hairs of my head." *This is to perceive sin.* When we begin to see our sins as they are, they crowd and multiply upon us beyond number. An ordinary mind, or a man in an ordinary state of mind, bears nothing, possibly, in his memory as touching his sins, but a few flagitious, very vicious actions, if he has in the course of his life been guilty of any. But these cannot, in the worst men, be said to be more in number than the hairs of his head. It is only when a man comes to think more deeply and closely upon the subject, that he is made to perceive the number of his sins, and understand them, as the Psalmist did. Let us place fairly and fully before our eyes the laws of God. Let us call to mind, not slightly, but thoroughly, our thoughts, our affections, our desires, and passions ; what has passed within, as well as what hath passed without us : and lastly, our words, and actions, and conduct ; not in a few great instances of flagrant offences, which may, indeed, or may not be really more sinful, but are more strikingly such, because coming under human laws and opinions. I say, let us not confine our attention to these, which we are apt to do ; but direct it to the examination of our conduct in its ordinary course. Let us do this, and we shall see that our sins are more in number than the hairs of our head. For example : What is it which

we owe to God, which we know to be due to him? “To love him with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our strength.” Have we done so? Have not, on the contrary, our lives been a constant failure of duty in this very article? Wherein have we come up to this rule? Wherein have we not come short of it? Yet it is both our rule and our reason. The rule carries our obligation no farther than reason carries it. Such a being, such a benefactor as God is, is entitled to our love, and to be loved with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our strength. Deficiencies, therefore, in this respect, are sins truly and actually such.

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

Again: look to the ten commandments themselves: look not to their letter, but their spirit; look to them as expounded, in some instances, by our Lord himself in his sermon upon the mount, and consequently as justly admitting the same exposition in other instances; look to their comprehension and extent, to what has been well called their *spirituality*; and then bring your conduct to the touchstone, that is to say, the test and criterion of rectitude, and we shall

want little to convince us of the multitude of our sins, to humble us under the hand of God. It makes no difference, that others have as much cause for as much self-accusation as we have, or some more, and even greater ; it makes, in reality, no difference in the case. We ought to recollect this in particular, because we are ever ready to think it does. But we must look to ourselves alone. We must make no comparison, except *that* between our conduct and our duty. This comparison being honestly made, our failings and offences will appear numerous beyond calculation. And can this be thought upon without concern—a deep and fixed concern? What says the Psalmist? “ My heart hath failed me ;” and contemplation of his sins made his heart sink within him. If it be not so with us, is it that our sins are less and fewer, or is it not that we care less about them? We do not choose to review or contemplate them at all. When we find ourselves in danger, we wish to become insensible of it. We have it in our power to turn away our thoughts and attentions from subjects that we dislike ; and we exercise this power with respect to our sins. If it were not so, it would be with us as it was with the Psalmist—“ our heart would fail us ;” the number and vileness of our sins, our failure of duty to God, our transgressions of the purity of his laws, our deficiency to man for God’s sake, would overpower us.

But, thirdly, what was the turn and direction of thought which these reflections produced in the mind

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

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

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

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

## V.

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

ECCLES. v. 5, 6.

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

I KNOW not so much good advice drawn up in so little compass any where as in the chapter which we have quoted ; nor of that advice, any part so important as that which I have read to you in the text. We are all naturally inclined to lean and presume much upon the mercy of God ; and this presumption cannot be combated by any general arguments, because the foundation of it is right. It is certainly true, that the frame of nature, the multitude which we see of contrivances, evident contrivances, and provisions for the happiness of sensitive beings, bespeak the good will and kindness of the Creator ; and of that good will, a plain and obvious part and consequence is, condescension to our infirmities,

and mercy to our faults. It is not only rational, but unavoidable to expect this. The language of Scripture, if we go to that for information, comes up in this respect to the intimations of nature. Throughout the whole book, God is described as loving, affectionate, patient, compassionate, and long suffering to his human creation: so that when we conceive of God as a merciful being, we think of him very truly. But then the question is, in what manner, and to what extent, we may apply this consideration to our own conduct.

First, then, when we apply it to console ourselves under any imperfection of character, owing to invincible weaknesses either of body or mind, we apply it rightly. God has not fixed a certain measure or standard of virtue, which every person of every sort and degree must come up to, in order to be saved; that were not the part of a merciful judge. He proportions his demands of duty to our several capacities, justly estimated, and faithfully exerted. It may be true, that he who has employed extraordinary endowments well, will be recompensed with a higher reward than he who has employed inferior endowments well; but still one as well as the other will be rewarded. He who had doubled the ten talents which were entrusted to him, was set over ten cities; whilst he who had doubled the five talents was set over five cities; but both were rewarded, both also highly rewarded, though differently. Therefore, any inferiority to others in our natural abilities, any dif-

difficulties or disadvantages we labour under, which others do not labour under, need not discomfort us at all. They are made up to us by God's mercy, who will finally accommodate his judgment to those difficulties and disadvantages so far as they are real. And the same allowance, which we hope will be vouchsafed to our constitutional infirmities (so far as they are both real infirmities and invincible infirmities), will also be extended to the difficulties we labour under, by reason of the circumstances and condition in which we are placed ; whether these difficulties be ignorance for want of education and opportunity, or prejudice by reason of a wrong education, and a dependance upon those into whose hands we were committed ; or error or superstition arising from these causes : for all such defects, so long as they are, properly speaking, involuntary, and not brought on or increased by our own act, we humbly rely upon the mercies of God, and we are not going too far in our reliance.

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



dentally betrayed into single instances of sin without a *plan* or system of sinning), we have Jesus Christ interceding for our forgiveness.

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

The true and sound distinction which we should continually bear in our mind, is no other than this—whilst we think of God's mercy only with a view to sins which are past strictly and exclusively, then it can hardly happen but that we shall judge rightly of it, and according to truth; but when we think of it with relation to our future sins, then we are in very great danger of mistaking and of misapplying it; and the mistake may have, indeed necessarily must have, the most dreadful effects upon our final welfare.

I cannot mark this distinction more strongly, than by desiring you to compare attentively what is said in the text with what is said by St. John in the passage just now quoted from his Epistle. Both passages speak of *propitiation*; that is, of the means whereby we may obtain pardon. Hear what St. John says of it: “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father; and he is the propitiation for our sins.”

Next hear what the text says of it: "Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin unto sin." You will observe, that one passage speaks in terms of encouragement; the other in terms of warning. And the truth is, that one passage speaks in relation to sins which are past, strictly and exclusively; the other speaks in relation to sins that are yet future. When St. John tells us, that "if any man sin, we have in Jesus Christ an advocate and a propitiation," he supposes a person to be reviewing his past life, to be distressed by the memory of his former sins; and then he points out a relief and source of comfort to his distress, by telling him that he has with God an advocate and a propitiation for the sins under the sense and recollection of which he is sinking. When the author of Ecclesiasticus warns us solemnly "concerning propitiation" (the same subject of which St. John speaks), by bidding us "not to be without fear to add sin unto sin, and not to say, his mercy is great, he will be pacified for the multitude of our sins;"—and when he farther reminds us, that "wrath as well as mercy came from him;"—he applies his advice to a different supposition: he supposes a person to be doubting and deliberating with himself concerning his future conduct; either concerning some particular sin which he is tempted to commit, or concerning the general course of his future behaviour; and he charges such an one against bringing into the deliberation the account or consideration of God's mercy, so as to encourage himself

thereby in giving way to the temptation by which he is urged. By this view of the subject the two passages are rendered consistent, and the important distinction upon the subject rendered visible.

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

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

or mercy, let the clemency and mercy of the prince be in themselves ever so great. Wherefore, I repeat, that whenever the ease and comfort which we draw from the contemplation of God's mercy, in respect to past sins, is carried forward to the future, so as to make us with more readiness give way to temptation, it is grievously and dangerously abused.

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

expressly depending upon forgiveness beforehand, would not this be a reason for withholding the mercy which had been thus perverted? It certainly would.

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

Upon the whole, the brief statement of the case is this. It is certainly true that God is merciful, but we are not authorised to use or apply the consideration of God's mercy any otherwise than to guard us against despair for our past sins, to quicken and incite us to reformation for the future, and to

support and comfort us when we feel that reformation in ourselves beginning. If we go farther than this, and think of God's mercy when we are deliberating concerning some sin which we are about to commit, either concerning our continuance in some old, or entrance upon some new, course of sin, we are sure to think of it improperly, and to build hopes and conclusions upon it which we are not authorised to entertain. I know nothing which can be a more powerful preservative against this turn of mind, and this fatal delusion, than the wise and solemn warning of the text : "Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin to sin, and say not his mercy is great, he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins ; for mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners."

## VII.

## THE EFFICACY OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

(PART I.)

HEBREWS IX. 26.

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

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

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

What may be called the first Gospel declaration upon this subject, is the exclamation of John the Baptist, when he saw Jesus coming unto him : “ Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” I think it plain, that when John called our Lord the Lamb of God, he spoke with a relation to his being sacrificed, and to the effect of that sacrifice upon the pardon of human sin : and this, you will observe, was said of him, even before he entered upon his office. If any doubt could be made of the meaning of the Baptist’s expression, it is settled by other places, in which the like allusion to a Lamb is adopted ; and where the allusion is specifically applied to his death, considered as a sacrifice.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the following words of Isaiah are, by Philip the evangelist, distinctly applied to our Lord, and to our Lord’s death. “ He was led as a sheep to the slaughter ; and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so opened he not his mouth ; in his humiliation his judgement was taken away, and who shall declare his generation ? for his life is taken from the earth :” therefore it was to his death, you see, that the description relates. Now, I say, that this is applied to Christ most distinctly ; for the pious eunuch, who was reading the passage in his chariot, was at a loss to know to whom it should be applied. “ I pray thee,” saith he to Philip, “ of whom speaketh the prophet this ? of himself or of some other man ?” And Philip, you read, taught him that it was spoken of Christ. And I say, secondly, that this particular



part and expression of the prophecy being applied to Christ's death, carries the whole prophecy to the same subject : for it is undoubtedly one entire prophecy: therefore the other expressions, which are still stronger, are applicable as well as this. " He was wounded for our transgressions ; he was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and with his stripes we are healed ; the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." There is a strong and very apposite text of Saint Peter's, in which the application of the term " Lamb" to our Lord, and the sense, in which it is applied, can admit of no question at all. It is in the 1st chapter of the 1st epistle, the 18th and 19th verses : " Forasmuch as ye know, that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a *lamb* without blemish and without spot." All the use I make of these passages is to show, that the prophet Isaiah, six hundred years before his birth ; Saint John the Baptist, upon the commencement of his ministry ; Saint Peter, his friend, companion, and apostle, after the transaction was over, speak of Christ's death, under the figure of a *lamb* being sacrificed : that is, as having the effect of a sacrifice, the effect in kind, though infinitely higher in degree, upon the pardon of sins, and the procurement of salvation ; and that this is spoken of the death of no other person whatever.

Other plain and distinct passages, declaring the efficacy of Christ's death, are the following: Hebrews

ix. 26. " Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many ; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." And in the xth chap. 12th ver. " This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down on the right hand of God, for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." I observe again, that nothing of this sort is said of the death of any other person : no such efficacy is imputed to any other martyrdom. So likewise, in the following text, from the Epistle to the Romans : " While we were yet sinners Christ died for us ; much more then being now justified by his blood we shall be saved from wrath through him ; for if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life." " Reconciled to God by the death of his Son ;" therefore that death had an efficacy in our reconciliation ; but reconciliation is preparatory to salvation. The same thing is said by the same apostle in his Epistle to the Colossians : " He has reconciled us to his Father in his cross, and in the body of his flesh through death." What is said of reconciliation in these texts, is said in other texts of sanctification, which also is preparatory to salvation. Thus Hebrews, x. 10. " we are sanctified : " how ? namely, " by the offering of the body of Christ once for all : " so again

in the same epistle, “ the blood of Jesus is called the blood of the covenant by which we are sanctified.”

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

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

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

world ; but that suitableness cannot, as it seems to me, be possibly perceived by us, until we are acquainted with that order and with those beings. So that it arises, as it were, from the necessity of things, that what is told us by a divine messenger of heavenly affairs, of affairs purely spiritual, that is, relating purely to another world, must be so comprehended by us, as to excite admiration.

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

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

## VIII.

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

(PART II.)

ROMANS VI. 1.

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

THE same Scriptures, which represent the death of Christ as having that which belongs to the death of no other person, namely, an efficacy in procuring the salvation of man, are also constant and uniform in representing the necessity of our own endeavours, of our own good works, for the same purpose. They go further. They foresaw that in stating, and still more when they went about to extol and magnify, the death of Christ, as instrumental to salvation, they were laying a foundation for the opinion, that men's own works, their own virtue, their personal endeavours, were superseded and dispensed with. In proportion as the sacrifice of the death of Christ was effectual, in the same proportion were these less necessary: if the death of Christ was sufficient, if

redemption was complete, then were these not necessary at all. They foresaw that some would draw this consequence from their doctrine, and they provided against it.

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

Again; when the apostle had been speaking of the righteousness of God displayed by the wickedness of man, he was not unaware of the misconstruction to which this representation was liable, and which it had, in fact, experienced: which misconstruction he states thus,—“We be slanderously reported, and some affirm, that we say, let us do evil that good may come.” This insinuation, however, he regards as



nothing less than an unfair and wilful perversion of his words, and of the words of other Christian teachers: therefore he says concerning those who did thus pervert them, "their condemnation is just:" they will be justly condemned for thus abusing the doctrine which we teach. The passage, however, clearly shows, that the application of their expressions to the encouragement of licentiousness of life was an application contrary to their intention; and, in fact, a perversion of their words.

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

But the clearest text to our purpose is that, undoubtedly, which I have prefixed to this discourse. Saint Paul, after expatiating largely upon the "grace," that is, the favour, kindness, and mercy of God, the extent, the greatness, the comprehensiveness of that mercy, as manifested in the Christian dispensation, puts this question to his reader—"What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" which he answers by a strong negative—"God forbid." What the apostle designed in this

passage is sufficiently evident. He knew in what manner some might be apt to construe his expressions: and he anticipates their mistake. He is beforehand with them, by protesting against any such use being made of his doctrine; which, yet he was aware, might by possibility be made.

By way of showing scripturally the obligation and the necessity of personal endeavours after virtue, all the numerous texts which exhort to virtue, and admonish us against vice, might be quoted; for they are all directly to the purpose: that is, we might quote every page of the New Testament. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven." "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." In both these texts the reward attends the *doing*: the promise is annexed to works. Again; "To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man *that doeth evil*." Again; "Of the which," namely, certain enumerated vices, "I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they, which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God." These are a few amongst many texts of the same effect, and they are such as can never be got over. Stronger terms cannot be devised than what are here used. Were the purpose, therefore,

simply to prove from Scripture the necessity of virtue, and the danger of vice, so far as salvation is concerned, these texts are decisive. But when an answer is to be given to those, who so interpret certain passages of the apostolic writings, especially the passages which speak of the efficacy of the death of Christ, or draw such inferences from these passages, as amount to a dispensing with the obligations of virtue; then the best method of proving, that theirs cannot be a right interpretation, nor theirs just inferences, is, by showing, (which fortunately we are able to do,) that it is the very interpretation, and these the very inferences, which the apostles were themselves aware of, which they provided against, and which they protested against. The four texts, quoted from the apostolic writings in this discourse, were quoted with this view: and they may be considered, I think, as showing the minds of the authors upon the point in question more determinately, than any general exhortation to good works, or any general denunciation against sin could do. I assume, therefore, as a proved point, that whatever was said by the apostles concerning the efficacy of the death of Christ was said by them under an apprehension, that they did not thereby in any manner relax the motives, the obligation, or the necessity of good works. But still there is another important question behind; namely, whether, notwithstanding what the apostles have said, or may have meant to say, there be not, in the nature of things, an invincible inconsistency between the

efficacy of the death of Christ, and the necessity of a good life ; whether those two propositions can, in fair reasoning, stand together ; or whether it does not necessarily follow, that if the death of Christ be efficacious, then good works are no longer necessary ; and, on the other hand, that, if good works be still necessary, then is the death of Christ not efficacious.

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

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

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

the conditions, but more so. A conditional offer may be infinitely kind on the part of the benefactor who makes it, may be infinitely beneficial to those to whom it is made. If it be from a prince or governor, it may be infinitely gracious and merciful on his part; and yet, being conditional, the condition is as necessary, as if the offer had been no more than that of scanty wages by a hard taskmaster.

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

the reward to this our performance or endeavour, and not to that which is the beginning and foundation and cause of the whole, the true and proper cause, namely, the kindness and bounty of the original offer. This turn of thought, likewise, as well as the former, it is necessary to warn you against. For it has these consequences: it damps our gratitude to God, it takes off our attention from Him.

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

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

The cause of salvation is the free will, the free gift, the love and mercy of God. That alone is the

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

This efficacy is in Scripture attributed to the death of Christ. It is attributed in a variety of ways of expression, but this is the substance of them all. He is "a sacrifice, an offering to God; a propitiation; the precious sacrifice foreordained; the lamb slain from the foundation of the world; the lamb which taketh away the sin of the world. We are washed in his blood; we are justified by his blood; we are saved from wrath through him; he hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." All these terms, and many more that are used, assert in substance the same thing, namely the efficacy of the death of Christ in the procuring of human salvation. To give to these expressions their proper moment and import, it is necessary to reflect, over and over again, and by reflection to impress our minds with a just idea, what and how great a thing salvation is; for it is by means of that idea



alone, that we can ever come to be sensible, how unspeakably important, how inestimable in value, any efficacy, which operates upon that event, must be to us all. The highest terms in which the Scriptures speak of that efficacy are not too great : cannot be too great ; because it respects an interest and an event, so vast, so momentous, as to make all other interests, and all other events, in comparison contemptible.

The sum of our argument is briefly this. There may appear, and to many there has appeared, to be an inconsistency or incompatibility between the efficacy of the death of Christ, and the necessity of sincere endeavours after obedience. When the subject is properly examined, there turns out to be no such incompatibility. The graciousness of an offer does not diminish the necessity of the condition. Suppose a prince to promise to one of his subjects, upon compliance with certain terms, and the performance of certain duties, a reward in magnitude and value out of all competition beyond the merit of the compliance, beyond the desert of the performance ; to what shall such a subject ascribe the happiness held out to him ? He is an ungrateful man, if he attribute it to any cause whatever, but to the bounty and goodness of his prince in making him the offer ; or if he suffer any consideration, be it what it will, to interfere with, or diminish, his sense of that bounty and goodness. Still it is true, that he will not obtain what is offered, unless he comply with the terms. So far his compliance is a condition of his happiness. But the

grand thing is the offer being made at all. That is the ground and origin of the whole. That is the *cause*; and is ascribable to favour, grace, and goodness, on the part of the prince, and to nothing else. It would, therefore, be the last degree of ingratitude in such a subject, to forget his prince, while he thought of himself; to forget the *cause*, whilst he thought of the condition; to regard every thing promised as merited. The generosity, the kindness, the voluntariness, the bounty of the original offer, come by this means to be neglected in his mind entirely. This, in my opinion, describes our situation with respect to God. The love, goodness, and grace of God, in making us a tender of salvation, and the effects of the death of Christ, do not diminish the necessity or the obligation of the condition of the tender, which is a sincere endeavour after holiness; nor are, in any wise, inconsistent with such obligation.

## IX.

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

(PART III.)

ROMANS VI. 1.

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

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

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

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

Now, independently of Scripture texts, I know not that any one would ever have thought of making

faith alone, meaning by faith the belief of certain religious propositions, to be the condition of salvation ; because it would have occurred to every one, who reflected upon the subject, that at any rate faith could only be classed amongst other virtues and good qualities, and not as that which superseded all. Be its excellency, or value, or obligation ever so great, it is still a quality of our moral nature, capable of degrees, and liable to imperfections, as our other moral qualities are. Those, therefore, who contend for the sufficiency of faith alone, must found their doctrine, and we will do them the justice to allow, that they do found their doctrine, upon certain strong texts of Scripture. The texts upon which they rely are principally taken from the writings of St. Paul ; and they are these :—“ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.” “ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed on Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law : for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” “ That no man is justified by the law, in the sight of God, it is evident : for the just shall live by faith.” “ The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” “ For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.” “ If thou shalt confess with

thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." These, no doubt, are strong texts, and it will not be wondered at, that in conjunction with other inducements, they have led many serious persons to lay such a stress upon them, as to exclude good works from being considered even as a condition of salvation ; and a few perhaps to take refuge in this doctrine, as a ground of hope under a life of continued sins. I say that these inferences are not to be wondered at, if the texts be taken by themselves. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture ; particular texts with other particular texts ; and especially with the main tenor of the whole. The doctrine even of Transubstantiation has a text to stand upon ; which, taken alone, and interpreted literally, is very strong in its favour ; but collated with other texts, and explained according to certain reasonable rules of interpretation, the passage is capable of being disposed of without forcing upon us any doctrine like that which had been deduced from it. Now, proceeding in this manner with the texts above cited, concerning the efficacy of faith, we take upon us to say, that whatever the writer of them meant by these expressions, he did not mean to lay it down as an article to be received by his disciples, that a man leading a wicked life, without change and without repentance, will nevertheless be saved at the last by his belief of the doctrines of the Christian religion ; still less did he mean to encourage any one to go on

in a course of sin, expressly and intentionally comforting and protecting himself by this opinion. I repeat, that he, the Apostle, could not mean to say this; because if he did, he would say what is expressly and positively contradicted by other texts of at least equal authority with his own; he would say what is contradicted by the very drift and design of the Christian constitution; and would say, lastly, what is expressly denied and contradicted by himself.

First, he would say what is contradicted by other texts of Scripture, and those of the very highest authority. For instance, what words can be plainer, more positive, or more decisive of this point than our Saviour's own? "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven." There can be no doubt but that they who are here introduced as crying out to Jesus Christ, "Lord, Lord," are supposed to believe in him; yet neither their devotion, nor their faith which prompted it, were sufficient to save them. Nay, farther; our Lord, in the same passage, proceeds to tell his hearers, that many will say to him in that day, "Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" It cannot be questioned but that they who do these things in Christ's name believe in Christ. Yet what will be their reception? "I will profess unto you I never knew you." And who are they who shall be thus repulsed and rejected? No others

than the workers of iniquity. "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." The difference between doing good and doing evil according to another declaration of our Saviour, is no less than this: "They that have done good shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Can a greater distinction be made, or expressed in words more plain? All the preceptive part of our Lord's teaching, especially his whole sermon upon the mount, may be alleged on the same side of the argument. And to substitute belief in the place of the duties there enjoined, or as an expiation for the offences there forbidden, even when persevered in, would in effect set aside the authority of the lawgiver. Why did our Lord command and forbid these things (or indeed any thing), if he did not require obedience as a condition of salvation? Again, every thing which we read concerning repentance implies the necessity of good works to salvation, and the inconsistency of bad works with salvation: for repentance is a change from one to the other, and can be required upon no other supposition than this. But of repentance we hear continually in the New Testament, and from the first to the last of the great mission of which it contains the history. John the Baptist began with it before our Saviour's own ministry commenced, and as the introduction to that ministry. His call to the Jews who resorted to his preaching was to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That practi-



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

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

Again, a sense which virtually sets aside the obligation and the necessity of good works cannot be the

true sense of Saint Paul's words, because it is contrary to at least one declared end of Christianity itself. The office and design of the Christian revelation is set forth in the following texts: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." By the phrase, "the grace of God that bringeth salvation," is undoubtedly meant Christianity. Then for what purpose hath it appeared? To do what was it published? The text goes on to tell us, namely, that it should teach us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. That was his object, or at least one of his objects, and the mean towards it was to teach us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Our Saviour himself had before told his disciples, "that he came to call sinners to repentance;" and repentance, as already hath been noticed, bears a necessary relation to good works and bad works. Agreeably hereunto, the benefit and blessing of Christianity, as a revelation, is described by the Apostle Peter to consist in its converting efficacy; for addressing the Jews upon a very signal occasion, and a very short time

after our Lord's ascension, when every thing was fresh in his thoughts, he speaks thus: "Unto you first, God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

The question, you remember, is what Saint Paul meant, or rather, strictly speaking, what he did *not* mean, in the several texts that have been cited in this discourse, and which are usually cited by those who may be called the advocates of faith, in contradistinction to good works. Now, although it may be a reasonable method of showing that a man's words are not to be taken in the sense which the letter and terms of the sentence may seem, at first sight at least, to convey, in order to prove that such sense is inconsistent with what is delivered by authority as great as his own, or greater, and inconsistent also with the main drift and purpose of that very institution, in the administration of which, and as forming part of which, the texts in question were written—although these points may be fairly brought forward in argument, yet the straight and clear way of showing, in any case of difficulty, in what sense a writer intended that his words should be understood, or rather in what sense he did *not* mean them to be taken, is to look to what himself has elsewhere said upon the same subject, and more especially to what he has said in the same writing. For though a man may advance what is contrary to sound reason, what is contrary to other authority, nay, what is contrary

to his own professions at other times, and in other writings, yet surely his words ought not to be interpreted, if there be any fair way of avoiding it, in such a manner as to make him contradict himself in the same discourse.

Now, pursuing this line of observation, we have to remark, first, that in the very same epistle to the Romans in which Saint Paul says, that "the just shall live by faith,"—not only in the same epistle, but in the same sentence, Saint Paul tells us that the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. By quoting, therefore, the old prophet's expression, "shall live by faith," he cannot mean to say that faith, accompanied with ungodliness and unrighteousness, would end in salvation. That indeed would be to say, not that the "just," but that the unjust, shall live by faith. It would be to say what his next words unsay, and contradict. The most therefore that this text, "the just shall live by faith," can amount to is, that though good works be necessary and be performed, yet, after all, it is not by them, otherwise than as they are the proof of faith, but by that faith itself, that the just shall live. Again: though it be true that Saint Paul in this epistle concludes "that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law," yet in the same epistle he had before told us, that "God will render to every man according to his deeds; to them, who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory,

and honour, and immortality, eternal life ; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jews first, and also of the Gentiles.” Therefore, his expression concerning faith, in the third chapter of this epistle, though strong, must not be so construed as to make the author assert the direct contrary of what he had asserted just before in the second chapter. Again : four chapters of this very epistle, viz. from the twelfth to the fifteenth inclusive, are occupied in delivering moral precepts. Let no one therefore say that moral precepts are indifferent, or that moral practice, *i. e.* the conduct which these precepts enjoin and enforce, is unnecessary—I mean in the judgement of the writer whose authority is here pleaded. Nor is it possible to reconcile with this opinion the two following texts, taken out of the same epistle : “ The wages of sin is death ;” chap. vi. verse 23. “ If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die ; but if ye, through the spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live ;” chap. viii. verse 13.

The same species of observation applies to the epistle to the Galatians ; in which epistle, it is true, that the Apostle hath used concerning faith these very strong terms : “ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ ; that we might be justified by the faith of Christ,

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

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

this declaration. After having enumerated certain species of sins, he adds these cautionary words, which show his opinion as manifestly as words can show it : “ Let no man deceive you with vain words ; for because of these things, even the sinful practices before recited, cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.”

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



## X.

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

(PART IV.)

ROMANS VI. 1.

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

THAT Saint Paul, in the texts which are usually quoted upon this question from his epistles, did not mean to say, that faith, accompanied with wickedness of life, would end in salvation, may be considered, I think, as proved. The next inquiry is, if he did not mean this, what did he mean? His words we cannot alter: and what other sense can we fairly put upon them, so as to excuse or avoid the sense which we disclaim? Now it is but justice to every writer to suppose, that he writes to be understood by those to whom his writing is immediately addressed, and that he has in view the circumstances and situation of the persons whom he directly accosts, much more than the circumstances'

and situation of those who may come to read what he has written, in some remote age and distant country. There are no ancient writings in which this allowance is more wanted than in those of Saint Paul, nor in any part of his writings more than in that which forms the subject of our present discourse. Saint Paul's writings were addressed to Christians: but who in those days were Christians? They were in general, if not altogether, persons, not as we are, born and bred up in the religion, but they were persons who, having been born and bred up heathens or Jews, when arrived at years of judgement and discretion, and exercising that judgement and discretion, had voluntarily, and from conviction, quitted their native religion, become believers in Jesus Christ, and openly taken upon themselves the profession of this, now a new system of faith and conduct. This conversion had been with them a most momentary change. It was the grand æra and event of their lives as to spiritual matters: and no wonder their teachers should be industrious in pointing out to them the advantages, the effects, and the obligation of this change. Now it appears to have been a doctrine of Christianity taught both by Saint Paul and the other preachers of the religion, asserted, or rather assumed, in their writings, and frequently referred to therein,—that, amongst other effects and advantages of their becoming Christians, this was one, namely, that the sins of which they had been guilty before their conversion were thereupon forgiven; and which sins

being so forgiven, they, by their conversion, and at the time of their conversion, stood in the sight of God (whatever their former lives had been) as just persons, no less so, than if they had led lives of righteousness from their birth; that is, in one word, they were justified.

But the forgiveness here spoken of, namely, the forgiveness of prior sins upon this faith and conversion, and the justification implied in that forgiveness, was undoubtedly an advantage annexed by the mercy of God to their faith and conversion, and not the effect of any pretensions they had, or might suppose themselves to have, from either their situation or behaviour prior to their conversion. Therefore, supposing this to be the sense of the word justification, viz. the remission of all the sins they had committed before their conversion to Christianity, it was literally and strictly true what Saint Paul tells these Christians, in his epistle to the Romans, that they were justified by faith without the works of the law, even supposing "the works of the law" to comprise all the duties of the moral law; and I think it very probable, that this is what Saint Paul meant by justification in that remarkable text, and which is one of the strongest on that side of the question. And I think so for two reasons. In the fifth chapter of the epistle, and the first verse, which connects itself with the text under consideration (the intermediate chapter being employed in a digressive illustration of the subject, drawn from

the history of Abraham), I say, in the beginning of the fifth chapter, Saint Paul evidently speaks of their being justified, as of a thing that was past. Whatever it was, it had already taken place: they were already justified; for he speaks thus of it: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." If then their justification had already taken place, when did it take place? What time can be assigned to it but the time of their conversion, according to the sense we contend for? A second fair ground for believing that this was the Apostle's meaning is, that it best suited with his argument. His argument was to prove, that the Gentiles were as properly admissible into the Christian dispensation as the Jews; a question at that time hotly contested, though now laid asleep. To make out this point, he shows that the justification, *i. e.* the pardon of prior sins, which conversion to Christianity brought with it, was neither in Jew nor Gentile attributable to their former behaviour, or to any thing which that behaviour could merit; but was, in both the one and the other, the pure and free effect and gift of God's mercy,—was grace,—was favour; and being so, that one sort of men, as well as the other, was capable of receiving it, and of participating in all the fruits and privileges which belonged to it. It was a thing which, upon the ground of prior merit, the Jew could not claim; which, upon the ground of pure favour, the Gentile might expect as well as he. Therefore,

the purpose of the Apostle's argument is satisfied, and the argument itself made most clear, by limiting his sense of justification to what passed upon the act of conversion; and it is by this interpretation alone that we can fairly avoid, in this passage, the sense which those put upon it, who contend against the proper necessity of good works; for we cannot, I think, in this passage, understand by faith that operative, productive faith which includes good works. Nor can we understand by the works of the law the rites only, and peculiar ordinances of the Jewish law. We cannot understand by faith that which includes and necessarily supposes works, because then the Apostle could not have talked of faith *without* works; whereas he says, that "we are justified by faith *without* the works of the law." We cannot restrain the expression, "the works of the law," to the positive precepts of the Jewish law, because we must suppose that Saint Paul's conclusion was coextensive with his reasoning; and his reasoning evidently applies and relates to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, to those who had no proper concern in the Jewish law, as well as to those who had. "We have before proved," says he, "both of Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." This was the common situation of both; and to this, their common situation, must be applied what he afterwards says concerning justification. It hath likewise been truly I think observed, that the laws must here mean the moral law; because only three verses

afterwards, and continuing, as, must be presumed, the same idea, he adds, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." But in no sense, to be sure, could it be said that the ritual or ceremonial law of the Jews, as a distinct and separate thing from the moral law, was established by the preachers of faith, or by this their reasoning upon it.

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

consistently with St. Paul's words to the Ephesians, as thus interpreted.

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

Ye observe days and months, and times and years." The truth was, that in St. Paul's absence, his Galatian converts had been going fast into Judaism, which he considered as an undoing of every thing which he had done amongst them; and which conduct of theirs drew from him some very strong expressions; yet none, I think, but what may be fairly understood without supposing him to dispense with the necessity of a virtuous conduct.

Justification is properly distinguished from sanctification. Justification, in the scripture sense of it, is the pardon of sins, prior to a certain period: sanctification is holiness of life subsequent to that period; or more strictly speaking, these words express what God does for us in these different stages of our Christian life. Justification is altogether his, because pardon is by its very nature the subject of favour. Sanctification, to say the least of it, is indebted to the support and assistance of his spirit. There is, therefore, an intelligible difference between justification and sanctification, and this is included in the term: for, as it respects us, it would be called sanctity; as it respects God's assistance, it is called sanctification. But, as hath been said before, they are both necessary. A man may be justified, that is, may have his sins forgiven up to a certain period; yet if he be not also sanctified, if, after that period, he relapse into and go on in unrepented wickedness, he will perish notwithstanding his justification. On the other hand, sanctification itself would not avail,



without having a preceding justification to rest upon. Good behaviour, from a certain period, has not in itself any proper virtue or quality such as to atone for bad behaviour before that period. By the grace of God it hath this effect, but not by its proper nature, any more than the regular paying off of our debts, after a certain period, will discharge or cancel those which were contracted before that period. Wherefore there must be a remission of prior sins, or in other words, justification, in order that a subsequent good life, or sanctity, or sanctification, may avail us at the last.

It may be true, that, according to this representation, the terms justification, faith, and works of the law are not every where used in scripture in exactly the same sense. Thus, although justification be generally used to express the pardon of sins that are passed, with a reference to some certain period, commonly that of their becoming believers in Christ, yet one or two passages are found, in which the word denotes our final destiny at the day of judgement. This, I think, is the sense of the word in that text of St. Paul, wherein he declares that not the hearers of the law, but the doers of the law, are justified; and most unquestionably it bears this sense in that discourse of our Saviour, in which he tells his hearers, "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned:" for this declaration is equivalent to another, which our Saviour delivers at the same time, namely, that

for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgement. So again, although in the texts which have been quoted from the epistle to the Galatians, it appears highly probable that, under the word faith, St. Paul had in contemplation an efficacious faith; and that by the works of the law he meant particularly the rites and ordinances of the Jewish law, the view with which he wrote that epistle naturally and necessarily suggesting these ideas to his thoughts; yet in the epistle to the Romans, penned with a somewhat different aspect, and under a different impression, especially in that famous text, "Therefore we conclude that man is justified by faith without the works of the law," I think he meant by faith, the simple act of believing, and by the works of the law, the practice of those duties which are enjoined by its precepts, moral as well as ritual; and that the true interpretation of the text turns upon the word *justification*, which does not here signify finding acceptance, but the pardon of all sins committed before conversion. Therefore, there is some latitude to be allowed in the exposition of these terms as they occur in different places.

It may be also further true, that some passages of St. Paul's epistles are not according to the interpretation which we have put upon them, so applicable to us (or as some may think, so useful, or instructive, or affecting) as they are under a different exposition. Is it to be wondered at, that portions

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

Nevertheless, we are not to dismiss every text which we cannot at first sight explain, with the short answer, that it relates to the first Christians, and not to us. This is a negligent and unworthy way of treating subjects of such deep importance,—it often proceeds from rashness, or indolence, or reli-

gious indifference, and will lead into mistakes of an opposite kind. We are to ascertain, by a serious examination of the text before us, and the place in which it is found, what the actual difference is between the case of the early Christians, and our own, and how far that difference clears up the particular meaning; whilst at the same time, in a more general yet fair construction, much substantial truth may be left, in which we ourselves are interested. If this be so, we are to apply what is applicable. And perhaps there are few portions of Scripture, in which, proceeding in this manner, we shall not find something that touches our own case most nearly. For instance, and to return to the question now under consideration, every man who reforms his life; who hath found in himself a general change of his behaviour; and who feels this change, both in the state of his mind and the course of his behaviour, will find a strong similitude between his own case and that of the first Christian converts; and I think that he is well warranted in hoping that the justification, the pardon of the past, which in Saint Paul's epistles is expressly attributed to their *conversion*, will be extended to his *reformation*, and upon the same condition, namely, of his persisting steadily in his new course; for, though the change in him be called *reformation*, and in them was *conversion*, reformation is in truth the substance of conversion; it being to no purpose to go from one religion to another, even from a false to a true religion, if we

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

it is far from being true that the doctrine itself is either barren or unimportant, or such as may be overlooked or neglected.

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

The second question is, will faith save us without works ; or, to put the same question in another form, will faith end in salvation, though accompanied by a life of wickedness ? Doctrines certainly have been, and are held, which lead to this conclusion, yet the conclusion itself is seriously maintained by few ; for, however in terms the doctrine of salvation by faith without works may appear to agree with certain expressions of Saint Paul's Epistles, yet, when it comes to be offered as a rule of practice, it shows its own inconsistency with every property and character of true religion so strongly, that the practical inference is always denied. It is generally avoided by putting such a construction upon the word faith, as to prevent any licentious deductions being drawn from the doctrine of justification by faith ; so that, to the question just now stated, " will faith end in salvation, though it be accompanied with wickedness of life," the answer usually given is, that true faith never can be accompanied by wickedness of life. It is not necessary to go over the subject again, for the purpose of inquiring whether it be applicable to all the texts of Scripture to which it is applied, or only to some of them ; for, I trust, we have shown upon the whole, that the sense, which the doctrine of justification by faith without works, rigorously taken, would put upon Saint Paul's expressions, can never have been the sense which Saint Paul himself intended : amongst other strong reasons, chiefly for this, that it is in contradiction with his own re-

peated declarations, and even with declarations delivered in the very writings in which the contested expressions are found. And I trust also we have shown (what undoubtedly it might be required of us to show), that these are interpretations fairly assignable to Saint Paul's words, which stand clear of the doctrine in its rigorous, or, as it is sometimes called, its Calvinistic sense.

The third question is, will good works save us without faith? Now, this is a question of circumstances—and the principal circumstance to be attended to is, whether our want of faith be our own fault. It is certainly true, that want of faith may proceed from, and be a proof of a wrong and a bad disposition of mind, of such a disposition of mind as no good thing can come from. This, perhaps, was both very generally and in a very high degree the case with the Jews in our Saviour's time, and with many of those to whom the Apostles preached; because they had evidences afforded them, which ought to have convinced them, and which would have convinced them, had it not been that they gave themselves up to their prejudices, to their vicious propensities, and to wrong habits of thinking. And this their situation and opportunities will account for some of those strong denunciations against want of faith, which are found in Scripture addressed to the unbelievers of those times. "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." And, to a certain extent, the same reason may be alleged concerning many of those by whom, in after ages, the



Gospel is rejected, after being fairly proposed to them. Now, in this case, good works without faith will not save a man; because, in truth, the works are not good, which flow from that disposition which occasion the want of faith. The works may be good, that is, may be useful as to their consequences and effects upon others; but this is not enough for the salvation of the person who performs them. They must also flow from a good disposition, which in the case supposed they could not do; for that good disposition would, along with the works, have produced faith.

On the other hand, cases undoubtedly may be supposed, and cases occur in innumerable instances, in which the want of faith cannot be attributed to the fault of the unbeliever. Whole nations and countries have never yet heard of the name of Christ. In countries in which he has been preached, multitudes have been debarred, by invincible impediments, from coming to the knowledge of his religion. To multitudes of others it has never been preached or proposed truly or fairly. In these and the like cases it is not for us to say, that men will be destroyed for their want of faith. The Scripture has not said so, but the contrary. The Scripture appears to intimate that which, so far as we can apprehend, is most agreeable to the divine equity, that such persons shall respectively be judged according to the law and rule with which they were, or (if it had not been their own fault) they might have been acquainted—whether that were simply the law of nature, or any addition

made to it by credible revelations. This is generally understood to be the meaning of that passage in the second chapter of Saint Paul's epistle to the Romans, in which he declares, that "as many as have sinned without the law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law." To which he adds, that "when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, they having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the works of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." Which two texts, taken together, intimate, as I have said, that in the assignment both of punishment and reward, respect will be had to the law or rule of action with which they were acquainted, so that those who acted conscientiously by that rule would be accepted; those who wilfully went against the dictates of their own conscience would be regarded as transgressors before God, be their condition, as to religious knowledge and information, what it would.

In order to understand that this doctrine does not detract from the value of Christianity so much as, at first sight, it may seem to do, two considerations are to be attended to, as possessing a material influence upon the subject. One is, that this gracious dispensation which comprises all mankind, which so condescends to their several diffi-

culties and disadvantages, and is so indulgent to human blindness and wickedness, is procured to the world through the intervention, the mission, death, and mediation of Jesus Christ. Christ is the instrument of salvation to all who are saved. The obedient Jew, the virtuous heathen, are saved through him. They do not know this, nor may it be necessary they should. Yet it may be true in fact. That is one important consideration. The other is, that we are expressly taught in Scripture, that there are divers degrees of happiness even in heaven. Which being so, it is not unreasonable to expect that faithful followers of Christ will be advanced to higher rewards than others. This opinion is not repugnant to any ideas we form of distributive justice, and is scriptural.

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

## XI.

## ALL STAND IN NEED OF A REDEEMER.

(PART V.)

HEBREWS IX. 26.

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

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

of our Creator excited towards us, and communicated to us by and through that Saviour and Redeemer, to confide in and rely upon, than any grounds of merit in ourselves.

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

performances are. I can hardly mention a branch of our duty, which is not liable to be both impure in the motive, and imperfect in the execution; or a branch of our duty in which our endeavours can found their hopes of acceptance upon any thing but extended mercy, and the efficacy of those means and causes, which have procured it to be so extended.

In the first place, is not this the case with our acts of piety and devotion? We may admit, that pure and perfect piety has a natural title to reward at the hand of God. But is ours ever such? To be pure in its motive, it ought to proceed from a sense of God Almighty's goodness towards us, and from no other source, or cause, or motive whatsoever. Whereas even pious, comparatively pious men, will acknowledge, that authority, custom, decency, imitation, have a share in most of their religious exercises, and that they cannot warrant any of their devotions to be entirely independent of these causes. I would not speak disparagingly of the considerations here recited. They are oftentimes necessary inducements, and they may be means of bringing us to better; but still it is true, that devotion is not pure in its origin, unless it flow from a sense of God Almighty's goodness, unmixed with any other reason. But if our worship of God be defective in its principle, and often debased by the mixture of impure motives, it is still more deficient, when we come to regard it in its performances. Our

devotions are broken and interrupted, or they are cold and languid. Worldly thoughts intrude themselves upon them. Our worldly heart is tied down to the earth. Our devotions are unworthy of God. We lift not up our hearts unto him. Our treasure is upon earth, and our hearts are with our treasure. That heavenly-mindedness which ought to be inseparable from religious exercises does not accompany ours; at least not constantly. I speak not now of the hypocrite in religion, of him who only makes a show of it. His case comes not within our present consideration. I speak of those who are sincere men. These feel the imperfection of their services, and will acknowledge that I have not stated it more strongly than what is true. Imperfection cleaves to every part of it. Our thankfulness is never what it ought to be, or any thing like it; and it is only when we have some particular reason for being pleased that we are thankful at all. Formality is apt continually to steal upon us in our worship; more especially in our public worship: and formality takes away the immediate consciousness of what we are doing: which consciousness is the very life of devotion; all that we do without it being a dead ceremony.

No man reviews his services towards God, his religious services, but he perceives in them much to be forgiven, much to be excused; great unworthiness as respecting the object of all worship; much deficiency and imperfection to be passed over,

before our service can be deemed in its nature an acceptable service. That such services, therefore, should, in fact, be allowed and accepted, and that to no less an end and purpose than the attainment of heaven, is an act of abounding grace and goodness in Him who accepts them : and we are taught in Scripture, that this so much wanted grace and goodness abounds towards us through Jesus Christ ; and particularly through his sufferings, and his death.

But to pass from our acts of worship, which form a particular part only of our duty to God ; to pass from these to our general duty, what, let us ask, is that duty ? What is our duty towards God ? No other, our Saviour himself tells us, than “ to love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind :” Luke, x. 27. Are we conscious of such love, to such a degree ? If we are not, then, in a most fundamental duty, we fail of being what we ought to be. Here, then, as before, is a call for pardoning mercy on the part of God ; which mercy is extended to us by the intervention of Jesus Christ : at least so the Scriptures represent it.

In our duties towards one another, it may be said, that our performances are more adequate to our obligation, than in our duties to God ; that the subjects of them lie more level with our capacity ; and there may be truth in this observation. But still I am afraid, that both in principle and execution our performances are not only defective, but de-



fective in a degree which we are not sufficiently aware of. The rule laid down for us is this, "to love our neighbour *as ourselves*." Which rule, in fact, enjoins, that our benevolence be as strong as our self-interest: that we be as anxious to do good, as quick to discover, as eager to embrace, every opportunity of doing it, and as active and resolute, and persevering in our endeavours to do it, as we are anxious for ourselves, and active in the pursuit of our own interest. Now is this the case with us? Wherein it is not, we fall below our rule. In the apostles of Jesus Christ, to whom this rule was given from his own mouth, you may read how it operated: and their example proves, what some deny, the possibility of the thing; namely, of benevolence being as strong a motive as self-interest. They firmly believed, that to bring men to the knowledge of Christ's religion was the greatest possible good that could be done unto them—was the highest act of benevolence they could exercise. And, accordingly, they set about this work, and carried it on with as much energy, as much ardor, as much perseverance, through as great toils and labours, as many sufferings and difficulties, as any person ever pursued a scheme for their own interest, or for the making of a fortune. They could not possibly have done more for their own sakes than what they did for the sake of others. They literally loved their neighbours as themselves. Some have followed their example in this; and some have, in zeal and energy,

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

When not only the generality of mankind, but even those who are endeavouring to do their duty,

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

In that remaining class of duties, which are called duties to ourselves, the observation we have made upon the deficiency of our endeavours applies with equal or with greater force. More is here wanted than the mere command of our actions. The heart itself is to be regulated ; the hardest thing in the world to manage. The affections and passions are to be kept in order : constant evil propensities are to be constantly opposed. I apprehend, that every sincere man is conscious how unable he is to fulfil

**this part of his duty, even to his own satisfaction : and if our conscience accuse us, “ God is greater than our conscience, and knoweth all things.” If we see our sad failings, He must.**

**God forbid that any thing I say, either upon this, or the other branches of our duty, should damp our endeavours. Let them be as vigorous and as steadfast as they can. They will be so if we are sincere ; and without sincerity there is no hope ; none whatever. But there will always be left enough, infinitely more than enough, to humble self-sufficiency.**

**Contemplate, then, what is placed before us : heaven. Understand what heaven is : a state of happiness after death : exceeding what, without experience, it is impossible for us to conceive, and unlimited in duration. This is a reward infinitely beyond any thing we can pretend to, as of right, as merited, as due. Some distinction between us and others, between the comparatively good and the bad, might be expected : but, on these grounds, not such a reward as this, even were our services, I mean the service of sincere men, perfect. But such services as ours, in truth, are, such services as, in fact, we perform, so poor, so deficient, so broken, so mixed with alloy, so imperfect both in principle and execution, what have they to look for upon their own foundation ? When, therefore, the Scriptures speak to us of a redeemer, a mediator, an intercessor for us ; when they display and magnify the exceedingly great mercies of God, as set forth in the salvation**

of man, according to any mode whatever which he might be pleased to appoint, and therefore in that mode which the Gospel holds forth ; they teach us no other doctrine than that to which the actual deficiencies of our duty, and a just consciousness and acknowledgement of these deficiencies, must naturally carry our own minds. What we feel in ourselves corresponds with what we read in Scripture.

## XII.

MISAPPREHENSION OF THE NATURAL EFFICACY  
OF REPENTANCE.

HEBREWS IX. 26.

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

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

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

There is another point also nearly connected with

these, in which we take up an opinion without foundation, and that is, the *natural* efficacy of repentance in obtaining the pardon of sins.

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

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

ledge. The real truth is—and it comprehends both the wise and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned—the real truth I say is, that we not only sin, but sin against our own knowledge. There may be nicer cases, and more dubious points, which a man, informed and instructed in religion and morality, would perceive to be wrong—which a man, ignorant and uninformed, would not discover to be so; and there may be many such cases; but what I contend is, that the question never comes to that. There are plain obligations which the same men *transgress*. There are confessed and acknowledged duties which they neglect. There are sins and crimes committed, which they know to be sins and crimes at the time. Therefore, since they act contrary to what they know, small as their knowledge is, is it in reason to be expected that they would not act contrary to what they know, if that knowledge was increased? Alas! in computing the number, and weight, and burden of our sins, we need only take into the account the *sins which we know*. They are more than enough to humble us to the earth upon the ground of *merit*: they are more than enough to banish that consideration: they are more than enough to humble every one of us to the dust.

Secondly: our sins are against gratitude. Whom do we offend by our sins? A parent. Him who is much more to us than a parent—a benefactor; the first, the greatest, the best of our benefactors—Him who, in fact, hath given us all that we have.



If we have had any enjoyment in life, it is his bounty. If we have any thing to hope for, it is from his kindness. It is his act and doing alone that we are at all, or in any respect, superior to, or different from, the earth under our feet. It is his will which hath raised us into animated sensitive beings; it is still farther his will which hath made us intelligent rational agents. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." These words are often repeated to us with little impression; but they contain solid, physical, and philosophical truths. He is the author of our being, and of every blessing which belongs to it—directly or indirectly, he is the author of them all. He is the constant preserver of our existence, the constant bestower of the good which we receive, or ever shall receive from existence. It is impossible to sin knowingly without offending this benefactor; that is, we know at the time that we offend him. Were we not justified, therefore, in asserting that our sins are *sins against gratitude*? "He that loveth me keepeth my commandments." He that loveth God keepeth his commandments. No proposition can be more true, for it means, that he who feels as much gratitude towards his Maker as he ought to feel, must be kept by that gratitude from wilfully offending him; which the transgression of his commandments infallibly does. Yet we sin; under all these circumstances of aggravation, we still sin: sin in us is exceedingly sinful—yet we sin. When the Scripture

talks, therefore, of sin requiring atonement and expiation, and of the death and sufferings of Christ as of great and mighty efficacy thereto, does it talk of more than what we should judge to be necessary for us, considering what sin is?

Thirdly, our sins are sins against forbearance: Is there one of us who might not have been cut off, and called to judgment in the midst of his sins? To the forbearance alone of God we owe that we were not so. We must recollect that there have been with us times and circumstances, when it had been most unhappy for us if we had been seized by death, or visited by punishment—when it had been a fearful thing indeed if our Lord had come. When, therefore, with these recollections upon our mind, we nevertheless continue to sin, it is rightly said that we sin against forbearance, which is a great aggravation. It is expressly taught in Scripture, by St. Paul in particular, that the long suffering of God is calculated to work upon the heart of man: If it do *not* therefore so work—if it do *not* operate as a principle and motive of amendment, then it brings us exactly under the description which St. Paul has left us of contumacy in sin; that is, “we *despise*,” such is St. Paul’s word, “the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering”—disregarding the design of this forbearance and long suffering; which conduct, as the same St. Paul pronounces, is no other than “treasuring up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath.”

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

the *cause*; for of itself it would have no such effect as to procure salvation; it has no right or title to look for any such thing. This matter is not well understood; yet it easily may be. There never was a malefactor brought before a judge who did not *repent*: yet does that save him, even when it is most sincere? Does the judge go about to inquire whether the criminal before him repent, or whether his repentance be sincere? He makes not that inquiry, because repentance will not save the malefactor from the denounced punishment of his offence. It is not therefore of the nature of repentance, it is not appertaining to its nature as such, to save even from punishment; no, not when it is most sincere: but *our* salvation, the salvation which we look for in Christ Jesus, comprehends much more than being saved from punishment; it includes the happiness of heaven, the reward of an immortal soul—above all price, and beyond all comparison the greatest thing we can gain. Can this, then, naturally belong to repentance, when even being saved from punishment does not? Simply to be saved from punishment is not the natural effect of repentance; for, in point of fact, it does not do it. How, then, to entitle us to the supremest of all gifts, the greatest of all blessings; how can *that* be ascribed to repentance, as by its own operation, and of its own nature? Observe, therefore, repentance has this to do with salvation: it is an *essential condition*; we cannot be

saved without it ; but then as to its being the *cause* of our salvation, or of salvation flowing or following from it, as its natural fruit, its due reward, its proper effect and consequence, it is no such thing. On this ground it resembles any other of our good works. It stands upon no other : I mean, it does not supersede at all the agency, the want, the efficacy of a Redeemer.

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

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

## XIII.

RELIGION NOT A MERE FEELING, BUT AN  
ACTIVE PRINCIPLE.

MATT. VII. 21.

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

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

When the fame of our Lord's miracles had drawn great numbers after him from every quarter of the country, from Galilee you read, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea, and from beyond Jordan, he

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

It was very natural for those who attended our Lord to feel a glow of zeal and affection, to be transported with admiration, to cry out “ Lord, Lord,” from the very fervency and ardour of their love and reverence, when they beheld the astonishing works which he wrought, and heard the words of salvation



which flowed from his lips, or saw the sufferings which he underwent, or his meekness and resignation under them. It was natural for them, and the same thing is natural for us. When we meditate at all upon these subjects—when we turn our thoughts towards the great author and finisher of our faith, the Lord Jesus Christ—when we reflect that he is our way and our life, that what we know concerning the life to come proceeds from him, that our hopes of attaining it are through him, that he is our guide and our instructor, our redeemer and mediator, that he came to lead his followers to heaven, that he laid down his own life to give them eternal life, that he still sits at the right hand of God to interest in our behalf—when we reflect, I say, upon the infinite, unutterable importance of saving our souls, and what he has done, and continues to do towards it—we cannot help crying out, “Lord, Lord;” we cannot help feeling ourselves overwhelmed, as it were, with the vastness and immensity of the subject, and the deep obligation which we owe to the Saviour of the world. This sentiment is still more apt to come upon the mind when any worldly distress or affliction drives us to take refuge in religion—to fly for succour to God Almighty’s protection, and to the dispensation of his righteous will in another world—“to take hold,” as St. Paul speaks, “of the anchor of hope,” and the strong consolation which is ministered to us by the Gospel of Christ. It is upon these occasions that we find religion to be our only stay, trust

in God to be the only firm ground we can set our foot upon. No wonder, therefore, if we be drawn almost involuntarily to cry out, "Lord, Lord,"—that we are constrained by his love—that we feel our dependance upon him—that we are brought to understand, that to be saved in the day of judgment is that concern which wraps up all others—that there is none other name under heaven, whereby we can be saved, only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder, I say, that in moments like these our affection towards Christianity is increased, our thoughts serious, and our devotion sincere.

Sometimes also, without any external causes, or any cause that we are acquainted with, strong impressions of futurity, awful apprehensions of our great change, come over the mind. The things of this world are diminished to nothing, when we place them by the side of that great event which will arrive, and in a short time, to all of us. Life appears what it is—a span; inconsiderable at the longest; liable every day to be put an end to: what shadows we pursue, what shadows we are! The unsatisfactoriness of all our worldly enjoyments, the uncertainty of all our worldly hopes, seizes the imagination with irresistible force. Here then again the soul turns to God. Beaten and repulsed from every other source of confidence and contentment, it seeks them in the future mercies of a faithful Creator.

Or again, it may and does happen, that a sudden glow, a certain warmth and elevation of heart, as

to the concerns of religion, spring up at particular times in our breast ; we cry “ Lord, Lord ! ” with rapture—the promises, the views, the consolations of Christianity, fill our hearts ; we rejoice (as Saint Paul, who felt much of this animation, expresses it) in the hope of our calling, and in the joy of the Holy Ghost.

Now concerning all these various states of mind and affection, the first thing to be said is, that they are all good. Whatever draws the soul to God, whether it be reflection upon the astonishing history of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ardour of his love, the patience of his sufferings, undertaken and undergone for our sakes ; whether it be some outward visitation and discomfiture, some stroke of Providence, which brings us to ourselves, which makes us serious in the business of religion ; whether it be some inward sinking and misgiving of the mind, some cloud which overcasts the spirits ; or whether, on the contrary, we be raised and lifted, as it were, towards heaven by the life and flow of our devotion, still all is good. We ought to regard and accept these stirrings and motions of the mind towards religion, from whatever cause they proceed, as favourable and hopeful intimations of a righteous principle forming within us. We are to invite, cherish, and cultivate them ; wait and desire the return of them ; above all, be thankful for them, and account even calamities as blessings, when they tend to make us religious. It is a sorrow not to be repented of, when it leads to salvation.

Nothing that our Lord says in the text ought by any means to be construed to the undervaluing or discouraging of devout feelings of any kind, or from any cause : but the great misfortune is, these thoughts are apt to be short-lived ; they are wont to be soon forgotten, and forgotten entirely. In the night we cry, " Lord, Lord !" in the morning we return to our sins ; that world, with its pleasures, and honours, and cares, and contentions which we lately thought so little worth our strife and our anxiety, courts us again with new temptations, and is pursued with fresh eagerness. That enduring, imperishable soul, the saving of which we judged the only concern we need to care about or to be afraid about, obtains not our consideration amongst the multitude of thoughts which crowd upon us ; those prospects of everlasting happiness in heaven, which awhile ago opened so bright upon our view, are again shut out ; some loose, sinful pursuit, some mean advantage, gets hold again of our hearts, and closes up that passage where religion was entering in. This is precisely the weakness which our Lord was aware of, and which the words of the text were intended to warn us against. To make good thoughts effectual to salvation, we must so work them into the frame of the mind, so knit and weave them into the very substance of the heart and disposition, that they be no longer merely thoughts, or merely occasional ; but they have a steady influence upon our behaviour, that they take hold of our conduct, that they be at hand to check

and pluck us back when we would go about any wicked design, and that they be at hand also to remind us, and to put us forward when any good thing falls in our power to do.

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

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

This, then, is the sum of what we have delivered. Do we find ourselves visited with pious affections, with serious and awful apprehensions of futurity, with devout and holy thoughts of God, of Jesus Christ, and of our salvation, let us be thankful for them, as for the greatest of blessings.

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

## XIV.

## THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

MATT. VI. 15.

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

THE forgiveness of injuries is commanded in Scripture, not simply as other duties are, but in a manner peculiar to itself; that is, as the absolute condition of obtaining forgiveness ourselves from God—a most awful consideration, and expressed in terms which cannot be mistaken or explained away—“if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses.” Words cannot be plainer or more positive. Nor is this all—for in the prayer which our Lord taught his disciples, and which from thence is called the Lord’s prayer, we are instructed to petition God to forgive us our trespasses, *as* we forgive them that trespass against us; which is as much as to acknowledge that so far from expecting forgiveness of our offences, we are not even to *ask* it upon any other terms than our forgiving the offences committed against us. Some wonder why this forgiving temper, which they reckon



no better than tameness, or want of spirit, should be ranked so high by our Saviour, and hold so prominent a place amongst the duties of his religion—should be of more account with him than the most shining and splendid virtues. But such people do not sufficiently consider the importance of this duty, or the difficulty of it. By its importance, I mean its use to mankind; for what are half the vexations of life, the uneasinesses in families, betwixt neighbours, and all the strife and contention we see in the world owing to, but to the want of it? and how are they to be healed and put a stop to, but by one of the parties at least setting an example of forgiveness? As long as each is determined to be even with his adversary, there can be no end of provocation or offence. Every retaliation is looked upon as a fresh affront, and requiring consequently a fresh act of revenge; so that upon this principle hatred must be immortal—an offence once given, or a quarrel once begun, must breed a train of perpetual ill turns, of constant spite and malice in the persons concerned. And this disposition is as painful to a man himself as it is mischievous to his adversary; for there is no enjoying any solid quiet, or comfort of heart, while a man hateth his brother—whilst he bears a grudge against, or is seeking to be revenged of any one. It likewise makes this a duty of greater real value, that it is very difficult. When we have received an injury or affront, we are naturally set on fire by it—we consider constantly how to be revenged upon our

enemy, and make him, as we say, repent it. This is either natural, as I said, or become so by our education—fashion—habit. Now this propensity, which is one of the strongest belonging to us, must by degrees, and with great pains and reflection, be got the better of. And we have not only this to struggle with, but also the opinion of the world, which is apt to have a mighty influence upon us. Other virtues are a credit and an honour to a man, but this is not: on the contrary, the world are more likely to reproach him as mean-spirited and cowardly for sitting down under an insult or affront, and tamely forgiving the author of it. As I said before, therefore, it is no wonder our Saviour should lay so much stress, and set so high a value, upon a duty which is so necessary to the peace and quietness of the world—which yet is so very difficult to be performed; and one which there is so little inducement to perform besides the considerations of religion.

To explain this duty farther, it may be necessary to mention some particulars which we may be apt to confound with it, but which are not any real parts of it. First, then, the forgiveness of offences should not imply that offences should not be punished when the public good requires it, that is, when the lawful punishment of the offence is necessary, either to correct and amend the delinquent himself, or others by his example. This duty only requires, that such offences should be punished and prosecuted out of a pure regard to the public safety, and to answer the

ends of punishment, and not to gratify revenge. There is no moral similitude between what we make a man suffer out of a cool consideration and a sense of what is necessary, and what is done out of spite or anger. There is this solid difference betwixt the two states—the one will be as painful to us as the other is pleasant. The two things arise from quite different motives—are of a separate nature—and Christ's command, which respects the one, has nothing to do with the other ; so that the magistrate may do his duty in punishing offenders, and private persons may do their duty in bringing public offenders to justice, without interfering with this command of our Saviour's. At the same time, however, it should be remarked and understood, that where no substantial good end is to be answered by it—that is, where the offence is trivial or inadvertent, or where lenity will not be likely to invite the repetition of it, or encourage others in it—in such circumstances to pursue an offence with the utmost rigour and severity of the law savours more of private spite than public justice. Now if there be a mixture of private grudge in such severity, it is a breach of our Saviour's command, though there be law, perhaps, to colour and cover it.

Secondly ; nor does this precept hinder us from applying, upon proper occasions, to the laws of our country to recover some right that is denied us, or satisfaction for some wrong that is done us ; for there would be no living in the world, if the good must

sit down under every wrong that the bad do them : this in the event would be putting the good in absolute slavery and subjection to the bad. But then to justify our conduct in this case, that is, to make it consistent with our Saviour's precepts, the right in question must be some serious right, of value worth the contest, and not merely to show that we are in the right and our adversary in the wrong, rather than for any thing that depends upon either. And likewise, when we are necessarily engaged in a contest of this kind, to proceed with calmness, civility, and good temper, which hurts no cause, and not with anger or passion ; and also to accept the cheapest and most easy method that will answer the ends of justice ; for what is beyond this must be merely to berate and distress our adversary ; and springs, we may depend upon it, from malice and revenge at the bottom. In short, it is easy enough to distinguish in ourselves when we act in those contests, which are almost unavoidable, with a Christian spirit, and when otherwise. If we, instead of trying every fair expedient to avoid and terminate the dispute amicably, are hastily engaged in it—if we go more for victory and triumph to depress and expose our adversary, than for any thing else—if we take delight in putting him to trouble, vexation, and expense, we are far, very far, let his conduct have been what it will, from acting in that mild relenting temper which our religion inculcates and insists upon.—Neither,

Thirdly ; when another has offended against us,

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

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

which offended us, the offence will be the same whether we are the objects of it or another. These are the chief cases in which we can make others suffer for their faults, without disobeying our Saviour's command to forgive them.

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

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

praise or merit really due to him—whilst we cannot see his success without mortification, or his misfortunes but with secret pleasure? As long as we continue in this disposition, at least whilst we continue without endeavouring to correct it, we have not the spirit of Christ: we have not complied with his command.

There are several considerations, which properly attended to and applied, may help to mollify our hatred, and bring us by degrees to that tenderness of heart and temper which makes so great a part of a good Christian:—I will mention two. The first is, that the only way of overcoming evil is with good. The most generous and effectual method of subduing our adversary's animosity, and making him sensible of his error and unkindness, is to repay it with kindness and good offices on our part. He that requites one ill turn with another is only even with his adversary when he has done. He that forgives it is above him; and so his adversary himself will confess one time or another. And thus does St. Paul exhort us: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. If thine enemy hunger, give him meat; if he thirst, give him drink; so shalt thou heap coals of fire upon his head"—a singular expression, but very just and beautiful when rightly understood. It was the custom to melt down hard metals by heaping coals of fire upon the head of the vessel they were put into. And so St. Paul comes to speak of heaping coals of fire upon your adversary's head to melt his heart. But the great consideration

of all, and which should never fail, one would think, to produce this forgiving temper within us, is that we stand in so much need of forgiveness ourselves. Imagine our own offences all disclosed and brought to light; imagine, again, ourselves obstinately persevering in revenge, in a denial of satisfaction, refusing to be intreated, disdaining to forgive, extreme to mark and to resent what is done or said amiss; imagine, I say, this, and you can hardly paint to yourself a greater instance of arrogance and absurdity. It must be intolerable, if any thing is, in the sight of God. This sentiment is described by our Saviour, in one of the finest parables in the whole book; which I desire to leave upon your minds, as being what we should always bear about us—a lesson which it is a shame to be ignorant of; and impossible, one would think, to forget. It is to be found in the latter part of the 18th chap. of St. Matthew.

“The kingdom of heaven,” that is, God’s dealing with mankind under the Gospel, “is,” says our Saviour, “like unto a certain king which would take account of his servants; and when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents; but, forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and



loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants which owed him an hundred pence, and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest ; and his fellow-servant fell down at his feet and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all ;—and he would not, but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me, shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that he owed unto him.” We can readily see the monstrous cruelty and ingratitude of the servant’s behaviour—“ Oughtest not thou also to have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee,” is an expression that goes to the heart. We must agree also in the justice of his lord’s conduct when he delivered him to the tormentors till he had paid all that was due to him. It is impossible not to own it is what he deserved, but our business with it is to see,—what also a little secret reflection will convince us of,—that this is no other than the case of each and every one of us who does not from the heart forgive his brother their trespasses.

## XV.

## RECONCILEMENT OF DISPUTES.

## PROVERBS XVII. 14.

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

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

affront scarcely perceptible, easily avoided, and at first as easily made up, commonly lays the foundation of those quarrels and animosities which, in private life, are sure to make those miserable who are involved in them ; and when they fall out between persons or parties of powerful and extensive influence, are apt to fill a whole neighbourhood with rancour, calumny, and confusion. The breach at first might have been closed up with little cost or trouble. It is seldom that the occasion of the dispute is worth a thousandth part of the uneasiness which each side suffers by it ; or that there is any proportion between the importance of a quarrel and the heat with which it is carried on. A hasty, angry, or inadvertent word, or sometimes not so much as that, even a cold, suspicious, or unkind look, may be enough to give birth to a contention which in its progress and effects may involve a whole neighbourhood—may divide friends, disturb families, set up unnecessary parties and odious distinctions, put an end to all the comfortable intercourse of society ; and, what is much more to be lamented, to all charity and good-will and good offices one towards another. What does either side gain ? What do not both sides lose ? lose in the composure and tranquillity of their own minds, in the society of those about them, in the opportunities of performing and receiving kind offices, which render the journey of life easy and comfortable. As the causes of the bitterest quarrels are generally the most frivolous, so condescensions equally unimportant would in the

early stages of the dispute generally close and heal them. A soft expression, a friendly countenance, a kind salutation, are all, probably, it would have cost to reconcile enmities which have since become fierce, implacable, and deep-rooted; but we must not condescend—we must maintain our right—we must not be wanting to our dignity—we are ready to accept acknowledgement, but we will not yield or give way first! We have declared our resolution, and it were meanness to give it in! Whilst both sides choose to argue thus, both sides may entertain an internal desire of reconciliation, and yet never be reconciled. The opportunity will soon be lost. The season of peace will soon be over. Offences are easily given, where both sides are on the watch to take them. Jealousy and suspicion are apt to convert undesigned words and actions into marks of what is already believed to be lurking within. One shyness is returned with another; every return becomes a fresh injury, and every injury requires a fresh retaliation. The distance between the parties is rapidly increasing, till all connexion and communication becomes odious to both—they no more approach each other, and therefore have no more opportunity, if they sought it, of bringing one another back to their former friendship—they are alienated incurably, and for life. A riveted hostility takes place: mutual reproach and mutual railing, invective, slander, and backbiting, are sure to follow. It is become a gratification and a triumph in each to depress and mortify the other. Thus are two

neighbours and two friends set down for life to torment each other and themselves,—not without almost constant disquietude and heart-ache ; I may say also, with a constant violation of God Almighty's laws. Are not the evils and calamities of life enow ? Is not the distress we suffer from sickness, from the loss of friends, from unavoidable misfortunes sufficient, that we must aggravate and magnify it by quarrels amongst ourselves ? Disputes of real moment and of serious consequence will sometimes arise between parties peaceably and amicably inclined ; but such disputes, we may observe, are generally conducted with decency and with moderation. It is for small, and sometimes only imaginary affronts, from minute, or perhaps only suspected incivilities ; from contests about insignificant forms and ceremonies ; from a passion to be thought greater than some other, whom we have taken it into our heads to view with eyes of rivalry and jealousy—it is from causes like these that the bitterest quarrels take their beginnings. It is haughtiness and impetuosity of temper from which dissensions usually commence ; that is to say, a hasty, peevish, or captious pride begins them ; and that stiffness which borrows the name of firmness, dignity, or consistency of character, but which is in truth, and which we should probably call in another, mere obstinacy and stubbornness, continues them. At least these are the infirmities of temper to which many are subject ; and these are the infirmities which if “ we would wish to see good days ”—if we would wish

“to pass the time of our sojourning here” in ease and quietness, we must endeavour to overcome.

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

First; from what has been laid down concerning the usual progress of the malignant and vindictive passions, which are called into action in the course of a dispute, it is evident that our caution is best exercised at first. “Leave off contention before it be meddled with,”—refrain from all language and behaviour which is likely to beget enmity and dissension. You see the beginning of your quarrel, but not the end, the extent, or the consequences. A provoking word, in the heat of passion and resentment, may be forcibly or shrewdly thrown out at the moment by the person who uses it, but it is sure to return upon his mind with bitterness and regret.

Secondly; a reflection which may put us on our guard against that promptness to take offence, and that precipitation in punishing or revenging the injury we conceive ourselves to have received, is, the consideration how extremely liable we all are to mistake both facts and words in the first report that is made, and the first apprehension that is formed of them. A very minute difference will convert innocent

but heedless actions into studied insults—loose and equivocal or unguarded expressions into deliberate affronts : and this circumspection is doubly necessary, when the behaviour or language that offends us comes to our knowledge through the representation of a third person, or the intervention, perhaps, of two or three intermediate accounts. It is not always necessary to suppose express malice in that person. Inaccuracy alone, in either observing or relating, will often fatally mislead a rash and impetuous hearer.

Thirdly ; if we be often incorrect in the judgment we form of other men's behaviour, I mean as to the facts, words, and circumstances themselves, much more are we apt to misinterpret the motives from which they arise. It will convince us of this, to recur to our own consciousness ; and to recollect whether it hath not frequently happened to ourselves to have the principles, views, and inducements upon which we have acted, totally misunderstood or misrepresented ; how forgetfulness hath been construed into neglect ; inadvertency into insult ; cheerfulness or vivacity of spirits into forwardness, intrusion, or petulance ; shyness into distance ; natural reserve into superciliousness and disrespect. It may sometimes have fallen out worse. An unfortunate conjunction of circumstances, or combination of accidents, may have caused us to be suspected of dark purposes, or mean contrivances—of art, craft, or design ; when, in truth, our minds were perfectly free from them. We may have appeared to be insin-

ere when we were never less so ; to have acted an equivocal part, when the whole embarrassment arose from unforeseen, unknown, or unthought of, positive circumstances. If ever this case has been ours, it ought to admonish us to reflect, that the same may happen to others ; and possibly to those with whom we have a present cause of dissatisfaction or complaint. We may be acting, at this very time, upon those hasty judgements from which we have ourselves experienced hardships and injustice. We have seen how liable other men are to error, with respect to us, when they proceed upon first impressions, partial accounts, or even upon appearances ; and we cannot but know, that we are no less fallible in judging of *them*. It ought to teach us caution and forbearance in our first behaviour, under a supposed injury or affront.

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



under the same infirmities of temper, constitution, or understanding.

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

Sixthly; one compendious rule, which, if observed, would prevent many quarrels from originating, and many more from proceeding to desperate extremities, is the following: “Never to speak what will give pain, without a prospect of doing good.” It is of the nature of human resentment to prompt us to say what we think may vex and mortify our adversary—what may raise up in his breast uneasy recollections, and to have a pleasure in doing so. This propensity is more irresistible when the sting is pointed by some scornful wit or vivacity of reply. A successful retort is what few can deny themselves. Our admonition, therefore, is, to control and withstand the impulse;

and to reflect upon each occasion, not how grating what we are about to say may be, how it will confound and silence our adversary, how smart or lively, how true, or even how just and deserved, but what *good* it is likely to produce. This reflection would correct those sudden ebullitions either of anger or fancy, by which, if applause be gained, peace and friendship are destroyed, our tranquillity disturbed, our character ultimately injured, or at least ruffled in the estimation of every one who knows his duty.

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

## XVI.

## OATHS.

## HEBREWS VI. 16.

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

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

there is ground to believe, that their opinion of virtue is rather forced by custom than consideration ; and this shows it, that you shall frequently see men scrupulous enough about the observation of the law of oaths—as oaths, for instance, in evidence before a court of justice, and the like—who are very heedless, not to say worse, of the authority and obligation of an oath in other cases,—as oaths for the due discharge of their office, oaths relating to the customs, and oaths concerning their allegiance, and some others of a like kind. Now it is an oath in both cases ; and men's care about the one, and indifference about the other, seem, I say, to indicate that their judgement of oaths is taken up rather from conforming to the prevailing way of thinking, than any just knowledge of the subject, or reflections of their own about it.

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

Now as to the form, an oath is a religious ceremony ; and like other religious ceremonies not described or pointed out in Scripture, is, and may be, in different countries and different ages of the world, very various, without any substantial alteration in the thing itself. Amongst the Jews, the person sworn held up his right hand towards the heavens, while he repeated the terms of his oath : which explains the meaning of an expression in the Psalms, “ And their

right hand is full of falsehood." Amongst Christians, also, the form differs considerably ; and in no country, I believe, in the world, is the form worse contrived, either to express or impress the nature of an oath, than in our own. The shortness and obscurity of the form, together with the levity and too great frequency with which it is administered, has brought about an inadvertency to the obligation of an oath, which, both in a religious and political view, is much to be lamented. I do not mean that it is a common practice for men knowingly and deliberately to perjure themselves. I trust, as I said before, that this is rare and singular ; but on some occasions, they carry away so little awe or sense of an oath upon their minds, as hardly to know whether they have taken an oath or not ; and therefore they must be in perpetual danger of violating the obligation of the oath, from mere ignorance or inattention, or want of thought : which, though it does not come up to the crime of wilful and corrupt perjury, is still a crime. All I think necessary to say, in explanation of the form in use amongst us, is this—that when the person sworn repeats the words, " So help me God," he is understood to mean—" so," that is, upon condition of my speaking the truth, or performing what I now promise ; this he is understood to say when he repeats the words, and to assent to when another repeats them. But whatever be the form of an oath, the substance and signification are the same. It is the calling upon God to witness, that is to take notice of, what we say ; and invoking

his vengeance, or renouncing his favour, if what we say be false, or what we promise be not performed.

This is what the person who swears in effect does ; and no man can do that, and know what he is doing, without an awe or dread upon his mind both at the time and whenever afterwards he reflects upon the obligation he is under, and how far he hath been careful to fulfil it. The knowledge alone of what an oath is, is enough, with a serious mind, to enforce the authority of it beyond all other arguments.

In further explaining the obligation of an oath, we must lay out of the case the particular mischief which false security, and false swearing, may, in any instance, do, because that mischief is to be accounted the same as if compassed by any other means ; this we will pass over, and observe the general guilt of false swearing, which is what we are to consider. Thus, if we take away the life of another by false swearing, it is just the same as if we stabbed him ; there is no difference. If by false swearing we make a cause go otherwise than it would have done, and ought to have done, and thereby deprive the losing side of what he would otherwise have obtained or preserved, it is the same as if we robbed him ; the manner of depriving another of his just right makes no difference. Whatever we consider the *general* nature and guilt of false swearing to be, these *particular* effects and aggravations are incalculable.

In order then to show, that oaths carry with them a proper force and obligation of their own, it will be

necessary for me to show, that there is good reason to believe that God will punish false swearing with more severity than a simple lie, or breach of promise ; for unless there be cause to think so, it cannot be contended that an oath has either use or virtue in itself ; but that men's bare word or promise might as well be taken, if there be the same guilt in breaking them as a solemn oath. Comparisons of crimes are to be made with caution, for they are attended with this disadvantage—that when we mention one crime to be greater than another, the hearer is led to fancy the less crime to be none at all, or to be inconsiderable. Thus, while we prove that false swearing is a greater sin, and will be more severely punished than lying, we are apt to think lying can be no great sin in the sight of God, nor the punishment much. This is not an uncommon, but surely a very weak way of reasoning ; for lying remains just the same crime, and the punishment which awaits it will be just the same, whether perjury be a greater sin or not. It does not make the guilt of one action less, to show that the guilt of another is greater, any more than it diminishes the height of one tower or mountain to say that another tower or mountain is higher.

Under this caution, therefore, we proceed to offer our reasons why we believe that God will punish false swearing with more severity than a simple lie, or breach of promise. First ; perjury is a sin of greater deliberation. The person who swears has

in fact, I believe, the thoughts of God and of religion upon his mind at the time ; at least there are very few who can shake them off entirely : he offends, therefore, if he do offend, with a high hand—in the very face, that is, and in defiance, of the sanctions of religion. This offence implies a disbelief or contempt of God's knowledge, power, or justice ; which cannot be said of a lie, when there is nothing to carry the mind to any reflection upon the Deity, or the divine attributes at all. For a lie may be sometimes pleaded haste, negligence, thoughtlessness, surprise : this can never be alleged in extenuation of perjury. It is doing a cool, concerted, deliberate crime. It may be said of a liar, that he was off his guard—had not the sense of his duty, and of God, the Author of all duty, upon his mind at the time ; the reverse of this is the case of perjury. A man must have, from the nature of the thing, and in fact has, the thoughts of God Almighty and of his duty upon his mind at the time ; and then it is showing, by transgressing one, and in effect bidding defiance to the other, a false way of implying in the person guilty of it, either a disbelief or contempt of God's knowledge, power, and justice. This is a heavy accusation ; but when we reflect that a man who swears calls upon God to witness what he says, invokes his vengeance, renounces his favour, if what he says be false, knowing still that it is false, what are we to think of the swearer's guilt ? Can we think he believes that God hears him, that



God has the power to punish him, and that God is a punisher and avenger of wickedness? If he believe these attributes, it is clear that he despises and wilfully defies them.

But, secondly; perjury violates a superior confidence. Mankind must trust to one another; and they have nothing better to trust to than another's oath. Hence all legal decisions, which govern and affect every right and interest on this side of the grave, of necessity proceed and depend upon oaths. Perjury, therefore, in its general consequences, strikes at the security of reputation, property, and even life itself. A lie cannot do the same mischief, because the same credit is not given to it. I have repeatedly endeavoured to inculcate this rule, that the way of estimating the guilt of any action is, to consider what would be the *consequence* if others allowed themselves in the same: the rule will never fail us. Now apply it to the case of perjury: what would be the effects, what would be the condition of mankind, if men once began to trifle with oaths, or to allow themselves, without shame or reserve, to swear to a falsehood? no man's innocence, no man's character, no man's estate, no man's life, would be safe for an hour. Who would sleep in his bed in peace that reflected he was in danger of being called out to prison, and perhaps to death, upon the accusation of a false witness; and that, since the obligation of oaths was held no longer sacred, false witnesses were to be procured in every street of a city? We read of some-

thing of the kind in the last stage of prophecy, in the state at which some nations arrived before their destruction ; and a dismal state of affairs it was. It supplied the place of murder and robbery, when men could take away the lives and fortunes of another by false swearing. This they may always do. Courts of justice, be they ever so honest or so vigilant, cannot help it, for they must trust to oaths of witnesses ; for what else, what higher tie upon the consciences of men, can they trust to ? So that it is truly said that every man's estate or life is in the power of perjury to take away ; and this is true in our own country as much as in any other.

The point we laid down was, that there is good reason to believe that God will punish false swearing with greater severity than a simple falsehood ; and we have evidence to prove that it is in reality a greater crime.

But further it is to be observed, in the third and last place, that God, in the Old Testament, directed the Israelites to swear by his name, and the priests to require upon some occasions an oath of the person to be examined ; and moreover, to show the immutability of his own counsels, he solemnly confirmed his covenant with that people by an oath. None of these things, it is probable, he would have done, had he not intended that oaths should have some meaning and effect beyond the obligation of a bare word or promise—which effect must be owing to the severer punishment with which he will hereafter vindicate the authority of oaths.

## XVII.

## PROFANE SWEARING.

## EXODUS xx. 7.

*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

IN all cases whatever, where there is an express command, it is best, in my opinion, to set off with the command, and to let it come fairly to be tried what the strength of the command is—whether men will take upon them to set aside the authority of God's commandment or not.

Now in the case of profane swearing, there is a positive and express command extant. There neither is, nor ever was, a doubt but that the command reaches the case. There neither is, nor ever was, a doubt but that the case of profane swearing constituted a direct and positive violation of the command. There may be, and there are, various ways of taking God's name in vain, but it never has been disputed that profane swearing is one of them.

There is no swearer, then, who does not knowingly violate the divine command, and who therefore has not this question to ask himself,—whether he be safe

while he is going on in a continued breach of one of God's commandments? That is precisely his situation ; and if he can draw, either from sound reason or from Scripture, good authority for believing that to be a safe situation, then he may be at ease : if he cannot, then has he the condemnation of a transgressed and despised command to look forward to. It does not seem a case, either for evasion, for doubt, or indeed for much reasoning. The command is clear, if commands *can* be clear. The transgression is also clear.

And in this respect it goes beyond some other duties, and some other sins, in the clearness of the command and the clearness of the transgression : for which reason, although it may be true, and perhaps is true, that the most ignorant persons are the most guilty of this practice, yet it is a case in which ignorance is little or no excuse. Were it a deep or abstruse case—were it a case of much argument or reasoning—were it a case which called for learning, or research, or inquiry, or knowledge, to come to any certainty about it—great apologies might be made for ignorance, great allowance to the want of education or of opportunity, from which the ignorance proceeded. But nothing of this sort can be pleaded. Here is a plain command, and a plain transgression. The ignorant man knows this as well as the wise. It is a rule for all—“ God will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain,” is a judgement pronounced for all mankind. The most

illiterate understands it—the most learned does no more.

If any questions have been ever raised upon this command, such as whether taking any oath, or upon any occasion, be consistent with it, more especially as it is recognised and applied by our Saviour, they are questions in which the profane swearer has no concern. This case is clearly within the law. It is nothing to him whether other cases be so or not.

I have said, here is a plain transgression of a plain command—and of what sort of a command? Let that be considered. Let it be considered under what circumstances, with what distinguishing force, with what extraordinary and prodigious solemnity, the Ten Commandments, of which this is one, were originally delivered—what reverence they are entitled to from all who reverence God. With those who think that God is not to be revered—who do not reverence him in any thing, I have no concern. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to-day and to-morrow; and be ready against the third day, for the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, upon Mount Sinai. And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the Mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, so that all the people that was in the camp trembled; and Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the Mount: and

Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire : and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole Mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice. And God spake all these words." "These words," saith Moses, "the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the Mount, out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice, and he added no more ; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me."

Now of commands so delivered, so pronounced, accompanied with such terrible preparation and solemnity, is any one to be made a sport of? Is it to be a diversion, a mirth, to treat one such command with insult and contempt, and with the very highest degree of both? Yet is it not true, that "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," is one of these commands? and is it not true, that it is thus treated? I speak not, as I said before, to those who think that God is not to be revered at all, or who do not reverence him in any thing, but to others do I speak, and most especially to all young persons. What a *beginning* is this, of a religious course of life? It is impossible, in the nature of things, that any serious sentiments of religion, any impressions, any conversation, any practice, any thing that resembles a religious character, or approaches to it, can grow out of such an origin.

But it may be said that this was spoken to the

Jews, and not to the Christians. Hear how that matter stands : “ I say unto you, swear not at all—neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne ; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool—neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king—neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black : but let your communication be yea, yea, or nay, nay, for whatever is more than these, cometh of evil.” These are the words of Christ himself, whereby it appears most indisputably, that he adopts the third commandment in its full extent, and according to the spirit, as well as the letter of it. So far from superseding or weakening its authority, he adds to it his own ; “ *I* say unto you, swear not at all.” So far from confining its extent, he rather enlarges it ; that is, he interprets it according to its spirit as well as its letter : from the name of God he extends it to every thing which relates to God. This excuse, therefore, does not come well from the mouth of any Christian whatever, namely, that the commandment was spoken only to the Jews ; for Christ, the Author of our religion, has explicitly adopted it, in all its force, in all its obligation, and in all its extent. What Christ himself began upon this head, the apostles continued : “ Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath.” Here is the very same strain of admonition as our Lord had used—clear, positive, decisive ; and this is from St. James.

Am I not well warranted, therefore, in asserting

concerning profane swearing, that there is a clear command, and a clear transgression? But will any one reply by asking, What is a command without a reason? I will judge the strength of the command by the weight of the reason, when I know it. Is this a reply from a creature to his Creator, from dust and ashes to Omnipotence, from ignorance itself to Him who knoweth all things, from weakness and impotency to the Ruler of the world? Is the command itself nothing? Is not the command itself sufficient: above all reasons or arguments whatever sufficient—a command so pronounced, so ratified; proceeding from such authority, delivered with such solemnity; so decisive in its prohibitions, so clear in its signification?

The reason nevertheless is the strongest of all reasons,—to uphold, namely, in the minds of men, a reverence for their Creator. Such is human nature, such is the constitution of the human mind, that what is treated externally, that is by words or by behaviour, with levity and giddiness and contempt, loses its force and impression internally. It is so in all cases: it is remarkably so in the present. How stands the fact in men addicted to swearing? are they men who live under an inward conscientious awe of God Almighty; a sense of his infinite adorable nature, of his constant presence, of his bounty or his goodness, of his power or his authority, his close relation to us, our absolute dependence upon him? If these things be true, are they not things which



should possess the mind? But is it possible that a mind possessed with such thoughts should allow itself without any shock in the practice of swearing? Is outward profaneness consistent with inward piety? Can they, do they in fact and in experience, subsist together in the same person? That I take to be the exact question. If it be true, either that a deep, a just, a rational piety, even without the smallest tincture of enthusiasm or melancholy, must and actually will produce a seriousness of outward demeanour with respect to these subjects,—at least to a degree sufficient to check both presumptuous contempt and heedless levity; of which contempt and levity a surer evidence and indication cannot be given than by common swearing, in any form of it and under all forms (for though forms of swearing be more or less shocking, they are in their view alike); or if on the other hand it be true, that the habit and practice of swearing will eat out, in young minds most particularly, all reverence for God Almighty, dissipate all good impressions, produce an incapacity for devotion, either public or private; and at last bring them to an impious boldness, to a casting off of all awe of God's judgements, of all regard and respect to him—then undoubtedly there was not only reason, but the highest of all reasons, for laying a restraint upon licentiousness so pernicious in its consequences; and the same, nay indeed much greater reason, for *obeying* that law, and that injunction by which it was laid. Depend upon it, that a regard to God Al-

mighty lies at the root of every thing which is good, is the only restraint from every thing that is bad—that whatever in any degree diminishes, or tends to diminish that regard, is of all hurtful things the most so.

For if it be allowed, which I think it may, that to see the moral evil of swearing is, to look farther than the generality of men do look; and that these evil effects, though real, and great, and certain, are not, like the effects of murder or theft, sensible and immediate; allowing this, then in what situation does the subject stand with those who have not considered the effects at all? It stands thus—it stands with them upon the ground of religion. The *religion* of the case, the religious command is clear: that at least is obvious and intelligible: of that at least they must be apprised. Wherefore, if they be of the number of those who do not comprehend the reason, or have never much considered the reason which makes swearing and cursing an evil, upon principles of morality, then it becomes a test and trial whether religion alone, whether religion as such, and independently of other considerations, has any authority or influence with them at all. Rules of morality, such as, commonly speaking, are called so, do not afford this test; for they are either enforced by the terrors or penalties of law, or the violation of them is attended with direct and immediate public mischief, or with cruelty, or with injury to individuals: under all which circumstances, although religion operate

in keeping us to our duty, yet it operates in conjunction and combination with other powerful motives. In the case before us, that is to say, in curbing and checking, and breaking the practice of profane swearing, religion operates by itself, and therefore shows what degree of force and strength and weight it really has with us. . This observation is applicable to a higher class than those who are vulgarly addicted to this vice, and the very truth is, that those who have upon their minds a sense of religion as such, and in any degree proportioned to its immense importance, are not drawn into the practice of swearing by any position of circumstances whatever ; those in whom this sense is feeble, or wanting, or lost, are drawn into this practice, if it so happen that their profession, their company, or their temper, or their habit, lead them into it.

I shall conclude with one reflection.

If there be one description of men more than another who ought to have the dread of God Almighty upon their minds, and in whom that dread ought to check all profane, all contemptuous, all idle, all impious treatment of his name and his commands, it is those who carry their lives in their hands. “ Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do ; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear ; fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea I say unto you fear him.”

## XVIII.

## DRUNKENNESS.

## ROM. XIII. 13.

*Let us walk honestly, as in the day ; not in rioting  
and drunkenness.*

WHOEVER considers the purity and strictness of the Christian religion ; how it extends its rules, not only to our actions, but our words, not only to words, but to thoughts ; how it requires self-command, self-government, at almost every turn, and in every point of our duties ; mastery and management of our passions of every kind ; a constraint over every inclination, so as to be able to check and call it back to its subjection to reason—whoever considers this, will see that we stand in need of perpetual vigilance and circumspection—how liable we are to fall ; how little able to maintain a complete adherence to God's laws, even in our soberest hours, with the perfect use of our faculties, and without any extraordinary violence or impetuosity added to our acquired or constitutional propensities ; that consequently, when a great advantage is thrown by intemperance into the wrong scale, the passions of every sort are inflamed and put in

motion, our reflection and sense of duty is confused, our judgment disordered, the admonitions of conscience laid asleep, and we are surrounded with temptations and with provocations,—in this condition it cannot be expected from human strength that a man should preserve an unblameable conduct, or a steady regard to the rules of morality and religion. Accordingly, I suppose it is the fact, that few, or none, recover from a fit of intemperance but who are conscious, when they come to themselves, of some impropriety or extravagance into which drunkenness has betrayed them ; some action or some outrage of which they are ashamed ; some expression or word which has escaped them, and which they wish in vain could be recalled ; some quarrel which they have drawn upon themselves ; some enmity of which they have sown the seed, and, universally, a loss of that command of ourselves in which both our happiness and virtue consist. But then comes the specious consideration, that the crimes a man commits in that condition are excused by the very condition he is in ; that he is not chargeable with what he does when he is not himself, when he has no command perhaps left of his conduct ; when his nature and disposition are altered as to all moral purposes : that, like the insane person, he is entitled to all the indulgence and excuses of that condition. This plea is made by thousands ; it is a kind of discourse you often hear ; and weighs, I am apt to suppose, much in the private thoughts of persons addicted to intemperate

courses. We allow, too, that it carries enough of the semblance of reason to impose upon many, and to deserve examination.

Now, the first observation that occurs is, that if this plea were allowed in its full extent, a man would be at liberty when he found himself disordered by intemperance to commit any crime or any extravagance; for his drunkenness, according to his argument, would cover and excuse it all: and a conclusion so absurd leads one to suspect the argument from which it flows. The truth of the case seems to be this; that if we look no further than the point of time when a drunken man commits his crime, it will be difficult to distinguish between his case and that of an insane person; for he is at that moment more completely bereft of his reason, at least as completely delivered over to the impulse of his passions, as the other: and if that be an excuse for the one, why should it not be so for both?—So it may be argued, if we confine our attention to the precise period of committing the offence: but here the two cases differ exceedingly—that the one person suffers under the visitation of an inevitable calamity; the other is the author of his own distemper: and this is what, properly, the drunkard's guilt consists in; *not* in committing faults when he is in a condition in which he cannot help it, but in knowingly and voluntarily bringing himself into such a condition. And when we once understand the proper foundation of the guilt, we shall be enabled to esti-

mate the crime of the action of a drunken man, compared with the same action in a sober man. The rule of reason and justice appears to be this : whatever proportion the chance of falling into such and such crimes bears to the absolute certainty, the same proportion does the crime of any evil action in a drunken man bear to the guilt of the same action in a sober man ; so that if there be, as there always is, unjustifiable licentiousness, if not of action, at least of language and thought, to which all persons inflamed with liquor are subject ; or if there be certain particular feelings and extravagancies to which the infirmity of particular constitutions when disordered by intemperance are sure to draw men into, then, and to both these, the guilt may be deemed equal to the deeds, if committed with all our senses and faculties about us : for it makes little or no difference whether we deliberately commit a crime, or deliberately put ourselves into a condition in which we know beforehand that we shall be tempted to commit it. Of crimes and outrages which are the effects of drunkenness, but are unusual or unthought of, the judgement is not quite the same ; they cannot be accounted of, as if proceeding from deliberate wickedness, because they are the effects of a condition which admits of no deliberation, nor can it be said here, as before, that the drunken man foresaw, or might have foreseen these effects, when he suffered himself to be brought into such a condition ; for they are by the supposition unusual, and therefore not foreseen : but

though unusual, they are not impossible, nor perhaps, all things considered, very improbable. Therefore there is a guilt, and a very great one, in incurring the hazard, or even the possibility of perpetrating those crimes and outrages from which we had power or had reason to withhold us ; and from which we are safe, or at least distant, so long as we neither abused that power nor that reason. I here put the supposition more in favour of intemperance than it will properly bear : for I supposed that the disorder occasioned by it deprives a man of the use of his understanding, and leaves him, at the time of committing the crime, in the absolute condition of an insane person ; so that the very guilt he was capable of, consisted in bringing himself into that condition. Now this is seldom the case in reality : in intoxication, some self-command, some conscientious sense of right and wrong remains with men ; and for so much as does remain they are accountable, as much then, as ever. Another circumstance should likewise always be noticed, which is a great aggravation of drunkenness : When a man finds by experience the mischievous, the pernicious consequences which intemperance produces to himself, or through him to others, and does not take warning by them, but returns to his drunkenness at every opportunity, and whenever the temptation comes round, it will be difficult to distinguish such a man's misconduct from the same misconduct in a sober person ; at least, there is a wide difference between this case, and his who has been



casually betrayed into intemperance, and, by intemperance, into improper behaviour, and takes little caution from the experience of his own infirmity, to keep out of the way of a second temptation, or gains little resolution to withstand it.

One considerable part of the mischiefs and evil tendency of intemperance, is the *example*, especially in people whose example is likely to influence others; as of masters of families, persons in public stations, those who are, or ought to be, the instructors of others.

Drunkenness effectually puts an end to all authority; for it so degrades and debases the drunkard, as not only to bring him upon a level with the lowest of those over whom his authority should be preserved, but much beneath them: it is ridiculous in a drunkard to talk to others of decency, order, good manners, quietness, peaceableness, industry, activity, usefulness, who himself, in this one vice, exhibits a public example of the violation of all these duties. And this matter of example, in this, as well as in a thousand other instances, may lead us to enlarge our views of the consequences of our actions, and see a guilt in them which we may not discern in them considered simply in themselves. In the case before us, expense, for instance, may not be a consideration to all; but their example, or their company, may draw in others to make it a consideration very serious. In like manner, the shame, and distress, and terror, and uneasiness which intemperance is sure to

occasion to a person's own family, is an important aggravation of the offence. This is not applicable to those who have no family; but then the infection of their example, or the exercise of their vice, propagates itself to those who have families, and so makes them indirectly the authors of misery which, very possibly, they never intended or suspected.

I have thus enumerated the effects of drunkenness, without exaggeration; for I do not wish to indulge in invective or excite indignation against it, further than the solid mischief it produces will justify. Universally we ought to take into the account, not merely the mischief it produces at the very moment of committing the crime, but altogether, sooner or later, directly or indirectly; to ourselves, in our fortunes, health, constitutions, understandings; to our families, in their subsistence, expectations, morals, peace, and satisfaction; to the neighbourhood and the public at large, by the outrages, indecencies, and extravagancies into which it betrays us; or more generally, by the evil tendency of our example, which will operate afterwards where it is more pernicious than in ourselves, and for which we are in a very serious degree answerable.

It remains that we state the judgment of Scripture concerning this vice; which you will find to be agreeable to what the light of nature, rightly attended to, indicates of its evil tendency: "Be not drunk with wine," says Saint Paul, "wherein is excess." You here find no rigid rules of abstinence or self-denial;

nothing of that unnecessary mortification or painful refusal of the satisfactions of life, which all religions that are founded on enthusiasm or imposture have been wont to enjoin. Saint Paul does not forbid wine ; but being drunken with wine, wherein is excess. The reasonableness of this precept entitles it to respect.

In the sixth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, Saint Paul enumerates the offenders of whom he says, “ they shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven.” Amongst these we find drunkards : “ *neither* thieves, nor covetous, nor *drunkards*, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall enter the kingdom of heaven.” This declaration admits of no comment save one : that we must understand the Apostle to speak of habitual offenders, persisting in their respective crimes, without repentance, change, or reformation. In other passages, Saint Paul is at some pains to teach his disciples how inconsistent this vice is with their particular characters and profession. It was a common way of preaching with him, to describe those who were indulged with the light of the Gospel as children of light, and of the day ; in opposition to the rest of the world, who lived, as to religious matters, in night and darkness. In this view of their condition as Christians, he takes occasion to enforce upon them the duty of sobriety : “ They that be drunken, are drunken in the night ; but let us who are of the day be sober.” I am not concerned to discuss the arguments. The passage shows Saint Paul’s

sentiments of the crime of drunkenness, and its absolute inconsistency with the Christian profession.

With respect to the preservatives against this vice, the first thing to be remarked is, that there is no trusting to our natural aversion to excessive drinking. Most people have this aversion at first. Therefore, a man being drawn in notwithstanding, proves that that is no security to be depended upon.

If, then, from our business, in which we are exposed to much company and many invitations to excess, or from any other cause, that we find our aversion abating, and a liking or a desire after this indulgence beginning, I know of no better advice that can be given, than to tie ourselves down by rules, and resolutely and constantly to abide by them.

All such rules are absurd when they are unnecessary; but they are not unnecessary when we are exposed to such danger by the consequences of falling into such a habit, so utterly destructive of all that is good, and of such incalculable mischief; and from which there is so little hope, if there be any indeed, of ever recovering.

The next great caution I would recommend is to beware of indulgences of the kind when alone, at home, and in our own families. So long as we confine our intemperance to occasions of feasting or of company, that can be repeated no oftener than the occasions return, which is not constantly. Whenever we cease to wait for occasions, and have found the way of betaking ourselves to this gratification by

ourselves, there is less, there is nothing, to hinder or interrupt a settled habit of intemperance fastening upon us. As I have observed already, the most plausible excuse to ourselves for indulgence is fatigue : thousands have been drawn in by this excuse. It is always, therefore, prudent to place the danger full before our eyes—to reflect how easily and how gently refreshment leads to intemperance, indulgence to excess. We shall consult our safety and happiness by forbidding to ourselves such indulgence the moment we perceive that there is danger of its gaining ground upon us, and laying, however slowly, the foundation for every other vice.

## XIX.

## LICENTIOUSNESS AND DEBAUCHERY.

EPHES. 5, 6.

*Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*

THESE are awful words. They assert most satisfactorily, that there are certain things, which, let men say or think what they will, are sure of bringing down the wrath of God upon those who commit them. They further intimate, that, although this be certainly true, and will be found to be so, yet many mistake, fatally mistake the matter—hold flattering opinions upon the subject which will prove to be false; thereby overlooking or remaining ignorant of their own danger, and of the end to which they will come; that there are deceivers and deceived; they who are labouring to deceive others, and they who are very willing to be deceived. For when the apostle uses these words of warning, “let no man *deceive* you,” he knew that such deceptions were abroad, were common, were employed, were listened to, succeeded and prevailed over the minds and consciences of many. Then he apprizes them of the danger, of the necessity

of preparing and fortifying themselves against such delusions. He bids them (for this is the meaning and force of his admonition) he bids them look neither to the right hand nor to the left ; to listen neither to what one man said, nor to what another man said ; neither to this specious persuasion, nor to that plausible argument, but to keep close to this one momentous, this never to be forgotten consideration, that these, however varnished, however coloured over, however extenuated or diminished, however excused or defended, will in the event *feel* the wrath of God.

“ Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” Because, you will ask, of *what things* ? That undoubtedly is the first question to be considered. What were the things which St. Paul had *particularly* in his mind when he wrote the words of the text ; I say particularly, for that he had some particular view, or some particular class and kind of view in his contemplation, cannot be well disputed. Now the context, the words which go before, must show us what he meant by *these things*, because they were things which he had already mentioned. The term *these things*, implies that ; it is a term of reference. But what he had been speaking of before, to which the text relates, was as follows : “ Fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting which is not convenient ; for this ye know, that no whoremonger nor unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in

the kingdom of Christ and of God." And then he goes on : " Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of *these things* cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Now I say that the class of crimes which the apostle had particularly, and I think had solely in view, were crimes of licentiousness and debauchery. I include all crimes arising from the unlawful and licentious indulgence of men's passions. The terms made use of by St. Paul, are " fornications, uncleanness, filthiness, foolish talking, jesting which is not convenient." Those terms all very evidently relate to one and the same subject, and that subject is what I mentioned. The only thing which can create a doubt whether it was *that* class of vices alone, which St. Paul intended, is the word *covetousness*. Covetousness is put among the other articles enumerated : " all uncleanness or covetousness." Now it appears very manifest that the word *covetousness* in this place, does not mean *covetousness* in the sense in which we usually understand it, as it relates to property or to riches, but that it means inordinate desires of another kind ; or the intemperate and unlawful indulgence and letting loose men's passions in the article of licentiousness and debauchery. The phrase, I own, is peculiar—I mean, not only different from the common acceptance of the word at present, but different also from the use of the original word in that language, and in the writings of that time ; yet I think it can be made out by proofs, that this and not the other, is the sense of the word



in this place—and in some other passages of St. Paul's epistles. *First*; the covetous man is called an idolater. Now there is no proper reason for this, or meaning in it, according to the common sense of the word *covetous*. For though *we* may sometimes say that a man idolizes gold, it is only a modern fashion of speaking. It is not intended nor found in the language of the New Testament, nor like that language: but in the sense we are arguing for, it is very just and proper. The character of the heathen idolatry (and this is what St. Paul refers to) was, that it taught immorality instead of morality: that instead of prohibiting and discouraging lewd and licentious practices, it promoted and authorized them by the impurity and indecency of its religious rites—which being the case, it was natural for our apostle to call a man addicted to these vices an *idolater*; inasmuch as these vices composed the character of *that* religion, if it deserved the name of religion, and even of its religious worship.

*Secondly*; in the passage from which our text is taken, v. 13, you read that "*it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret*;" and what is here said, evidently refers to the offences before enumerated. But its being a shame to speak of it, and its being done in secret, does not apply to *covetousness*, in the common sense of the term: there is nothing indecent or shameful in the mention of covetousness in that sense; nor in that sense can it be particularly accused of being

carried on in secret : but of covetousness in the sense we are affixing to it in this place, the inordinate indulgence of vile and licentious desires, both these may be said truly.

*Thirdly* ; one can hardly avoid being convinced that we are right in our exposition of the word, when we consider how it stands joined with this sort of sins in other parts of St. Paul's epistles : Col. 3, 5. "Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon earth ; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Again, 1 Cor. v. 9. "I wrote unto you in an epistle, not to keep company with fornicators of this world, or with the covetous:" and in the next verse, "but now," says he, "I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator or covetous." In both these places, covetousness is put in close connexion with fornication, which connexion establishes the sense we give to it. The fourth chapter of the 1st Thess. verse 5th, is equally strong for our purpose, though not quite so obvious: the passage is this—"Ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus"—an awful preface—then what follows? "This is the will of God, even your sanctification ; that ye should abstain from fornication ; that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God ; that no man go beyond, or

defraud his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such: as we have also forewarned you and testified, for God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." In this passage the Apostle is discoursing of one class and kind of crimes; and what that class was appears from the concluding clause, "God hath not called us unto uncleanness." Now though the word *covetousness* does not appear in our translation, it does in the original language; for the word which is translated *go beyond* in this passage is the word which is translated *coveting*, *covetousness*, in the other passages. In each and every one of these passages, it is put as an undoubted and characteristic mark of idolatry. From the term, therefore, being always put by St. Paul in strict and close connexion with fornication, we are authorized to conclude that it bore in his mind, and in his manner of writing, a signification similar to what that term bears.

It may be said, that investigations of this sort are superfluous and minute; but I answer, that when we read such strong texts as the present, "because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience;" it can never be superfluous to ascertain what things the apostle really meant. These declarations are what we have to go by: their true sense, therefore, is of the utmost moment for us to know: and in the present instance, I think that it is made out with great certainty, that sins of

debauchery and licentiousness were what the Apostle had specifically in his mind, when he pronounced this condemnation.

The next observation I have to make is, that these sins were then common amongst the heathen ; that the Christians, before their conversion, had been addicted to them ; that those who practised them were endeavouring, under various pretexts, to draw others to be partakers with them ; that these pretexts were to be resisted by the consideration that, let the slaves or the advocates of those vices say what they will, “the wrath of God, because of these, cometh upon the children of disobedience.” These sins were so common amongst the idolatrous heathens, that they were emphatically called idolatry itself, and that in all the different passages which have been quoted. Again, some of the Christians themselves, before their conversion, had been addicted to them. “Ye *were* sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord ; walk as children of the light.” And more express in the Epistle to the Colossians, speaking of the same practices : “In the which,” says he, “ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.” Thirdly ; those who practised these crimes were endeavouring, by various practices, to draw in others to be partakers with them : “Be not ye partakers with them. Let no man deceive you with vain words : have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.” This was the state and character of the times. This was

the situation of the persons whom St. Paul so earnestly admonishes. And in similar situations, the like admonitions will be always necessary. For I take upon me to say, that whensoever any licentious practice becomes common in the country, palliatives and excuses, salvos and subterfuges, will never be wanting to draw in and encourage the timid and apprehensive who are entering upon such courses, as well as to fortify and to harden those who are actually and deeply engaged in them; that there will always be found, as I said before, deceivers; and likewise persons very willing, not to say desirous, to be deceived; that, as it was in St. Paul's time, so since, so now, so hereafter, it will be the case, that those who give a loose to such practices will endeavour by many vain words, by various forced and futile reasons, both to make themselves as easy as they can in the course which they are following, and to bring others, first to relax in their own condemnation of such examples, and then to imitate them. When this once happens (and it happens to all of us), that is the very case in which we ought to recollect St. Paul's powerful warning, delivered under circumstances perfectly similar to those which we experience — "*Let no man deceive you with vain words;*" with artful salvos and subterfuges, with contrived excuses and extenuations; for the solemn truth remains, and so you will find it to be, that "because of these things, cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience."

## XX.

## FORNICATION.

(PART I.)

HEB. XIII. 4.

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

IN treating of the crime of whoredom, thus solemnly rebuked in these words, I shall simply mention to you the mischiefs attending it, and the severe declarations of Scripture against it; and then leave it to yourselves to judge whether the allowing ourselves in this practice can be consistent with the hopes of getting to heaven at the last.

Now, I maintain, that whoredom is destructive to the public, destructive to the person joined with us in the crime, and destructive to ourselves. It destroys the public in this way: if there be one thing more than another of consequence to the public morality, it is the encouraging and keeping up of family connexion; for without families, what would become of the world? The business of it could not be carried on; there would be little private comfort; there would be no industry or regularity in the country; children could not be brought up

with any tolerable care, or sent into the world to do any good in it. But more need not be said; for every man that reflects a moment must perceive that it is morally impossible to keep up any peace, quietness, happiness, or order amongst mankind, without families; and as a proof of it, marriage institutions, of some kind or other, obtain, as far as I know, in every quarter and country of the world: a plain proof that men are convinced it is absolutely necessary for the common good.

Now whoredom and fornication are sure to hinder and discourage marriage, for if people are restrained from the unlawful indulgence of the passions, nature herself will take care to point out to them what is lawful; and marriage will be more or less frequent and happy, according as men are tied down from loose and irregular gratifications. I am aware what you will answer—that this may be a consideration of consequence upon the whole, but that in a single person's case, the harm a single person can do to the whole community in this respect is but a trifle, scarcely to be perceived. To which I answer, that you may say this almost of any crime: it is not a vast or very sensible mischief that any one man, however wicked, can do to the public at large; but you will please to remember withal, that if the mischief you do is but a trifle with respect to the public happiness, the punishment you suffer for it hereafter is but a trifle with respect to the public misery; the one is proportionable to the other, though but in-

considerable with respect to the whole; it may be enough to destroy you, who in the same view are also inconsiderable. But the proper answer to this, which is a very common way of talking and thinking, is this: What would be the consequence if every one were to argue so? I allow myself in this, which I own in the general practice to be wrong and hurtful, because my single case can make but small difference. Another has the same reason to say so that you have; and so if this excuse is to be allowed in one instance, there is nothing left but to allow the sanction to every one that pleases; that is, to make an end at once of all morality and religion in the world.

But secondly; whoredom, I contend, is mischievous in the highest degree possible to the partner of our guilt, the person concerned with us in it. I desire to draw your attention to this point. Imagine a wife, a daughter, a sister of your own, to be the person seduced and corrupted; you cannot conceive a heavier misfortune, an affliction or disgrace that can equal it. What shame, confusion, and misery in a family! how is a happy and united house thrown into a scene of bitterness, anguish, and reproach! What think you of the author of this misery? Is there no guilt in his behaviour? Is there no punishment due to it—to be expected for it—from a just and righteous God? He may have got out of the way, and does not see or know all the misery he has occasioned; but does that make it less, or extenuate



his offence? I am free to say, that if we compute crimes by the unhappiness and distress they knowingly occasion (and I know no better method of computing) not half the offences for which men suffer death by the law are so guilty as this of seducing and corrupting a young person to her ruin. The loss of money or property is nothing to it. Now, I may say, whoredom always begins or ends with this. It too often begins with this; or otherwise profligate young men who have already debauched and corrupted themselves in the world become the authors of this mischief and calamity to others.

Thirdly; it is mischievous also to the offender himself, and in this way: it draws down the mind from all sense of religion, and by degrees loosens and wears away all the good principles that were in a man. There are some points, which when well passed, all is over with a man; and this seems to be one of those points. When a man has once been brought to allow himself in habitual whoredom and uncleanness, generally speaking, it is all over with him. As to his religious principles, he will soon, if I am not mistaken, find a change himself in this respect, which he will be surprised at; that is, many things which before seemed shocking and abominable to him become so familiar and accustomed to his thoughts as to be made light of: all spiritual meditation and reflection, all religion, and the hopes of it, are laid aside when a man has given himself up entirely to this vice; indeed, he is neither fit for such thoughts, nor has any

relish for them ; his thoughts and his relish are taken up with something else, from which he finds it impossible to lift or disengage himself. I am saying no more than what I believe fact and observation will easily testify. There are scarce any who give themselves up habitually to this vice who retain any sense of their various obligations, or live in the fear of God in other instances. It has a more immediate tendency, I think, than any other vice to create a disregard to all other breaches of the law, and to occasion a total neglect of duty. The duties of devotion—those particularly relating to the Deity—suffer especially by this practice, which clouds the understanding, corrupts the will, debases the affections, and indisposes the whole man for devotion and any proper service of God. It usually occasions all kinds of sins, and prevents the repentance of any. We need not go far to seek for the causes of this effect : one may be, that as there can be no peace but by reconciling, somehow or other, their practice with their principles, they who will not conform themselves to the purity required by the Gospel, are forced, as it were, to conform their notions to their own impure conversation, and either at once to have done with the belief of Christianity, or, what is more easy and common, to stifle the remembrance of it. These are the consequences of whoredom to the public at large, to the partner of our crime in particular, and upon ourselves : and I do not know that I have exaggerated them, or put down any which are not true.

I proceed, in the next place, to set before you some of those declarations against it which are to be found in Scripture. I could produce a great deal out of the Book of Proverbs, from the Book of Wisdom, and the prophets, but I shall confine myself to what Christ and his apostles have said, as being of the higher authority with us, and that according to which we shall be judged. "Out of the heart," says our Saviour himself, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man." This is what our Saviour himself says; and one word from him decides the point. You will observe also with what company fornication is classed—with murders, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. I do not mean that these crimes are all to be reckoned equal, because they are all mentioned together; but it proves that they all are crimes. The Apostles are more full; and for this reason, that they had to do with the heathens, who made very light of this crime. Saint Peter enforces the duty of chastity upon the new Christians in the following very strong terms: "Dearly beloved," says he in his first epistle, "I beseech you as pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." And again, in his second epistle: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgement to be punished; but chiefly them that walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness." These are very plain and affecting words:

“ the Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgement to be punished ; but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness.” Saint Paul also has treated this subject very largely ; as indeed he had occasion, being that to which the people he wrote to were before their conversion much addicted : “ but fornication, and all uncleanness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh saints.” Saint Paul shows here very plainly his sense of the heinousness of this vice. He not only says, let it not be practised, but “ not once named amongst you, as becometh saints.”—This to the Ephesians. To the Corinthians he sets forth the guilt of this vice in this way : “ Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” And that the *defiling* here spoken of is intended of fornication is pretty plain : from what he says more fully in the sixth chapter of his epistle—“ Flee fornication ; every sin that a man doth is without the body ; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body in the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God ; and ye are not your own.”

I do not want to explain the argument here used by Saint Paul, or all the expressions contained in it ; because I produce it only to show what it says without any explanation—that Saint Paul condemned fornication as absolutely and peculiarly inconsistent with the Christian profession. In his Epistle to the

Colossians (for I think there is hardly one of his epistles which does not take notice, more or less, of this), he charges them as follows: "Mortify your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence; for which things' sake," he adds, "the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience." *For which things' sake*; that is, for the sake of fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence. This is a very awakening rebuke to these vices; we find that they call down upon them the wrath of God. Once more also, in his Epistle to the Thessalonians: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication." Had the Apostle stopped here, he had told us every thing we wanted of the will of God. "This is the will of God; and to know that will and do it is the whole of our business here:" but he proceeds, "that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel (namely, his own body) in sanctification and honour: not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles, which know not God; for God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." There are two very remarkable passages to our purpose in the Revelation of St. John, in which you cannot fail to take notice both of the terrible sentence denounced against fornication amongst some other crimes, and also with what other crimes it is classed: "The fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have

their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." And again, speaking of those who shall be excluded from the divine presence, he says:— "Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." The words of the text I reserve for the conclusion, because it is both positive, and withal so short as to be easily carried in memory. It is in the thirteenth chapter of Hebrews and the fourth verse: "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

I shall make no sort of remark on what has been said, but this one; that if you are satisfied, partly from the harm it does, but principally from these places of Scripture, that whoredom is really contrary to the will of God, and will draw down his wrath upon it, it matters not how light the world may in general make of it; because it is by the rules of Scripture and reason that we shall be judged at last, and not by the opinion of the world.

## XXI.

## FORNICATION.

(PART II.)

## HEBREWS XIII. 4.

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

I HAVE in a former discourse set forth the effects of lewdness as we see them in this world; and also the consequences that we are to expect to ourselves in the next world, if the threats and declarations of Scripture are to be depended on. I made no other observation upon these effects or these declarations than simply this—that if we saw reason to believe from either of them, or both of them together, that a course of unlawful lewdness was inconsistent with our hopes of salvation, not to suffer ourselves to be led away by the opinion of the world, or expect that these things would pass for trifles hereafter, because they are amongst many accounted trifles here. If, then, this be a vice of that serious nature, and which may have such serious effects upon our everlasting condition, the next great consideration will be, what are the proper preservatives and precautions against it.

Indeed the whole subject of the preservation of virtue is vastly too much neglected, in other circumstances, as well as this. A virtuous and vicious character does not so much consist in one or two, or a few single acts of virtue, or of vice, but in such a plan and rule and habit of living, as is suited to promote the one and guard against the other. I allow that the greater part live without any such plan, rule, or habit; and what is the effect? They commit themselves to every situation that presents itself, without reserve, fear, or caution; and they trust that if a temptation to vice assault them, they shall find firmness and reflection enough in themselves at the time to guard against it; and upon the strength of that persuasion, they either lay themselves out for such situations as furnish temptation and opportunities of vice, and are inviting on that account; or they enter heedlessly into such situations; or they fancy the time for exercising their morality is not yet come; as yet there is no harm; and when they fall, as they are almost sure to do, into the snares, why then, "they were surprised and taken off their guard—they were overpowered by allurements which no one could resist—the reason they depended upon was perhaps grown dark—the resolutions, which were so steadfast and unconquerable, melted away like snow before the fire; and he surely, who knows whereof we are made, will condescend to excuse the passions which he himself has implanted, and not condemn with severity our fall, which no human fortitude could



prevent." In which train of thinking the error is, that we do not carry back our minds to that which composes, perhaps, the greatest part of our offence — our leading ourselves into temptation, our either seeking it or suffering ourselves to be drawn into it, or falling upon such a course of life as exposes us to it; which we might have prevented, and which surely we had powers enough to have withstood. "But surely this delusion can happen but once. A man may be once drawn in, and entangled for want of experience; but he will escape, when he does escape, like a bird out of the hand of the fowler, not to return, one would think, to the snare. Just the contrary is the fact. The same process is renewed,—the same often dangerous situation or heedlessness about entering into it—the same weakness in yielding; and the same excuses and palliations will be no longer necessary; till a confirmed habit of vice be formed, "when we work uncleanness," as the Apostle expresses it, "with greediness," and without any further molestation from the rebukes or checks of conscience.

Having said thus much upon the necessity of looking after the preservation of our virtue in time, and laying out such a plan of life as may best keep us from temptation, and fortify us against it, I now proceed to propose what appear to me the most effectual preservatives against the sins of lewdness, which of all others most easily and most violently beset us during the early and best part of human

life ; and these are, employment, temperance, choice of company, and the regulation of the thoughts.

The first precaution against those vices is constant employment. There are few who can *bear* leisure ; that is, whom leisure does not lead into vicious attachments. When a man looks about him, and finds nothing for him to do, all his evil thoughts and propensities are directly setting themselves to work ; and when once the attention has got hold of any criminal indulgence, it is not easily set loose. Resolutions against these serve only to rivet the thoughts the faster upon our minds, and there are few who can hold out against the continual teasing of such thoughts. The only way was, at first, to have kept our attention better employed ; and it is still the only way, to convert it to something else. This account is confirmed by observation. I do not say that the active and the diligent are always free from these vices, for a man may be vicious, in spite of every thing ; but I think you will find few exceptions to the remark, that the idle are generally dissolute—that those who have no business, or do not take to their business, are commonly a nuisance to the neighbourhood they live in, in this very respect. Let those, then, who are to live by their labour or business, receive this additional reason for sticking close to their occupation—that they can hardly fail of success, or of a comfortable livelihood however—that they make their employment, by sticking to it, easy, which otherwise is sure to become irksome

and fretting. Besides both these reasons, they are taking the most reasonable method, and perhaps the only one, of passing their time innocently here upon earth, and procuring thereby the happiness they look for hereafter. As to those who have no employment, they have great reason to lament the want of one, as a misfortune, if it was only on the account above-mentioned; but a man must be very low in understanding, as well as left very short in his education, who cannot contrive some method of bestowing his activity and thoughts which may procure him advantage or credit, or at least an innocent amusement, as well as make him of some service to the neighbourhood he lives in.

The next safeguard against the vices of lewdness is temperance, especially in drinking. Was drunkenness nothing more than a brutality for the time, every one who had a concern for his duty would avoid it; but the mischief is seldom over so soon. The consequences are too often fatal to virtue in another respect—not only to the drunken man's, if he had any, but to the virtue of some poor sufferer who falls in his way. Drunkenness, in reality, both inflames men's passions, and confounds and deadens the reason and reflection, and every principle that can restrain them; so that it always destroys the balance, as one may say, which was intended in the human constitution: and if men of the best and ablest sort can scarcely control their passions, it is not expected they should retain much command over

them when such an advantage is thrown into the wrong scale. Now if to these you add a notion, which men in general take up, that drunkenness is an excuse for what men do in that condition, and which notion in effect amounts to this—that when men find themselves drunk, they are at liberty to do what they please: if you lay all these considerations together, it cannot, I think, be reasonably supposed that men will preserve a constant regard to morality and religion in the government of their natural passions, who do not lay a restraint upon themselves in the article of drunkenness.

The next great point to be attended to by those who are anxious for the preservation of this virtue from the allurements of criminal pleasures, is the choice of company. Companions, however they differ in other respects, commonly resemble one another in their vices. The influence of a good man's example may not possibly be always able to make those who associate and converse with him good; but the contagion of a vicious man's life will seldom fail to infect and draw in all who keep him company: and the reason is, it is in one case against the stream, in the other case with it—in the one case, the example has to combat with our natural propensities—In the other case, it aids and assists them. Nothing so soon and so effectually wears off that horror and shrinking back of the mind from any vicious actions, with which good education and good principles have inspired us, as the practices of our

companions. We are astonished at first to hear with how much ease they speak of those things which we have been taught to shudder at, and with how little reluctance and regret they practise them : but our surprise by degrees wears off. We begin to think there cannot be all the danger or guilt in those indulgences which we supposed : we then insensibly gather courage ; and as we set not up for singularity, or a superior standard of virtue, we do not understand how that should be so heinous an offence in us, which others allow to themselves without concern or remorse. Thus are our sentiments insensibly changed ; and yet the nature of things is not thereby changed. What *was* immoral, and profligate, and destructive of the happiness of human society, and contrary to God Almighty's commands, and under the sentence of condemnation in his Word which he has revealed to us, is so still. Nor are the consequences less likely to overtake us because we have forgotten them. Another thing, which vastly increases the baneful influence of dissolute company, and renders us, as some may suppose, almost excusable, is a certain shyness in some men, which will seldom allow them to make much opposition to the solicitations and example of their companions, how contrary soever to their own choice and judgement, if they had been permitted to choose and judge for themselves : and then there is generally, in addition to all this, the fear of ridicule, which to the tenderness and sensibility of young minds is like

the fear of death. And the misfortune is, they make no distinction—their being laughed at, whether with reason or without, is equally insupportable; and especially when these scruples look like want of spirit, or their companions give that turn or that name to it; though, in truth, it is want of spirit, and nothing else, that keeps them in such company; for what, in reality, can be more mean-spirited than to be led in a state of subjection to those about us, without choice, force, or judgement of our own; and to be compelled, for it is compulsion, to give up our consciences, principles, and resolution?

I mention this, not so much to fortify young men against the influence of bad company (for I have little hopes of that) but to advise them to keep out of their way—to be wary and cautious how they trust themselves in the society, much less with the intimacy, of a dissolute character.

The last and great preservative I shall mention is the regulation of the thoughts. “Whosoever,” says our Saviour, “looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already with her in his heart;” that is, whoever voluntarily entertains loose and bad thoughts and designs, makes himself in a degree a partaker of the crime, so that our Saviour imposed it as a duty upon his followers to lay a restraint upon their thoughts; and our Saviour knew what was in man when he did so—he knew that, without a proper control and regulation of our thoughts, it is in vain to expect virtue in our prac-

tice ; for licentious thoughts will, earlier or later, according as opportunities present themselves, or we grow tired of struggling with them, lead to licentious practices. I have already mentioned the way of managing our thoughts, that is, by keeping them constantly employed upon some proper object ; and I believe there is no other way.

These, then, are the precautions which, with the blessing and assistance of divine grace, are most fitting to conduct us through this world, and in a debauched and licentious age of it, with innocence in that respect, in which of all others there is the most danger, and by which men are drawn into such confirmed habits of universal profligacy as are dreadful to observe.

Men are perpetually complaining that they resolve against these vices, but that their resolutions, in the time of trial, never stand out : and how should they ? They have never used any of those cautions—put in practice any of those preservatives, which are absolutely necessary to keep up self-government, or a command over their passions, and to give stability and success to any resolutions. Their virtue does not take the alarm in time. They take up with an idle life : they see no harm in that, if they can afford it—or if they cannot, it is their own concern. Profaneness, drunkenness, unreasonable hours, are only so much frolic, which is over the next morning. They find out, or are found out, by dissolute companions. They are courted for their mirth, or viva-

city, or humour, or entertaining qualities, without any care about the danger of the consequences. A habit of vicious thoughts is suffered to grow upon us, because, if it do not lead to a habit of acting, where is the mischief? And then all vice, or entry to vice, is laid open—every precaution neglected, every incentive excited or inflamed, and we are surprised that we are overcome.



## XXII.

## DISCONTENT.

1 TIM. VI. 6, 7, 8.

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

RESTLESSNESS and impatience in the situation of life they are placed in, is in some men a disposition, in others a habit ; in others, again, a false calculation of the advantages and disadvantages of different conditions. But it is in all a temper of mind extremely prejudicial to a man's happiness, as it will not suffer him to acquiesce in, or enjoy, the satisfactions which are within the reach of his present situation ; and is no mean whatever of procuring him a better. It has an ill effect upon his virtue ; as no man accommodates himself properly to the duties of a station with which he is discontented—which he is labouring only to get rid of. Although there may be no reflections, perhaps, which can compose the fretfulness of his disposition, or correct a confirmed habit of being out of humour with every thing that belongs to himself, and pleased with what-

ever he sees others possess ; yet where discontent proceeds, as it sometimes does, from mistaken notions of the happiness and misery of different conditions, a little just reasoning and consideration may help to cure it.

Now what deceives most men in comparing their own situation with that of others, is this ; that they are perfectly sensible of their own cares, their griefs and difficulties, the hardships and inconveniences of their own situation, and know little or nothing of those of others. A man's happiness or misery, so far, I mean, as it is affected by outward condition, depends almost always upon invisible circumstances—secret particulars which others are not acquainted with, and never suspect. Few can truly estimate the real circumstances in the condition of others, the evils and inconveniences they suffer ; nor if they do, will they trouble themselves to confess what they believe.

Besides, evils are never known till they are passed ; that is, there is such a difference between our judgment of the evils which we experience, and those which we are only told of, that the smallest of our own sufferings seems to outweigh the greatest we observe in others. Add to this, that such is also the infirmity or the perverseness of the human mind, that pain of all kind makes a much greater impression than pleasure—inconveniences than advantages—the irksome part of a man's condition, than the benefits and privileges of it. So that when we come to reflect on our own situation, the evil of it is

always uppermost. Instead of taking the good and the bad together, and fairly balancing both sides of the account, we dwell, for example, upon the fatigue, or the confinement, or the humiliation, or the indigence, or other disadvantages of our condition, which are remembered distinctly, and with all their aggravations; whilst the comfort and advantages, the peace, quietness, and security and independence, the freedom from care and from danger, and many substantial blessings we enjoy, we either forget, or overlook as familiar and inconsiderable, and so miss the common benefit of every situation.

Discontent, then, in fact is delusion. We see nothing but the outside, and fair side, of a man's condition; we see not the secret of the real difficulties and inconveniences; or if we hear their complaint, we do not feel their sufferings: whereas our own situation is understood to the bottom, the evils and hardships of it are all found out; and not only so, but these evils and hardships perpetually return upon our thoughts, whilst the comforts which should balance them are left out of the comparison. With such prejudices, it is no wonder we form very false computations, and are betrayed, without reason, into complaint and injustice; into a dislike of our own condition, and envy of other men's—into a restlessness and discontent, which confine our merit and damp our activity, and make us both uneasy in our condition and useless. That there is some very great deception in men's judgement of one another's

happiness, and one another's station in life, is probable from two facts, which all moralists of all ages have taken notice of; one is, that the man who is discontented in one situation is generally discontented in every other. This is a fair experiment—Suppose a man who is dissatisfied with his condition to be able to change it. Suppose him, if you will, advanced to the very station he coveted, and would have carved out for himself; if you find this man from thenceforward easy and satisfied, his former uneasiness and impatience were not without foundation; if, on the other hand, you find, that after the novelty of the change, and the first triumph of success is over, the man returns to his wonted ill-humour—that his discontent continues, though the subject of it be altered—that new causes produce new complaints—that he still murmurs and still repines;—if this be the case, it is a reasonable conclusion that the man was originally wrong in his calculation—deceived in his estimation of the happiness of a condition which he had not tried. And this so often is the case, that it furnishes good reason to suppose, that such deceptions are extremely common. The greater part of mankind get nothing by a change, but to regret advantages which they despised, or did not even perceive, whilst they possessed them; and to discover new sources of anxiety and complaint.

Another fact of the same kind, and which I mention for the same purpose, is that the envy of mankind is commonly mutual; I mean, that you shall

meet with twenty persons who all envy the other's condition. Now they cannot all be right. The greatest part must necessarily be under a delusion, when they judge of their neighbour's happiness. This mutual envy is to be found amongst all orders and professions. The poor man envies the plenty, the appearance, and accommodation of the rich ; and sees them with envy, because he sees nothing else. He compares them with the fatigue he undergoes, with the scanty provision which his own condition affords. The pains and pressure of his own distress he feels, and can therefore judge of them ; the delight and pleasure of his rich neighbour's luxury he only imagines ; and ten to one he is deceived in his imagination, because he places to the account the pleasure that he himself should receive from it, which is very different from what the possessor actually receives. The rich man, in return, when he observes the health and activity, the cheerful countenance and vigorous spirits of the labourer whom he employs, his continual occupation and sound rest, and compares it with his own languor and listlessness ; when he reflects how burthensome his time and thoughts are, when he reflects upon his tedious days and wakeful nights—when he takes this view of his own condition, he repines at the superior lot of those whose humble but active station supplies them with employment, and exempts them from care.

Stations of peril and enterprise are generally envied by those who are tired with the slow progress

of their fortunes ; while such men, in their turn, regret the situations they have left, or lament that they ever exchanged the plain path of patient industry for scenes of adventure and uncertainty. And all such mutual discontents are governed by the same mistake—each man forgets his own advantages, and magnifies those of others : each party is impatient under his own sufferings, and ignorant of those of his neighbours. Generally speaking, we cannot employ our time or thoughts worse than in comparing our own condition with that of others. For the most part, the fewer of these comparisons we make, the better. Indeed, when the mind is in health, as we may say, when the spirits and temper are properly composed, we seldom concern ourselves with them at all ; yet if we will make such comparisons, it is of consequence that we make them truly. This we can never do, till we learn to allow a great deal for the intimate knowledge we have of our own condition, and the imperfect judgement we can form of other men's—for there is a wide difference between observing an evil or inconvenience in others, and coming actually to experience it ourselves—and lastly, for our imperfect enjoyment of pleasures which are new and unexperienced.

Secondly ; the best remedy for discontent is, to learn to attend to those blessings which we enjoy in common perhaps with the rest, or with the generality of mankind—instead of looking for other exclusive or particular privileges which some men

possess beyond or above others. A blessing is in reality not the less valuable because others possess it as well as ourselves ; and yet it requires some generosity of temper to see this. It is for the want or defect of this temper that the love of God obtains so little in the heart of man—that there is so much less gratitude towards Him than might be expected from reasonable creatures to such a benefactor. Health and liberty, the perfect enjoyment of our limbs and reason, the use of our understanding and the faculties of our mind, are blessings beyond all price ; yet because others possess them as well as ourselves, because they are only common to us with almost every man we meet, they are seldom in our thoughts—seldom subjects either of satisfaction to ourselves, or of gratitude to God. Not one man in ten reflects from whom he receives these blessings, or continues to receive them. If we are not indulged with riches and honours, and high stations, with the means and knowledge of luxury and show ; unless we are distinguished by those favours which, from the nature of them, must be confined to a few, we can see nothing in our own condition to be thankful for. Could this narrowness of mind be once so far got rid of, as to allow us to estimate the blessings we enjoy according as they are in themselves, and not by the comparison with others, there are few who might not find enough in their condition to excite sentiments of complacency and content, certainly of gratitude towards God.

Discontent, considered in a religious view, besides that it indisposes us for the duties of our station, by making us lazy or careless about them—besides that it sometimes puts men upon advancing themselves by unjust or forcible means—is utterly inconsistent with a religious temper of mind. It destroys, as we have already said, the love and gratitude we owe to God. It is not to be expected that men should be, nor is it found in fact that they are, capable of much affection towards God, whilst they are discontented with the condition in which he has placed them. When we confer favours, if, instead of observing satisfaction and gratitude in the person obliged, we meet with nothing but impatience, complaint, and discontent, we are naturally and justly offended with such obstinacy of temper: nor do I know any reason why the same temper should not be offensive to God, especially when it is considered that the favours we are able to confer upon one another bear no proportion to those which God has bestowed upon us all.

Discontent, again, argues too great a fondness for the world and for the concerns and advantages of it: a fondness, I mean, greater than is consistent with our expectations and pursuits of a better. Were this world a man's all, it would be difficult to offer any considerations that could abate his passion for it, alleviate his disappointment, or soothe his complaints: but when another, and a better existence, and of longer duration, is held out to us, such a pro-



spect is calculated, one would think, to moderate our attachment to the present, and our solicitude and concern about it. The differences and distinctions of human life, which so much affect and perplex us when placed beside this great object, appear what they are, too diminutive to provoke our jealousy or discontent. For these two reasons, contentment in us Christians appears to be our duty as well as our happiness, and as such, is enjoined by St. Paul: "having food and raiment," he writes to Timothy, "let us be therewith content;" and to the Hebrews he commands, "be content with such things as ye have." But above all precepts does he recommend this virtue by his own example: "I have learnt," says he, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." There is something very great and affecting in these words, and quite of a piece with that fortitude and firmness of mind which distinguished St. Paul's character upon all occasions.

From what has been said, then, it appears that when we repine at our own condition, and covet other men's, we, for the most part, impose upon ourselves—that we are the dupes of a delusion—natural enough, no doubt, but of which a proper exertion of judgement and reflection will get the better; that when we indulge this fretful, discontented, dis-

satisfied humour, we cherish a narrow-mindedness, which overlooks the many and great blessings we enjoy, because in common perhaps with most others, in order to torment ourselves with the thought of some fewer, some single advantage which is denied to us;—that this frame of mind is both extremely unfavourable to all sense of affection and gratitude to God Almighty, and also too much binds down our souls to this world, and prevents any due preparation for, and progress to another.

## XXIII.

## SUICIDE.

2 SAM. XVII. 23.

*And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.*

THE crime of suicide prevailing amongst us beyond the example of any other Christian age or country, and the lawfulness of it being maintained, as it is said, by many, it becomes high time to look into the question, to see whether this practice is, or is not, forbidden to the Christian moralist.

I set out with observing, that to those who regard death as the termination of their being, this question becomes a mere computation of interest, a single comparison of the evils of life with its advantages; and according as one or the other shall appear to preponderate, a wise man will relinquish his existence or preserve it. In which estimate, however, we shall do well to remember that the prospect of many evils is worse than the presence; that though circumstances change not, we shall; that time may dissolve those

associations which torment us ; that habit accommodates the temper to every variety of situation, and, as the dilated eye discovers glimmerings of light amidst the thickest darkness, so the mind inured to misfortune finds alleviation and comfort in the most desperate condition.

But to those who look for a future day of retribution and account, the lawfulness of suicide becomes a question of a very different nature. The self-murderer, though he fears not him that killeth the body, and after that can do no more, has the same reason with others to fear Him who casteth soul and body into hell-fire. And here I would premise, but without the least distrust of my argument, that should the guilt of suicide turn out at last to be a matter of doubt only, we are bound by that very doubt to abstain from it. There can be no question but that we may, if we will, lawfully continue in existence : there is a question whether we may lawfully quit it. It is a contempt of authority to incur even the danger of disobedience, when a safe and certain choice is in our power. Besides that, the action in this case would want that entire acquiescence and approbation of conscience, which should accompany every important step of a good man's conduct. For he who can overrule the scruples of his conscience will soon learn to reject its decisions. I am the more confirmed in this position, as I take the case of a hesitating conscience to have been thus, and in an instance of much less importance, adjudged by St. Paul—" He

that doubteth," saith the apostle, "is damned if he eat; because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith," that is, not done with a full persuasion of the lawfulness of it, "is sin." This caution applies with especial force to the case of suicide; a sin, if it be one, which cuts off all place of reparation and repentance.

We now proceed to the inquiry itself, whether a man possesses such a right over his own life and person, that he may lawfully destroy them at his pleasure.

To ask then, what is our duty in any instance, is to ask what the will of God is in that instance. Now the will of God, as of every other intelligent being, must be learnt upon any point, from his express declarations where they can be had; or, where these are silent, from his general character and disposition; from the aim and analogy of his laws and conduct in other instances. We will begin with this latter inquiry, and see how the question stands, upon the foot of reason and natural religion.

First then, the divine will is intimated by that eager and instinctive love of life, which prevails without exception through the whole animal creation. There are who think this love of life to be nothing more than what results from a sense and experience of the pleasures it affords; and to those who think so, this argument has no weight. Many, on the other hand, observe a violence and intensity in this passion, beyond what they deem either the value of life or

the pains of death could on their own account create. To such there will appear a separate and original principle superadded for this special purpose, to retain men in existence, when disgust or despair would drive them out of it. And considered in this light, it becomes a proof of God's intention, that we should preserve our lives; and consequently, of his displeasure against those who wilfully and wantonly destroy them.

Secondly; he, who puts it out of his power to do his duty, refuses to do it: and who is there so disengaged and unconnected, as to have no duty or demand upon him? Who is there that owes not to some relation or other, industry or obedience, piety or gratitude, justice or restitution, instruction, counsel, protection, or support? All which obligations are at once violated and forsaken by this single act of suicide. Or, if a situation so singular can be supposed, that all private claims upon our service are satisfied or ceased, I would then ask, what condition can be so abject or so useless, but that "by a patient continuance in well doing," by the exercise of those virtues which fall within our reach, we may hope to improve our merit here, and, of consequence, our proportion of happiness hereafter?

Thirdly; another way of determining whether an action be virtuous, innocent, or criminal, is to see whether the effects of it are beneficial, indifferent, or pernicious to the happiness of human society; which happiness, from the manifold provision he has made

for it, appears to be the purpose of God Almighty's will : the end, therefore, and aim of all his laws, and, by consequence, the measure and standard of our duty. Now in this way of reasoning, it is material to remember, that it is not the particular consequence of any individual action which alone determines its moral quality ; but the tendency and operation of that general rule, by which actions of the same sort are permitted or forbidden. I will explain myself by an example. Murder in certain instances may produce no immediate or particular mischief to the community : it may deliver a nation from tyranny, or a neighbourhood from oppression ; it may transfer power and property to better hands and better uses. But when we reflect that we cannot permit one action and forbid another, without assigning some distinction between them ; that the same rule, therefore, which permits this, must permit every assassin to fall upon each man he meets, whom he thinks useless or noxious ; that the allowance of such a rule would overthrow the best end of society, the security of its citizens ; commit each man to the spleen, fury, or fanaticism of his neighbour, and fill all things with terror and confusion ;—when we reflect upon this, we see, that the present benefit of the action is outweighed by that more important ruin which the admission or impunity of so fatal an example would at length produce. Whatever, therefore, we may think of its particular consequences, we condemn it to sustain a general rule ; which will not endure an arbitrary

exception, and which cannot be laid aside without a general injury.

Whatever is expedient is right—whatever is indifferent is innocent. But then it must be expedient or indifferent upon the whole, in all its collateral and remote effects. The same attention to equal and general rules; the same study of uniformity, which prevails in every code of human jurisprudence, takes place for the same reason in the moral system also, and government of the universe. To apply this reasoning upon the twofold consequences of our actions, to the question before us—Suicide has much to answer for of both. Nor can any case be put, which is not concluded under sin, either by the peculiar injury, or the general mischief: the tears and cries of our unpitied relatives—the confusion and agony of those we leave behind—the loss which may never be forgotten or repaired—the ignominy of our fate, which stings to the heart, and which is derived to all our connexions,—are consequences of self-murder, which cannot be mentioned or thought upon with patience. What must be the stubborn cruelty of his mind who can despise, and in his last hour disregard, the affliction and disgrace of all he loves, whom no compassion, friendship or affection—whom neither the tender ties of family and kindred, nor the dearer names of wife and child, can withhold from the fierce and sullen purpose of his soul? The thief, the plunderer, and the rebel, inflict not any calamity on a stranger or an enemy, which can be compared with



that which the self-murderer brings down on those of his own household, and his own blood. But though no duty were deserted, no claim defrauded, no friend or family afflicted by our death, no orphans abandoned, and no widows to make lamentation ; yet, if it be once admitted, that whoever is weary of life, and has rendered, or can suppose, himself useless to others, is for that reason at liberty to quit it,—what have we not to fear, where the accumulating of riches in the few produces the want of a sufficiency in many ; where early habits of luxury and refinement have multiplied desires and disappointments ; where voluptuousness and sensuality have drained the sources, and worn away all sense of natural pleasures ; where the permanent satisfactions of the heart and understanding are unknown, or extinguished by more gross pursuits ; where the spirits, convulsed by passion, by turbulent and impetuous exertions, have lost their natural tension and composure ; where religion, the appointed medicine of human woes, is converted by our vices and mistakes into an object of terror and aversion. In circumstances like these (connected perhaps with other more physical causes), if ever a time should come when public opinion and numerous examples shall authorize this crime, what havoc may we not expect ; what desolation of the species, from spleen, impatience, melancholy, and despair ?

These are the arguments, which reason holds forth against the lawfulness of suicide ; and combined together (as in every probable question the arguments

on each side ought to be), amount to such a presumption of God Almighty's will, as should stagger the most determined purpose of destruction.

We next inquire, what may be added to this presumption from the light of revelation.

And here I meet an objection which asks why, if suicide be indeed unlawful, we do not find it more expressly forbidden in the Christian Scriptures?

In the first place, our Saviour's own precepts, if we except that set discourse, which is chiefly taken up in rectifying the perversions, and improving the purity of the Jewish law, are, for the most part, occasional, arising out of some present occurrence, or alluding to some special instance—a method of instruction, for conciseness, perspicuity, and impression, of all others perhaps the most convenient. As no example, therefore, of self-murder is recorded to have fallen within his notice, we are not to wonder that he has left us no observation upon the guilt of it. The morality of the Apostolic writings is contained either in summary catalogues of virtues and vices under their most general denominations, or in certain series of brief independent maxims, pointed, perhaps, sometimes at the particular exigencies or corruption of those to whom they were addressed. Amongst these, it is no more extraordinary that a particular species of murder should be omitted, than that the duties of friendship, the rights of self-defence, the extent of gratitude, the limits of civil or parental authority, are nowhere ascertained. A

systematic detail of morality, pursued through all the subdivisions of our duty, is not given. The most beautiful and perfect general rules were laid down, and men are left for the application of them to the deductions of reason, and the dictates of humanity. What goes a great way towards accounting for the silence of Scripture upon this crime, is, that it does not appear to have prevailed in any great degree amongst those with whom the Scriptures had to do. But four instances are recorded in the Old, and one in the New Testament, of any thing like self-murder; and these, surely, of a kind which can do no credit to the cause—of a rejected favourite, a fallen tyrant, and a perfidious traitor. The Jews are known to have held this vice in the utmost abhorrence, and to have prosecuted the remains of a self-murderer with all the indignities which their law assigned to the worst of malefactors—a circumstance sufficient to show, that the public opinion in this instance was right, and therefore needed no new lesson from the Christian teacher. Admitting, therefore, that the Scriptures had not condemned this crime in so many terms, let us see what can be gathered from them concerning it, by fair implication and construction.

First, then, occurs to our observation the commandment itself, “Thou shalt do no murder.” Who shall say, what the Scriptures have not said, that a prohibition, delivered in terms so absolute and comprehensive, is not meant to include the murder of

ourselves ; especially, when reasons of public utility, the best interpreter of moral precepts, require that it should? All other exceptions to this rule, the rights, namely, of the magistrate and the soldier, are expressly recognized or clearly allowed ; whereas we are repeatedly commanded to abstain from the life of man, without one saving clause in favour of this assumed dominion over our own. When God commits to mankind a right over the lives of brutes, he expressly reserves out of the grant any authority over the life of man—" For in the image of God," says the Almighty, " made he man : " an expression which, whatever it imports, stamps a superior dignity and estimation on the human species, and contains a reason for the prohibition, which, whatever it be, prevails alike against the killing of ourselves and others.

Secondly ; human life, throughout the Scriptures, is every where spoken of as a stated period,—as a race that is set before us,—as a course to be finished,—as a fight that must be fought—descriptions, which could hardly have dropped from the pen of those who considered life, and the duration of it, as in our power, and at our disposal. It is absurd to command us to " persevere unto the end," if the end be determinable by our own choice,—to bid us " not be weary of well doing," if we may cease from it at pleasure.

Thirdly ; the passions, temper, and motives, which give birth to suicide, contradict the spirit and prin-

ciples of our religion. Affliction and calamity, considered in the view under which Christianity exhibits them, are either subservient to the exercise and improvement of our virtue, or swallowed up in the expectation of immortality and heaven. Complain to the disciple of Jesus of the sufferings of life, he tells us, that they are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. Are we overwhelmed with tribulation and distress, he teacheth us that tribulation worketh patience, and patience virtue; that the severities of Providence are the corrections of a parent,—pledges of his care,—and tokens of his love. Now it seems impossible, that a mind possessed in any sort of this persuasion should so far sink under, or repine at the misery of its condition, as to be driven to this last act of discontentment and distrust. If suicide be lawful, what is the exceeding great use or excellence of patience, that it should obtain a place amongst the foremost duties of the Christian profession? In vain are we exhorted to take up the example and the cross of Christ,—to look forward unto Jesus, the finisher of our faith,—to rejoice, inasmuch as we are made partakers of his sufferings,—to endure the chastisement of the Lord, and not to faint, when we are rebuked of him,—to struggle, in a word, through all the dangers and difficulties of life, if we may take refuge at once in a voluntary death. The accidental temper in which a man dies does not determine his fate, any further than as it is the effect or

indication of more established principles. But that death can never be safe which proceeds from a total want or decay of those principles, which it was the first care of Christianity to inculcate.

Fourthly ; it does not appear that any of the first disciples of Christ did, in fact, ever admit this crime amongst them, though provoked to it by the most extreme and intolerable sufferings. As far as relates to this life, they were, both by their history and confession, of all men the most miserable. If they had conceived themselves at liberty to choose under these circumstances, it is extraordinary that they should all have preferred life, when they universally professed and believed that to be with Christ was life, and to die was gain. I rest it here.

One argument, however, which rises from our reasoning against suicide, deserves an answer.

As a man cannot give what he has not,—if he has no right over his own life, how can he transfer that right to another? and how, then, can any state derive, from any implied and social compact with its citizens, that right which it claims and exercises of punishing by death? I answer, that the state derives this right, not from any secret or supposed consent of the subject, but immediately from God. I mean, from that presumption upon God Almighty's concurrence with every necessary means of upholding society ; upon which presumption, the whole right and obligation of civil authority relies. This power in private hands, and in the hands of the magistrate,

has very opposite effects upon the general welfare. For the same reasons, therefore, of public utility, God has delegated it to the one, and denied it to the other.

These reasons may be sufficient to evince the unlawfulness of suicide, considered in a general sense, when it is wanton and unprovoked,—when it is called in to put a period to a life made miserable by our crimes.

But is there no exception or excuse for those who flee for refuge to the grave from the injuries of fortune, or the never-ceasing anguish of a wounded mind? If self-murder be unlawful, these reasons afford only the same excuse for it, that any violent temptation does for the sin it prompts us to commit,—that want does for theft, thirst for drunkenness, or revenge for murder. We know that the sufferings of life may be aggravated beyond the ordinary patience of human nature; we know, too, that there is born with some men, and generated in others, a certain horror and dejection of spirits, which spreads a dismal shade over the fairest scenes, and fills our evil days with sorrow and disconsolation. But we will not allow that this is either insupportable or incurable. We mistake the remedy: let them cease to expect it from riot and excess, which serve only to stupify the feelings, while they exasperate the malady. Let them try what temperance, soberness, and chastity will do,—the satisfaction of virtue, and the hopes of religion,—the exhilarating

activity of some benevolent pursuit, or the triumph of successful struggles with our passions and ourselves. Lastly, let them resort to that gracious Being, who despises not the sighings of a contrite heart, nor the desire of such as be sorrowful,—who will relieve, and in his own good time reward, those sufferings with which, for some kind but mysterious purpose, it hath pleased him to visit us.



## XXIV.

## THE LAW OF HONOUR.

## LUKE XVI. 15.

*For that which is highly esteemed amongst men is abomination in the sight of God.*

A CONSIDERABLE part of mankind, and those too of the higher orders of society, govern their conduct, so far as they do govern it at all, by the rule of reputation, or, as it is better known, by the name of the law of honour.

In the first place, I acknowledge that it is a great thing to act according to any rule: for, generally speaking, men fail not so much in the choice of their rule, as in not being able to act up to it. To obey every impulse of passion; to yield to any or every temptation; to catch at all opportunities of all sorts of pleasure with plan, prospect, and condition, is the lowest state of moral character. To proceed by some rule, to aim at some standard, to possess an authority over our conduct, and exercise our judgment at all, is the next state, and compared with the last, a state of improvement. To take for our guidance the rule of reason and the rule of Scripture, to inquire after

it, to inform ourselves of it, to endeavour to understand it, and when we do understand it to conform our behaviour to it, is the perfection of moral excellence; and like perfection in every thing, seldom perhaps absolutely and completely attained, but what we should always aim at, and gradually advance towards.

Again; I would by no means decry or disparage the law of honour universally. It holds many to order, whom nothing else would. Part of mankind seem, in a great measure, incapable of reasoning about their duty, or inquiring for themselves. These must of necessity proceed a great deal by the rule of honour and reputation; that is, in other words, by what they hear praised and esteemed by the persons they converse with. In a multitude of instances, the law of honour in all civilized countries (and we have no concern with any other on this subject) prescribes the same behaviour that reason and religion prescribe. Saint Paul himself, who had no extraordinary deference for human judgement in these matters, enjoins upon his followers whatever things are praiseworthy, whatever things are of good report; which is a good general rule, though it may contain exceptions and defects.

Having premised thus much in behalf of the law of honour, and of those who go by it, and who challenge to themselves the character and title of men of honour, and who are certainly much to be preferred to those who go by no rule but present inclination;

I shall now proceed to show that the rule is not, alone, either safe or complete. By safe, I mean sure to conduct to future and final happiness; by complete, I mean containing all the duties which are required of us by the will of our Creator.

It is not safe or complete, because it omits some duties, and tolerates some vices; so that a person may be deemed and may be a man of honour, notwithstanding he neglects some necessary duties, and allows himself in some vices.

It is my business to make this appear. Now, as the motive and law of honour is calculated principally, if not wholly, to secure and make easy the intercourse between people of equal, or nearly equal condition in life, by regulating the behaviour of such as are governed by or resting upon fidelity, punctuality, civility; between such this may be the view and object of the rule. It prescribes duties only between equals, or those who account themselves such; omitting, as well that whole class of duties which relate immediately to the Deity, as those which we owe to our inferiors: and the reason of the omission is substantially this—that a man is not the worse companion, nor the worse to deal with, in those concerns which are usually transacted between persons of honour. Hence it comes to pass, that the profanation of God's name and attributes, of his religion, religious ordinances, and all the effect of passions, levity or infidelity, are no breaches of honour, nor accounted such, even by those who think

them wrong. And if this be not a true account that I have given of the law of honour, that it is confined to the duties and offices between equals; we would desire to know how it happens that it is not the same as the law of God. At least, it is a demonstration that the law of Moses does not embrace the extent and compass of our duty; since there are points, such as those I have mentioned, relating to the Deity, which we acknowledge to be duties, though yet the violation of them is accounted no breach of the law of honour. The consequence of this is, that those who set up for persons of honour, and look no farther than to maintain the character of men of honour in the world, find no obligation or inducement to any of those duties which we owe immediately to God. They may allow the evil habits of cursing and swearing to grow upon them and keep hold of them; they may indulge themselves in the utmost licentiousness in the treatment of many things that belong to religion; they may be as remiss and negligent as they please in their attendance upon public worship, and behave as irreverently as they please when they do attend; they may utterly lay aside any act of private devotion; they may cease, in a word, from every expression of homage, piety, gratitude, and acknowledgment to the Supreme Preserver of us all, without suffering in their character as men of honour, or incurring a stain or imputation upon their honour on that account. Nevertheless, these are duties. God is entitled to our affection

and devotion, our love and honour; and he has commanded that we pay it. This is not disputed; nor do I insinuate that it is. What I argue is, that the law of honour is not considered to concern itself with these duties, even by those who confess them to be duties.

This, then, will be admitted—that what respects the Divine Being lies out of the province of the law of honour. But in all that concerns man and man; in that great and important class of duties which are called relative duties, the law of honour may be depended upon as an adequate rule; and there, it is enough if we act but up to and support the character of men of honour. I wish it were so, for the sake of all who profess this character: but I fear the observations we have laid down—that the law of honour takes notice only of what passes between equals—will be found here also; and that those duties which we owe to our dependents and inferiors, which form together a very considerable part of a good man's virtues and a bad man's vices, are omitted in the law of honour; that is, may be either observed or violated, without any effect upon a man's honour, or reputation for honour, one way or other. Of this kind the following are examples:—the cruel and barbarous treatment of our domestic servants—  
• the worreting them out of their happiness by causeless or immoderate anger, habitual punishments, groundless suspicion, wanton restraint, harsh, scornful, or opprobrious language. It is not to be com-

puted the quantity of misery a fierce, over-bearing temper may produce in his family and amongst his dependents by these means. Yet what has all this to do with his honour? He is not the worse accounted as a man of honour for this behaviour. Notwithstanding, the justifiableness of such behaviour no one will assert; for a conduct which occasions so much unnecessary misery to any, no matter to whom, must be criminal.

Bounty to the poor is a Christian duty; no one doubts it: but I do not find it affects a man's honour either way, whether he is bountiful to the poor or not bountiful. And not only want of charity, but want of justice, is tolerated and connived at by the law of honour. The great and grievous injuries done to tradesmen by delay of payment, oftener by not paying their just demands at all, and by persons of rank and distinction, and who assume the name of men of honour, however inconsistent they be with any principle of moral probity and every pretension to it, are not inconsistent with the reputation of honour, provided the man be careful of his conduct amongst his equals, and preserve a regard to truth, fidelity, and punctuality in his dealings with his equals, or with persons of honour: for all these instances proceed upon and produce the same principle; to wit, the observation we set out with—that the law of honour prescribes and regulates the duties only between equals: and though it may be right as far as it goes in most instances betwixt such and

amongst such, it is altogether regardless of what is due from us on the one hand to our inferiors, or from them to us on the other. And these merely are two capital defects in the law, when it is considered as, or set up for, a complete rule of life.

But this is not all; we have something further to accuse the law of honour of; and that is, in one word, the licentious indulgence of our natural passions. If I was to describe the law of honour freely, I should call it a system of rules well contrived, by persons in the higher stations of life, to facilitate their intercourse with each other. Now, such persons being occupied in a great measure in the pursuit of pleasure, it is not to be expected that they should lay down rules to themselves which trench upon their pleasures, or subject them to any great restraint in that which composes the business and object of their lives. And this remark will be verified by experience. The law of honour is careful to exclude all fraud, chicanery, falsehood, concealment in the mutual dealings of persons of honour; but I do not find that it lays much, if any, stress upon the virtues of chastity, sobriety, moderation, economy; because such stress would greatly check and contract the pleasures and pursuits of this description of men. There are some duties which the law of honour does embrace; but the violation of them contains not any great breach of it. These are decorum, civility, good manners, or the avoiding any of that shuffling and cunning which makes it impossible, or highly

inconvenient, to deal with any man. The requiring strictness in those virtues would bear hard upon the manner of life of persons who come most within the reach and influence of the rule of honour. It is upon the same principle that the great Christian duty of the forgiveness of injuries, of which you hear and read so much in the Scripture, has no place at all amongst the virtues of a man of honour. Indeed it is hard to say whether, if the law of honour were to decide upon it, it would be judged a virtue or a vice ; whether it would not be pronounced meanness, rather than magnanimity ; an instance of weakness and pusillanimity, rather than of chastised affections or a sense of duty. Resentment is a natural passion, and it costs no little self-mortification to quell and quiet it ; and mortification of any sort is not to be looked for in this class of mankind.

The substance of our assertion is, that the rule and law of honour is not alone a right or sufficient rule to go by ; and I will comprise the sum of what I have delivered in support of the assertion in two or three queries :—

First ; Is it not true that a person may be negligent of every act of duty to the Divine Being, of every act of service, worship, or devotion whatever, without any impeachment of his honour ?

Secondly ; Is it not true, that the same person may be tyrannical and over-bearing in his family and among his servants ; rigorous in the extreme in the treatment of his dependents ; utterly without any



share of liberality to the poor? Is it not true that a person may be all these without impeachment of his honour?

Thirdly; Is it not true, that he may likewise distress or ruin his tradesmen by dilatory and irregular payment, or by absolute insolvency, and yet pass for a man of honour among those who claim that title?

Fourthly; Is it not true, that he may live in the habitual guilt of fornication, adultery, drunkenness, prodigality, and be capable of the most desperate revenge, without impeachment of his honour?

Fifthly and lastly; If these things be so, is the law of honour a safe rule of life? Is it enough to satisfy any man who is concerned for his final happiness, to be able to say of himself that he is, or to hear others call him, *a man of honour*; without inquiring whether he hath also fulfilled the duties, and compared himself with the measure of God's Word, explained and applied by the sound judgement of unprejudiced reason?

## XXV.

## HONESTY.

## PROVERBS XX. 7.

*The just man walketh in his integrity.*

[N. B.—Passages in it borrowed from Ogden.]

It is an old question amongst moralists, whether mere justice, or as we commonly call it, honesty, be a virtue. All allow that dishonesty is a vice, and a very great one; but whether the contrary of it be a virtue, or only a strict debt and obligation, has been sometimes controverted. Thus to steal, is a very grievous sin; but merely to keep his hand from picking and stealing, would hardly entitle a man to be called virtuous; nor the paying his lawful debts; nor the discharge of those demands which he is bound, and obliged, and compellable to discharge. None of these, it is said, though they may entitle a man to the name of honest, give him either the name or the characteristic of virtuous. On the contrary, no duties are of greater importance to society than these; perhaps hardly any of so great. Society might subsist without generosity, but without honesty it could not subsist at all. Therefore human laws

are all calculated to enforce honesty. There is place, there is opportunity, there is a call for, there is a want of, higher degrees of goodness; but in these men may and indeed must be left, so far as human laws are concerned, to themselves. The essential thing for society is honesty. Therefore in that, men must not be left to themselves. When conscience will not do its office, the laws must. There may be a thousand violations of Christian duty, which the laws of men neither can reach, nor would reach if they could, because they ought to be voluntary: but honesty is so necessary, so essential, so fundamental a part of social order, that the laws of society, not in one but in all countries of the world where there are any laws, punish the violation of it with exemplary severity, and every considerate man acknowledges the justice and necessity of such proceedings. Different views, therefore, of the question, make us see it in different lights. If we look to the character of the person who is merely honest and no more, we do not seem to see any thing for which to call him virtuous. If we look to the conduct itself, we find few virtues of such great importance: and that is the matter which has raised the doubt upon the subject.

I will now explain to you the consideration which I think resolves the difficulty. The true distinction in the case is, whether a man may be honest upon principle, or honest out of policy. That will be found to be the exact distinction. If a man be

honest from principle, his honesty is a virtue, and will carry him a great way in the discharge of all social virtues ; which form not the whole (far from it), but an important part of the Christian character. The difference between honesty and other duties is, that there are so many strong external reasons for being honest, that it is extremely possible for a man to be so, without any internal principle whatever. In point of fact, many persons, I believe, are honest, without any internal principle of duty whatever. With regard to others, therefore, it may be always doubtful, whether this honesty proceed from principle or from policy. But that is not the whole, or the most important part of the doubt. It may be doubtful even to ourselves, from which of these two motives even our own honesty springs.

The fear of the law, without question, keeps many persons honest. They do that of their own accord, in the first instance, which they know the law would compel them to do in the second, with a great addition of inconvenience and expense. Such a man may never, in the course of his life, be the subject of an action or lawsuit,—yet if he act from the consideration here described, and only from that consideration, he acts as much through fear of the law, as if he was under its compulsion ; and what he does is as little connected either with a moral or religious principle, as if the law did it for him.

Another man shall discharge the demands upon him, which strict honesty, according to the common

signification of the term, requires at his hand's, out of mere policy; because he sees plainly that no person would knowingly deal with him if he did not. If he is to draw an advantage from any kind of business, he must observe the rules by which business is regulated. To see this, is only to see his own interest, and is a case rendered so plain by daily and constant experience, that few persons, in fact, miss of seeing it. Yet there may be no principle at the heart all this while. There may be regularity in his transactions, yet no principle at his heart.

A third finds, what it is impossible to live in the world without finding very soon, the numerous advantages of a good character; and that character is deeply concerned in the precision and punctuality of his dealings. He looks steadily to his reputation in business. That he knows to be essential to his success: his prospects, his fortune, depend upon it. He goes something farther than the rest. He does not look to the law, or the terrors of the law: he never intends to let the matter come to that. He does not merely take care so to deal with others, as that others will continue to deal with him, but he is anxious to establish a character for honesty,—knowing how serviceable, how important, and how valuable a possession such a character may prove. But though he may carry his conduct somewhat farther than the others, he may be as destitute as they of either moral or religious principle.

The truth is, in all those acts which fall under the

meaning of this term honesty, especially pecuniary honesty, there are so many external motives which bear upon our conduct and direct it, that it is impossible almost to know in others, and not very easy to know in ourselves, whether what we do springs from virtuous and religious principles or not. Yet a vast deal depends upon that difference, when the character is to be estimated in a religious view; or even when the general question is to be resolved whether honesty itself be a virtue or not.

All that a teacher can do (and, so far as he can do it, it may be important), is to point out some of the tests by which a man may satisfy his own conscience, how far the integrity which he observes in his dealings—his honesty, in a word—be the fruit of a right and religious disposition, or be the effect of mere worldly considerations.

Now one of these tests is, when a transaction is of a nature to be perfectly secret—when the truth of it is known only to ourselves, all others who were privy to it being dead or absent—when if we do what is right, we acquire no reputation; if we do what is wrong, we incur no censure, because the whole world except ourselves are in ignorance of what is either right or wrong in the business. When this happens, as it sometimes does to almost every man who is engaged much in the affairs of the world, then to act with complete fidelity, and with as scrupulous a regard to justice and equity, as if we were acting in the face and under the direction of a court of

justice, fully informed in all the facts and circumstances of the case ;—I say, so to act, and to be conscious of having so acted, forms a fair presumption that our honesty is honesty upon principle.

Secondly ; merely to render what is due to those who can claim and assert their right is, as we have said, an equivocal proof of principle ; because a man of no principle whatever, if he were possessed of common prudence, would do the same : but when we deal equitably and justly with those who must take what we choose to give them ; who must sit down under our determination, be that determination what it will—to deal, I say, with those at least as amply and liberally as we should do either with a superior who could command justice, or with an equal who could enforce it—this again I acknowledge to be a proof of honesty upon principle.

Now many persons may stand in this relation to us ; and they often do so, for different reasons.

It is the case with those who are too poor to vindicate their pretensions. The benefit of the laws, in many cases, cannot be obtained easily. If you will have justice, you must pay for it. When such men, therefore, taking advantage of this difficulty, withhold your right under colour of referring it to the law, they rob ; when, under protection of their own wealth and ability to maintain a contest, they refuse or but delay to comply with equitable obligations, they steal.

But, secondly ; the person with whom we have

to do may not be absolutely poor, but may be dependent upon us in some other way. Now, whenever we make this dependency a reason for curtailing him, in any respect whatever, of his full and just rights, we show evidently that our honesty, even when we do act honestly, is not an honesty upon principle. He must be silent, even though oppressed. He must not complain, however injured. But if we be honest upon principle, we shall either lay this situation of his with respect to us entirely out of our consideration, or, if we do consider it, we shall make it a reason for conducting ourselves towards him with more attention to all his claims, and with a strict regard to the justice and honesty of the particular case now under our view ; without reference to any other case, or any other transaction, which may have passed between us. He must not remind us of our duty: therefore we should be more careful and anxious not to forget it ourselves—both to recollect it and to discharge it. We may have been bountiful, we may have been generous towards him upon former occasions, but that is not to be made a reason for doing him injustice upon the present. It may stop his mouth ; we shall hear of no remonstrance from him ; but it ought not to induce us to subtract the smallest particle of his right or his claims. This is one case in which honesty is put to the test. Nor will it vary the case, whether the person with whom we have to deal be obliged to us



by former favours, or be dependent upon us for future expectations.

Exceedingly plain cases need not come in question ; that is, when a demand is precise and positive, exact and clear, both in its amount and in the right. These are not the sort of cases upon which honesty is called upon to do its duty, or to manifest its principle. There is another class of cases, and that is of those in which there is some degree of doubt or latitude. These are the cases for an honest man to show his character in : most especially when they are conjoined with the circumstances of the former case, namely, that whatever we do cannot be questioned ; that in fact we have the making of both sides of the bargain—the adjudication of our own cause in our own breast, and that cause not without grounds of doubt and question,—then is the time to give evidence of the sincerity and the reality of a moral principle within us.

If in cases like these we do not lean, not even a little, towards our own side ; if we attend to the whispers of equity without any one to admonish us ; if we be advocates, not for ourselves, but with ourselves for every one who has a claim upon us ; if we see our own cause with the same eye with which we look upon that of another—our own reasons not made greater than they are by self-interest—another person's reasons not made less than they are because he is unable to maintain them ; if we impose no

hardships because they must be borne : then, I say, we have a comfortable assurance in our own conscience, that our integrity,—not only upon these but upon more ordinary occasions, upon occasions in which it cannot be brought to the same test,—is in truth the effect, not of policy, but of principle ; and such integrity, such honesty as this, is a fulfilment of duty, and therefore a great virtue, because it is a fulfilment of that comprehensive Christian precept, “ whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do even so to them.”

## XXVI.

## PRUDENCE IN THE CONDUCT OF OUR TEMPORAL CONCERNS.

## PROVERBS XXX. 8, 9.

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

I HAVE made choice of this text, not so much for the prayer itself, which yet is a very good one, and what most wise men will join in, as because it marks very strongly, and I believe very truly, the effects which riches and poverty,—the extremes of them, however,—frequently have upon us. We will convert the order of the words, which will make no difference in the substance of them, and consider at present what the text has to say of poverty.

Give me not poverty, says the author of this prayer, lest I be poor and steal. The strength of this observation extends beyond the words. We must not by poverty understand only an absolute want of subsistence, and the ordinary accommodations of life, but every situation, high and low, where men's expenses exceed their income, and thereby occasion embarrassment and distress. Nor is the danger con-

fined to stealing. Any dishonesty, any unfair shifts by which people can relieve their distresses, come within the extent and substance of this remark. So that the force of the prayer may be seen, perhaps, more plainly if it be put into these words—guard me against all difficulties and embarrassments in my circumstances, lest these difficulties put me upon unfair means of relieving them, and drive me to desperate and dishonest shifts to get rid of them.

Whether there be sufficient reason for this prayer or not, must be judged of by observation and experience; and they who have seen most of the world will be most ready, I believe, to acknowledge that the opprobrium of involved circumstances is so great and so urgent, that there are few who find their integrity firm enough to bear up against it. How frequently do we see, or hear, however, of men of fair character, whilst the world went easily with them, drawn in by degrees as their circumstances grew worse, to try experiments, at first perhaps, though not quite upright, neither on the other hand absolutely dishonest, and end at last in the direct practice of roguery and deceit! The inducement, no doubt, is strong. There are few who can give up their habits of luxury, or part with the indulgencies to which they have been accustomed: fewer still who can bear the shame of it. There is a reputation to be upheld, a pride and point of honour to be maintained, which, however false or foolish, will not permit men to descend in the ranks of life, or submit to those humiliations and

restraints which their circumstances require. Now this is a constant pressure and temptation; and although at certain times their reflection may get the better of it, and fortify them against the remotest thought of relieving themselves by dishonesty, yet these reflections coming only at certain times, and the temptations, as I say, being constant, pressing always upon their thoughts and spirits, if an opportunity comes in their way, of supplying or superseding their necessities, it is well if they be scrupulous about the means, or able to refrain from any expedient which promises alleviation or relief in present distress. One may imagine how urgent the temptation is. A man has tasted what it is to live well and reputably. This must beggar him. He must give up his acquaintance, connexions, place, character, appearance, and esteem. This is what is before him, if he insist upon the strict rules of honesty and uprightness, and all this may be avoided by taking an advantage which is in his power. A man, in such an instant, has not wit or ingenuity enough to disguise or palliate the irregularity of what he is about. But no matter what is the cause of it, if it be found true in fact, that distressed circumstances drive most men to injustice of one kind or other, it affords matter of very serious reflection to all of us.

Are we those, first, who are setting out in the world? Such, if they consider what has been said, will take heed to lay the plan of their expenses so as to fall easily and entirely within the compass of their

fortune, and to keep close to this plan. And this, not merely as a matter of prudence and economy, but as a *moral* duty ; for so they will find it to be to their cost, if they neglect it. Let not any luxury of living tempt them into dissipation and extravagance. Luxury of eating and drinking is the poorest of all pleasures at the best ; and can, I think, be no pleasure at all when it is procured and embittered by the difficulties it draws us into. Neither (which is equally dangerous) let any false notions of shame, or appearance, or emulation, lead them into expenses inconsistent with their fortune. They may be sure that real respect is never procured that way. They mistake the matter much, if they hope to procure reverence and esteem by displaying an appearance beyond their circumstances. All who are acquainted with the truth will upbraid and despise them for it, and it is surely a pitiful ambition to impose upon strangers. All this, as I said before, is to be pressed upon them on the score of duty and religion, for, if they will either observe the world themselves, or believe those who have observed it, they will find dishonesty in some shape or other, open or concealed, direct or indirect, to be the general effect of involved and encumbered fortunes, especially where the incumbrance is brought on by extravagance or profusion ; and when we see other men's integrity so often borne down by the temptation this lays them under, it is a piece of presumption to expect that ours should stand firm against it. So that a reasonable degree of prudence,

in the regulation of our desires, habits, and expenses will be found, and I believe most men will own it earlier or later, to be as conducive to our virtue as our comfort,—equally necessary, that is in other words, to make us happy here as hereafter.

I would next address a word to those whose misconduct or misfortunes have reduced them to straits and difficulties in their circumstances. There is a vast difference, no doubt, in the cause of their distress ; but their distress, in either case, may be great. Now such, perhaps, should be told what they are to expect. They must look for struggles and temptations. They may expect to meet with opportunities of relieving the present burden by unfair practices ; perhaps, of setting themselves, apparently, at ease and at liberty. They must count upon being violently beset and urged in their minds when these opportunities offer. Their own hearts will suggest to them all the misery of their present situation, what they have suffered, or what they are likely to suffer, if they neglect the present opportunity. Their imagination will go in quest of every excuse and palliation that can be thought of ; what they are induced to do is no more than what thousands, and they themselves, perhaps, have done before—what, they hope, urgent want may make pardonable—it is what, some time hence, they may make restitution for—what, perhaps, may never be known—what, if it be known, will not leave them worse than they are. These, and numberless more like reflections, will rise

up in their minds. All is, however, of no weight, because what is wrong and unjust in a rich man will be wrong and unjust in a poor man ; but such, nevertheless, as will probably be of great influence upon the biassed, bewildered judgement. The temptation they must expect will occur frequently, will meet them at every turn—ruin them when off their guard, struggle with them when upon it—infest them with constant importunity. What advice, then, can be given to such ? To stick the closer to their integrity the more urgent their distress grows. To consider that every man has his trial—this is theirs ; that this is their proper enemy, the persecution and danger to which they are exposed ; this their spiritual enemy. They are to do what a good soldier does, arm themselves the strongest where they know they are the weakest ; prepare for defence where they expect the attack : collect, that is, all their resolution, to this point ; exert themselves, and all the vigour of character which they are masters of, against their adversary. If they have themselves to blame for their distress, strict honesty under it is the way, and the only way, by which they can repair their error. Uprightness in adversity always procures the respect and indulgence of mankind ; and, we trust, also, the favour of Almighty God. Even when our adversity has been owing to our own fault or folly, it is an atonement in some measure for past misconduct ; but when we see extravagance drive men to distress, and distress to dishonesty, there is no one will pity them ;



because every body but themselves can see that both the distress and dishonesty lay at their own door. The case of those who are reduced by misfortunes, which is what may happen to the best and wisest of mankind, is, as it ought to be, more easy. It is easier, I mean, to bear up cheerfully against the inconveniences of poverty, when we have not ourselves to reproach with it. There is no infamy to contend with ; for where is the shame of sharing the disaster which all mankind are liable to ? It is like being struck by a thunderbolt. There is no disgrace in it of any kind. Fools, indeed, may deride, when they see us stripped of the ornaments of wealth and honour—but none but fools will laugh : the good and serious will be taught to look up to the hand which holds the rod, and tremble for themselves. Misfortunes man is taught to expect ; and, bad as the world is, it will always reverence an honest man struggling with difficulties. But there are for such, comforts and considerations of another kind, far above the world or its opinions. The proper reflection in such a situation, and which should never be out of a man's mind, is this—that their misfortune is the visitation of God alone, probably for the very purpose of trying and proving our integrity.

He, therefore, that stands firm, that holds fast his integrity, comes out of the fire purer and brighter—approves himself to his God in the very part in which God has been pleased to try him. This is to sanctify our sufferings—making, that is, “ our light affliction,

which is but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But, indeed, to speak the plain truth, it is not those who are brought to poverty by misfortunes that are often dishonest under it. It is those who set out with schemes of over-reaching and deceit, and fail in them; or those who begin with extravagance and end in fraud; that is, wanting either any good principle or firmness of mind to abide by it, they are carried away by the temptation which, according to their circumstances, is the strongest: in their prosperity by luxury and pride—in their adversity by the practices of fraud and roguery. The violent temptations that distressed circumstances lay men under, to attempt the arts of fraud and dishonesty, ought both to make us careful ourselves, and likewise somewhat more moderate and charitable towards others, who labour under difficulties of this kind. We may have been, perhaps, fair and honest in our dealings; we have done well—but we have been always in affluence, at ease in our circumstances, and have never felt the load and pressure of perplexed or reduced fortunes. We have never known what it is to look disgrace and poverty in the face. If we have known this, we know not the trial some men's honesty is put to, nor how far ours would have stood out against them. It is one thing to maintain our integrity in the ordinary transactions and easy concerns of life, and another to hold it fast at an extremity—when we are pushed on by indigence, and the prospect, perhaps, of ruin on

the one side, and convenient opportunity, and the expectation we may be under of setting ourselves at ease and liberty on the other.

I am not now arguing for dishonesty of any kind, or in any circumstances. I am only pleading for the lenity of mankind—somewhat more mildness and moderation in our judgement and treatment of such persons, than is always shown; and this principally to impress upon you the advice of Saint Paul, “That if any be overtaken in a fault, instead of driving him to despair by persecution and ill usage, to restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

## XXVII.

## THE MISAPPLICATION OF EXAMPLE.

1 COR. xv. 33.

*Evil communications corrupt good manners.*

WE often make a very bad use of the example of others ; and this is not owing solely to the wickedness of the example, but to our own error and perverseness in applying it. It is very difficult to live well among bad companions. It is a proof of a strong sense of duty, as well as of a great command of resolution, to maintain our virtue and innocence in any particular branch of morals, in which there is a general relaxation of principle and insensibility of guilt prevailing among the persons around us. Men without principle, men without religion, men of unsteady minds, of easy consciences, of thoughtless dispositions, are swept away by the current—they go down with the stream of general practice, and of general conversation, with very little opposition to corruptions which have example to support them ; hence, the infectious nature of vice, and the rapid progress of the infection : if licentious and lascivious sins have found their way into a neighbourhood, good and serious men are shocked to see how the youth of both sexes fall into the snare. It is with concern

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that they observe how many are undone, and how soon. When drinking, late hours, riotous proceedings, gain footing in a place, there is no computing what numbers are drawn in: at first, it is probable, those only who were bad beforehand—then the idle and unoccupied, who are ready for any seduction—then the giddy and foolish—then the pliant tempered; but the evil practice continues, till husbands and parents forget all those who ought to be the nearest and dearest to them, and share in the general profligacy, to the great grief, terror, and prejudice of their friends, and those who depend upon them. If swearing get into use, it is inconceivable how the horror of it wears away, and how soon oaths and imprecations become frequent in our streets, even from the lips of children; how all discourse, especially all mirth and diversion, become tainted with it; but the good Christian reflects—he knows that sin is the same, whether it be common or uncommon, whether there be many examples to countenance it, or none, whether it be the fashion of the place, or the contrary—that it is the same in the sight of God, the same in its final effects, the same in its punishment; and that all those, be they many or few, who are led away by the commonness of a vice, are either men of hollow and unsound principles, or foolish and ignorant—men wanting in firmness and self-command, men incapable of any moral proficiency: yet, that is the true time to hold close to a man's innocency and resolutions, when he is beset, as I may so say, by the restless im-

portunity of evil example, of a corrupt neighbourhood, of a licentious age.

These all are the natural consequences of bad examples ; but what I rather propose to consider is, not so much the effects, as the misapplications of example. And of these one is the following,—when a man of general good character has some particular failing mixed with his virtues, we, without possessing their virtues, make them an excuse for the failings in ourselves : than which nothing can be more absurd, for how far these virtues may extenuate the failings in him is certainly of no importance to us ; if we have not his virtues to allege in our conduct, they can be of no benefit or profit to us. And if we take the argument the other way—if we suppose that the failing cannot have so much harm and guilt in it as some impute to it, otherwise so good a man would not have allowed himself in the practice, we advance the unsafest argument that can be alleged. Some are very mixed characters, very inconsistent with themselves ; and men, otherwise good, are under surprising delusions in that part of their character in which they have suffered themselves to be overcome ; so that, to build upon their authority in the very point in which they betray their weakness, is to rely upon a very feeble support indeed. Thus, a man of honour and honesty in his dealings, in whom the world places great trust and confidence, may unfortunately, with all his character for general conscientiousness and integrity, have fallen into habits

of sottishness and drinking; others who give themselves up to this insinuating and pernicious vice will plead his example,—and appear to themselves to be sheltered, as it were, under his character, though not one of the qualities which compose his character belong to themselves. But, they say, could he be the man to permit himself these indulgences, if he thought them so wrong? Alas! we ought never to argue in this manner—we cannot infer a man's judgement from his practice, we know not what passes in his mind: perhaps his conscience is struggling against it all the while; perhaps he has been so often overcome by temptation and by his propensity, that conscience has lost its force and its sensibility—which will happen; perhaps, if he were to counsel and admonish, he would be the first man to warn or caution us against the very indulgence in which we think we are only following him: he would propose his own case to us, not as an encouragement or an example, which we make it to be, but as a lesson and a warning. Sensible of his infirmity and his unsteadiness, he does not undertake to defend it, although he has often found himself overcome by it. And what must be the consequence of this kind of imitation? If we will imitate some particular person, let us imitate him in his good properties; at least, let us imitate him throughout. Picking out from each character the bad parts of it, and infusing those, and those only, into our own, is a plan which must end in gradual loss of virtue and growth of vice; and if

others pursued it as well as we, in universal depravity and corruption. We are to judge of actions and conduct as they are in themselves, and not as they are joined with other actions and other conduct in the same person—that is the right and sound judgement : but the most wrong, and the most unsound, is that which would excuse vices which we have, by virtues which we have not ; that which presumes that a man's judgement vindicates what his passions prompt him to.

A second misapplication of example is this : when we see a man of pious and religious carriage forget his character, so as to fall into some unjustifiable or loose conduct, we forthwith conclude that his former piety was all hypocrisy, his religion feigned. Now this is a very hasty conclusion ; the experience of human life does not authorise it : on the contrary, we see men drawn into transgressions of their duty, without renouncing, or even disturbing their principles. There is a great deal of difference between secretly respecting religion, and religion not having so firm a hold on our minds as to guide and direct our conduct uniformly. We may infer the weakness of a man's principles and resolution, or we may infer the violence of his passions, and the mastery they have gained over him, from his giving way to temptation ; but we cannot infer, either his former insincerity, or that any deliberate change in his opinions has taken place. A difference ought to be made whether the sin be casual or habitual ; that is, whe-



ther it be a single offence, or a course of offending : if it be the first kind, it is a very harsh judgement to pronounce, because a man has been off his guard, and overtaken off his guard, that therefore, in truth, he has no religion at all. There is no foundation for any such inference. Not only charity, but probability is against it. If a man apparently religious falls not only into a single act of transgression, but into an evil course of life, the presumption no doubt is more against him ; yet even here it is far from decisive. Men in fact allow themselves a course of unlawful practices in some particular point, who retain a regard to duty in other points. We may perhaps argue that they deceive, even fatally deceive, their own hearts ; but we cannot argue that they reject the grounds of moral and religious obligation. I mention this case in particular, because vicious men are exceedingly apt to lay great stress upon it. It is a kind of ease to their minds to find out a hypocrite. If they can but point out in the neighbourhood a man of outward sanctity and apparent religious behaviour, who has been detected in some secret bad practices, or who, after years of sober and regular conversation, has fallen off from his character, and given himself up to licentious or dishonest courses, they draw a great comfort from it to themselves—they are fond of repeating such instances ; they are willing to believe, and would have others believe, that all men at the bottom are very like themselves ; that the difference between good and bad men is more in the appearance

than the reality ; that the opinion of the world, which reprobates and cries out against them, is unreasonable ; for it is not, that they are in fact worse than others, but that they do not cover and mask their vices so well. Now I say, that this way of talking and thinking is very irrational, on two accounts : first, because it presumes that every man who allows himself in some bad practice, or who falls off from his former character, is, and all the while has been, secretly, a disbeliever and a contemner of religion,—which presumption is by no means true ; it is neither generally true, nor absolutely true. It is a conduct which arises from inconsistency much oftener than from insincerity. And secondly, were it true, the inference they draw from it to the encouragement of their own vices is to the last degree fallacious. Because there are hypocrites in the world, does it follow that there are no solid grounds of virtue?—True it is, that some who make a profession of religion, in their hearts reject it—Does it follow that religion has no foundation to stand on ? It is only the judgement of these partial persons after all, that is shown : and, what is most material, it is that judgement corrupted and influenced by a bad life—because theirs is always, by the very supposition, a case of concealed or newly-commenced wickedness.

Another species of deceptive argument from example is this—when we see, or rather imagine that we see, other persons perform any act of religion from selfish or unprincipled motives, we avoid their

example by not performing the act of religion at all ; which is the most perverse turn to give to the matter that can be. The true reflection from such an example is this : The duty does not cease to be such—the act of religion is not therefore less an obligation, because certain persons of our acquaintance perform it with very improper views and motives ; if they comply with it from bad reasons, we ought to comply with it from better, instead of not complying with it at all, in order to show our dislike of their example. Thus because we think some persons come to church or the sacrament, to be thought religious ; others because it has been their custom ; others because they are obliged to it by their situation, calling, or the authority of their parents and masters ; others because they have nothing else to do—therefore we will not go to church or the sacrament at all. This example shows what shifts and pretences men are driven to in excuse of their neglect of duty. Good and wise men would be very unwilling and scarce able to believe, that any persons performed religious acts from any other than religious motives ;—but they immediately reflect that if the case be not so, it is nothing to them ; it is no extenuation of their guilt, should they neglect what is their duty, if others debase their performance of it by unworthy motives : nor, on the other hand, can it ever detract from the worthiness and acceptability of those services which proceed from a sincere wish to please God.

In like manner, because it sometimes happens that

men who are remarkable for their attendance upon religious ordinances are not equally remarkable for their honesty and virtue, and good conduct in other respects, therefore we take up a mean opinion of religion and religious ordinances. This is a very loose consequence that we draw—religious ordinances never pretended to possess such a check and irresistible efficacy in them, as to make men good universally or necessarily. Great allowances must be made for the difference of men's engagements, and the temper of their minds with respect to them, and some for the difference of men's apprehension of the importance of particular offices; and after these allowances, I believe it will turn out that the soundest virtue, the truest morality, is found in conjunction with a pious veneration for the offices of religion.

The sum of my discourse amounts principally to this: If unfortunately there be any in our religious congregations who are found out to have carried on concealed practices of wickedness along with outward sanctity and devotion; who, after having led for a long time a life of regularity and religion, fall off from these characteristics, we are not entitled to conclude, as we are very apt to do, that they are, and have been, disbelievers on the whole. Experience of human nature authorises no such conclusion; the probability is, that they are not so much consequences as inconsistencies: these men are borne down by the force and strength of the temptation. But, chiefly and industriously, ought we to beware of drawing

such inferences from the examples, as to make them either a reason for the less respectability of religion itself; or for thinking that such may in any way, or by any construction, either in the judgement of mankind, or in the final judgement of God, be an excuse or cover for our own evil courses.

## XXVIII.

## THE DUTY OF PARENTS TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN.

(PART I.)

EPHESIANS VI. 4.

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

THE duty of parents towards their children is a duty which concerns so many, and is of such importance to all those whom it does concern, that it deserves every consideration which we can give it: for though it be a duty generally acknowledged, it is not in some parts of it either so well understood, or so properly practised as it ought to be. I shall divide the duty, for method's sake, into three parts.

First; the maintenance of children, and a reasonable provision for their happiness, in point of circumstances and situation in the world.

Secondly; education.

And thirdly; the proper care of their virtue.

The obligation upon parents to maintain their children is the first and pleasantest part of their duty; and it is founded upon this reason—the helpless con-

dition of infancy renders it absolutely necessary that one or other take the charge of its maintenance. And it is manifest that the parents have no right, by their act and deed, to burden others with the charge. Nothing, therefore, is left but for the parents to undertake it themselves : so that the maintaining of our offspring is matter of strict debt to the rest of mankind. And this, independent of the affection of parents to their children; which, if it be instinctive, is an instinct implanted for the express purpose of promoting the interests of their children, and so demonstrative of God Almighty's will and intention about it.

This part of a parent's duty, though so plain and natural, and though the impulse to it be commonly so strong, is not always discharged. They are the lowest, indeed, as well as the vilest of the human species, who neglect or break through it : yet there are some such in every neighbourhood. There are those who run away from their families and leave them to perish, by the want of what they should do for them. There are others who stay at home only to consume in drunkenness and idle sports, what should be bread for their families ; and perhaps what their families earn.

There are those who are fallen into so slothful and idle a course of life, that they had rather cast their children upon the public than labour for them. And there are those, lastly, who, after having ruined the mother, and been the means of bringing innocent

sufferers into the world, abandon both to shame and misery, nor concern themselves as being any farther connected with them, or being under any obligation to provide for the maintenance of either : which is just as abandoned and wicked a line of conduct as any of the others,—for, if you remember the reason why parents are bound to maintain their children, that reason holds equally for natural children as for any other. There is no difference in the obligation, so far as it extends to maintenance, but what custom holds—which is no difference at all. But there is something beyond mere subsistence, which a child is entitled to receive at the hands of its parents, because there is something necessary for it, and which the child cannot procure for itself; and that is, a reasonable provision for the happiness of the child in its circumstances and situation of life. Those who, to make short work of the subject, say that a parent is bound to do all he can for his children, say too much; because, at that rate, every thing a person spends, which might have been saved, and every profit omitted which might have been made, would be criminal, as it would be a breach of that rule. Besides, such very general rules, which have no limits, would be of no sort of use. But a reasonable care of the circumstances and situation of children is certainly a parent's duty,—that is, to put them in such a situation, and leave them, if in our power, in such circumstances, as that they may have a fair chance, and a probable expectation of being happy and use-



ful. *Happy* and *useful* are the two words to be remembered : that is what I mean by a reasonable provision.

Now I do not say a child has this chance or expectation, unless he be well placed in a situation suitable to his habits and reasonable expectations, and furnished likewise with a competent provision for the demands of that situation. But here it becomes a very material question, how we are to calculate the demands and expenses of the situation, or what may be deemed a person's reasonable expectation. For these exigencies depend much upon the young man himself, and they can call or think what they please so many exigencies ; and thus making the expectations of the child in some degree the measure of the parent's duty, we are laying the parent open to unbounded demands. I answer, that the exigencies of any situation, and the reasonable expectations of children, are so far regulated by custom ; that as much indulgence in expense, appearance, and manner of living, and the like, as is customarily allowed to and practised by people of such professions, or in similar situations of life, are to be accounted the exigencies of that situation. Not that custom, in its own proper force, can alter or determine what is right or wrong in any case ; but in the present case you cannot suppose that a young person who is denied that which all, or almost all, about him are allowed, or, which is the same thing, is not supplied with the means of procuring them, and exposed on that ac-

count to continual mortification, and what he reckons disgrace: you cannot, I say, suppose that he will be tolerably easy or happy under such circumstances—at least you will not find him so; and a fair chance for his ease and happiness he has a right to look for. You will understand that all vicious and licentious indulgencies are to be excepted out of this rule, which a parent is not to encourage or supply, or even permit, if he can help it, however common they may be in the situation and class of life in which his child is placed; nor would it alter the case if such practices were universal.

What we have said of custom regulating the exigencies and situation, is equally true as to the expectation of the child, and the choice of situation. In reality, and in the eyes of reason, all situations which are equally innocent and useful are equally honourable; but it is not exactly so in the opinion of the world. The world has what it calls its distinctions of rank, its liberal professions, and inferior stations; and in laying out a plan or provision for our children, we must be content in some measure to submit to such opinions. A child will naturally expect to preserve the place, rank, and condition in life, in which he has been brought up. He has had from the first those who accounted him their equal, and he will expect to continue so. And who should say that his expectations are unreasonable? At least they are natural and unavoidable. It is not

likely that a child should be satisfied in a condition which degrades and depresses him beneath his acquaintance; and that he should see with patience the children of all other families, whose birth, place, and rank in life were like his own, advanced before him.

The *habits* of a young person are a consideration of still greater importance than his expectations. To accustom children to habits of ease, amusements, and elegance, and a thousand distinctions, and then to send them abroad into a calling where they must all be given up, or meet every day with contradiction and rebuke, and to suppose that your children will reconcile themselves to the change, is to suppose the children much wiser than their parents—is to expect that from the indecision and vehemency of youth, which you will find is the fruit of reflection and resolution.

The rule we lay down then is this,—that a parent is bound, if in his power (for no one is bound to impossibilities), to provide his child with a calling suited to his talents and reasonable expectations, and to supply the exigencies of that calling; and those expectations and exigencies are to be deemed reasonable which the generality of others in similar circumstances, or of the same profession, are commonly indulged with: and then, when a parent has done this, he has done his duty—so far as relates to provision.

We will next see how this rule applies to the different classes and conditions of life, and who are the persons that offend against it.

First then, the most important, because the most numerous of men amongst us, are those who have only their labour to live by.

It is manifest that if they accustom their children betimes to industry, and procure them any calling in which their industry will honestly support them, they completely acquit themselves of the duty of a parent to his child; as completely, perhaps even more so, than the man who lays up an independence for his son, in order to raise a family or be in a condition above his birth. He provides his child with a situation suited to his habits; for he took care to habituate him from the beginning to labour and sobriety, and to the reasonable use of exertion: for the child who expects to live in idleness when his parents brought him up by their labour, cannot be said to entertain a reasonable expectation. And then, as to the demands of the situation, a livelihood for himself, and, in due time, the means of providing a livelihood for a family of his own, is the utmost that either reason or even custom can authorize him to expect. That in fact, with no extraordinary vein and inclination, he will expect. These things a parent cannot supply him with; but he can do better: for he can establish him in the business which he has taught him, or can get him taught, and direct him by the sober and industrious life he

has brought him up with, to maintain himself. This is a consolation and encouragement to their condition of life; as it shows that every man who has health and hands, and activity, need not fear being able to do his duty to his family: and would we did not observe many persons more afraid of the burden of a family than they are of offending God by a life of lewdness and licentiousness! They who transgress against this rule are the people who suffer their children to live in absolute idleness, or what is next to it, in some trifling employment which can never be of service to them when they become men—or in little pilferings and private tricks; and who do not, if they grow up, take care betimes to provide them with masters and honest laborious callings.

The next order of men are those who are in the middle, betwixt poverty and riches; who are of liberal professions, and though of smaller estates, in creditable branches of business. These might provide a mere subsistence for their children by sending them out into the world to get their bread by trade or manual labour; but they would not satisfy by these means the reasonable expectations of their children, which is necessary to be done, in order to give them a fair chance for happiness. Much less are they bound, on the other hand, to make them or leave them independent of any profession. This may happen sometimes; but I believe that there is more pleasure than merit in it, when it does happen. A calling in some degree upon a level, in point of place

and station, with that which their parents follow, is the utmost they are entitled to expect ; and yet this simple and practicable rule is often and in various ways neglected. It is neglected from avarice, from vanity, and from extravagance. From avarice ; as when a parent sinks his child's profession to save the charges of education, which of all schemes of economy is the worst : for the child, when he becomes master of his liberty and his fortune, will hardly sit down with the calling he is brought up to, and is qualified for nothing better. But this error is not common. Our rule is violated from vanity, when a parent, from some foolish conceit of birth and distinction, thinks the ordinary occupations of life beneath the dignity of his family, and yet is not in circumstances to advance his children into the more honourable professions, and so leaves them to shift for themselves without either employment or profession at all ; or, what is worse, introduces them perhaps into some profession or place of public education of some great name and repute, and yet has it not in his power to supply him with the necessary expenses of the station in which he has placed his child, until he can maintain himself : I call these *necessary expenses*, as I said before, which all or most in the same situation of life are allowed. This is both folly and cruelty :—folly, for you will hardly ever know an instance of a person succeeding in a profession who is thus shackled ;—and cruelty to the child, for the thus lifting him up into the higher

classes of life, without giving him the means of supporting himself, is only to expose him to continual insult and mortification ; to make his life and happiness a prey to every vexation and distress. I am sure that a parent who acts thus does not do his duty by his child, if it be a parent's duty to give his child a fair chance of happiness. He gives him indeed scarcely any chance at all : for there is not any one living who can be at ease under the difficulties and vexations which a man is liable to whose circumstances are inadequate to his state.

And lastly ; parents do not discharge their duty to their children, or what is just the same, put it out of their power to discharge it, by their *own extravagance*. When a parent might, by frugality and self-denial and diligence, put his children into a calling suitable for them, and give or leave them sufficient to go on with his calling, and does not do so, he is then extravagant in the properest sense of that word, and his extravagance has a double effect on his children—it both accustoms them to high or luxurious living, and deprives them of the means of continuing it. Nor is it an excuse to say that their children shared with them ; that they indulged them while in their power with every thing they could afford, or more. This is not that reasonable and permanent provision for a child's happiness which it is a parent's duty to make.

The last order of men which remains to be considered are those of great fortune and family, and

who are bound perhaps to transmit to some one child a considerable part of their fortune. Such child will seldom submit to enter into a profession, nor would the parent be willing he should. When those persons, by luxury or mismanagement, throw away their large fortunes upon themselves—or enjoy it while they may, as it is termed—they leave the rest of their family of all others the most destitute; for they have brought them up with expectations only to be disappointed; with habits which will tease and torment them, and with a pride which will starve them.

To sum up the whole; the duty of parents to their children, like every other duty, has its limits. There is such a thing as doing too much, when we are so anxious for our family as to be hardly just, and never generous to the rest of mankind. And there is such a thing as doing too little—when we neglect the opportunities we have, or may have, of providing for our children in such a manner as is reasonable, and, if it be not their own fault, conducting them through an ensnaring and precarious world, with comfort to themselves and usefulness to others.



## XXIX.

THE DUTY OF PARENTS TOWARDS THEIR  
CHILDREN.

(PART II.)

PROVERBS XXII. 6.

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

ONE grand article of a parent's duty to his children is the care of their virtue, and the using of proper expedients and precautions to preserve and inculcate it. This you will say was the business of education, which has been already treated of; but there are certain other precautions and expedients which do not fall under the notice of what is commonly reckoned education, and which therefore we choose to make the subject of a separate exhortation; though to say the truth, it matters little how our duty is arranged or divided, if it be but understood and practised.

Now the first and principal and most direct way of encouraging virtue in our children, is by our own example. The great point in a young person, or indeed in any person, is the being accustomed to look

forward to the consequences of their actions in a future world: and this is not to be brought about by any other method than the parents' acting with a view to those consequences themselves. Whatever parents may be in their own conduct, they cannot but wish to have their children virtuous: both because they know that virtue at the setting out has a better chance for thriving in the world than vice (though with all chances it may turn out otherwise), and because, unless a man has deliberately, and from conviction, cast off all expectation of a future state (which is not, I trust and believe, the case with many, if with any), he cannot but desire, if he love his children at all, to have them happy in that state—he cannot but know that to promote and secure that happiness and that interest is, after all, the very best thing which he can do for them. And I will suppose it to be the wish and purpose of every parent. But then how do they go about to accomplish it? They gravely, perhaps, and solemnly give them lessons of virtue and morality—warn them with much seeming earnestness against idleness, drunkenness, lewdness, dissoluteness, and profligacy; whereas they themselves hang about all day without employ, come home disordered by intemperance, are cried out against in the whole neighbourhood for some profligate connexions, and waste and destroy their substance in riot, dissipation, and high living: or they will tell their children, possibly, of the great importance of religion—that every thing

beside is of short duration, and, consequently, small importance, in comparison with this—that death closes all our cares but this—whatever else, therefore, they regard, to take care of this. This is the conversation, perhaps, that they hold with their children, whilst their own conduct all the while has not much of the influence of religion discoverable in it. The offices and ordinances of religion, which are the apparent, and therefore, as examples, the affecting and influencing spirit of it, are put by and neglected, if there be any pretence or cause for neglecting them—not seldom without any pretence or excuse at all.

All that the child sees of the parents is, that they are continually taken up with the pursuit of some pleasure; or that they busy themselves about some worldly advantage, as much as if there were no such things as religion and a future state ever heard of. One hour the parent shall be representing to the child the tremendous authority of God Almighty—that the whole world is in his hands—that He is the giver of all good, and has the power to inflict upon us every evil—that He is the author of life and death—that it is He only that can kill the body, and after that can cast into hell-fire—that He is never, therefore, to be named or thought of without awe and veneration. Thus will the parent talk one hour, and the next, perhaps, if a very slight provocation fall in his way, the child shall hear him cursing and swearing, and dealing about the name and

vengeance of God, the terrors of hell and damnation, with as little concern, and upon as frivolous an occasion, as if these things were only tales to frighten fools with, and to be sport to the wise man. Even the understanding of a child is not to be imposed upon by such mockery, or made to believe that a parent can be sincere, or really is in earnest in delivering rules and principles of behaviour, which manifestly possess no sort of influence upon his own—which he forgets or breaks on every occasion that arises; and when the child has once found out this, or suspects it, the discovery has a fatal effect upon the parent's authority in general; for whatever lessons of prudence, or maxims of morality, or admonitions, or exhortations he afterwards gives his child, they will only pass with it for so much form and affectation: whereas, did the parent regularly and constantly act with a view to a future judgement and the laws of religion himself, the child would easily learn to turn its eyes and attention the same way, and with very little talking to; and the custom of considering itself accountable hereafter for what it does here, thus silently and insensibly formed by the parent's example, would have a chance of remaining with it to its life's end. This is the least troublesome, and only true way of inculcating religion into young minds, and does not disgust or frighten them with the suddenness of it.

A second thing, by which much may be done towards the preserving and cultivating of a young

person's virtue, is in the choice of professions. Professions differ much in the opportunities and temptations to particular vices: young persons differ as much in the disposition and inclination they discover to different vices. Hence, it is manifest, there is room for judgement in selecting professions the least favourable to those vices to which the child discovers a propensity, and the most likely to qualify and correct them. Instances of this may be the following: if a youth betray a turn for a loose and dissolute course of life, some calling in which he will be early restrained, and live at first under immediate inspection and authority, and above all, one in which his hand and mind will be kept constantly employed, and in which sobriety and regularity of behaviour is the general character, and much insisted upon as a point of reputation; some calling of this kind (and of this sort are most employments in trade and business) seems best adapted to keep within bounds his craving for pleasure, and by degrees moderate it.

If he show a propensity to sottishness, low company, and mean diversions, it may remedy this to advance him into politer stations of life, where he will hear these vices and propensities reprobated, and a spirit of honour and dignity set up against them: and it will carry him away from those places where he is beginning to form mean attachments and bad habits. If there be reason to suspect him of a mereenary, sordid temper,—which in youth is not

common,—a liberal education and a liberal profession are the best remedy. An intercourse with young persons of these lines of education and profession will probably cure it. If he be envious, proud, and passionate, impatient of superiority and disappointment, the more private his condition of life is, the better; where he will meet with fewer quarrels, competitions, and mortifications.

This all seems very plain and rational, and yet it is not only neglected in practice, but expressly contradicted, and a rule the reverse of this pretty generally observed. Men choose sometimes their children's professions with a view to the dispositions they remark in them. But how do they direct their choice?—Commonly to such callings and ways of life as are of all others the most likely to foment, call out, and encourage every bad disposition they have betrayed. Thus, does a child seem addicted to dissolute and licentious pleasures, is what we call wild and ungovernable? he is despatched abroad to a distance, and enters one of those professions where he will be out of the reach of his parents or of any other authority; without superintendence and control; with every opportunity and every temptation to vice, together with the example and encouragement and conversation of those he is placed amongst. If his temper be narrow and mean and mercenary, a trade and employment by which that tendency is naturally increased is sought out for him, where a selfish and avaricious turn will grow upon him, under

the name of frugality, attention to business, care, and circumspection ; all which he finds to be qualities of great use and esteem in the way of life and among the people he converses with—and to a certain degree they are both necessary and meritorious. If he be of a wily, crafty turn of mind, proud of a successful stratagem, and laying out to overreach and make an advantage of the simplicity and unsuspecting temper of those he deals with—why then he is made, a parent concludes, for one of those callings, necessary and honourable in their nature, but in the practice of which vileness and craft have too many opportunities, too much success. If his spirit be haughty and ambitious, this is considered as the indication of a lofty and aspiring mind, which must be gratified by placing it in one of those liberal professions where the respect and importance, and dignity and rank of that higher order are apt to flatter the vain, the proud, the arrogant ; but in which this sort of temper will have no other effect than to expose a man to repulse and disappointment, chagrin, envy, and vexation, and the whole train of conflicting passions which infest unsuccessful, mortified, or affronted pride. In their arguments no regard is had to the care or preservation of the child's virtue, the subduing of his vicious propensities, the amendment of his disposition,—which in reason ought to be the first of all considerations ; but the whole attention is paid to worldly advancement and success, in which also their choice often fails.

Another case in which parents are chargeable with the source of their children's ill conduct, is when they urge them, as it were, into situations in which it is very difficult to behave well. The parent complains that the son is idle—when he has never put it in his power, or given him the means to exert his diligence, with any advantage or encouragement; or that he is fallen into a loose course of conduct—when the parent, probably from pride, avarice, or some such motive, opposed some generous attachment, and prevented that virtuous connexion which might have preserved him from his present course of life. This also is no uncommon case, no uncommon consequence. Or, the child is fretful and discontented in his situation, instead of attending to the business or the duties of it. This also is often the parent's mismanagement, as well as the child's fault. It may be that the parent has advanced his child to a state of which he either cannot or will not supply the expenses, and so he leaves him in much embarrassment and perplexity—has dignified him with a condition of life beyond his first expectations, or has accustomed him early to habits of luxury inconsistent with the calling he is destined to, or the provision he has given him.

The example of a parent, I have already said, has a great and obvious influence upon the manners and moral sentiments of children; and the greater in proportion as they entertain the more reverence, esteem, and affection for their parent. Young



people seldom seem much or well impressed with moral sentiments of their own ; and it is not to be expected, hardly indeed to be wished, that a child should condemn or regard with abhorrence what he sees his parent practise. This is obvious. But there is another way in which the child's character is often determined by the parent's conduct, which is not so obvious ; and that is, when the parent carries any quality or behaviour to an excess which the child sees and suffers under. The child is apt, when he grows up, to discard the whole principle, and run into the contrary extreme. Thus, when a parent carries his economy to a length which teazes and harasses, and makes unhappy his family and all about him, it is odds but the child despises, when he enters into the world, all economy as so much covetousness, and sets off, as soon as it is in his power, a prodigal and spendthrift. If the seriousness and gravity of the parent be mixed with moroseness and austerity, the effect is, that the child contracts an aversion to all seriousness, and turns out a character of thoughtlessness, levity, and profaneness. If the parent's religion be melancholy or superstitious, it compels him to a constant affectation of it, in season and out of season. If it be a troublesome attention to multiplied forms and ceremonies, there is danger lest the child take up a dislike to all religion, as inconsistent with any tolerable degree of ease or pleasure.—The same of many other qualities. We are often disgusted even with virtue itself, when coupled with forbid-

ding manners. A parent, therefore, who wishes to recommend good principles and good qualities to the child, should not render them forbidding in his own example : and if he wishes to procure and preserve a proper influence, he should not only be virtuous (which is the first and great thing), but take care to make his virtues sit easy upon him, and render even his virtue—what virtue is always capable of being—amiable, easy, and engaging.

## XXX.

THE DUTY OF CHILDREN TOWARDS THEIR  
PARENTS.

EXODUS XX. 12.

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

IN my last discourse I gave 'an account of those duties which parents owe to their children, I proceed now to take notice of those which the children in return are enjoined to perform towards their parents. And this may be done by examining into the sense and meaning of the words of the text: "Honour thy father and thy mother." Something may be added, too, with regard to the promise annexed to the performance of this duty, "that thy days may be long in the land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

"Honour," then, signifies a great many things; and takes its sense especially from the person it relates to. To honour the king is one thing,—to honour God is another. To honour our equals or inferiors is different from either; and therefore the word must not be taken in the same sense wherever

we meet with it ; but the meaning and extent of it must be determined by the party to which it is addressed. Since then the words, “ Honour thy father and thy mother,” are so much of one of the commandments of God as is meant to secure the duty of children towards parents ; and several duties of love, of respect, of obedience, and of support, which children owe to their parents, are comprehended under them.

First, then, we are commanded to *love* our parents. But because, properly speaking, it is not in our own power to love or hate, to hope for or fear, when, and what, and whom we will, but according as we apprehend the thing or person to be desirable and lovely,—by being commanded to love our parents, we are to take such courses and considerations as may increase our natural affection to them, and avoid all such things as may any way diminish it. How far their being, under God, the authors and originals of our life and existence, may contribute to excite this affection, is not so easy to determine ; because life, as it is happy or miserable, is differently to be represented. But parental love, which exerts itself in a constant care and preservation of us, is a real good, which deserves to be repaid with all the love we can show. It is this which supplies all the wants of helpless infancy, secures from all the hazards of heedless childhood, of giddy and unthinking youth. It is this that informs the mind and regulates the manners, that trains up the reason, that exercises

the memory, that instructs us to argue and understand such things as by our years we are capable of, and takes care to educate and fit us for greater concerns. It is this that brings us first to God in baptism, and keeps us afterwards in the ways of goodness and religion, by instilling into us wise and virtuous principles; by reminding us constantly of our several duties, encouraging us in good by favours and rewards, and reclaiming us from evil by reproofs and corrections. These, and a thousand more, are the ways which parents take to make their children happy; besides those endless and innumerable labours, watchings, and solicitations, which consume their whole life, to make a handsome provision for them of the good things of this life. So that whatever benefits can be the grounds and foundation of love in children, the care and love of parents abundantly afford them; and, therefore, they are obliged to take the remembrance of these frequently into consideration, in order to stir them up to love their parents, who have done so great things for them; who next, under God, are not only the authors of their being, but of their well-being likewise, and present happiness.

Another duty which children owe to their parents is *respect*; that is, all external honour and civility, whether in words or actions, by virtue of which they are obliged to be submissive in their behaviour, and mannerly and dutiful in their speeches and answers to them,—to say things honourable and commendable

of them, to pry as little into their failings and infirmities as they themselves can, and to extenuate and conceal them as much as possible from others. And for this there is so much reason and decency in nature, that it shocks us to hear one reproach his parents with vices and infirmities, though what he says be true, unless it be done with great concern and tenderness, with grief and pity; but when it is done with contempt and pleasure in telling, we cannot help abhorring such impiety; for the hearts of all men go along with Noah for laying punishment upon Ham for his unnatural and profane derision, and love the memory of those sons who would not themselves see, nor suffer their own senses to be witnesses of, the miscarriages of their father.

That, therefore, children may discharge this part of their duty the better, and in every gesture, word, and action, show all due honour and respect to their parents, as it is partly in their parents' power to effect, so it should be their care and concern to promote it. And to this purpose, they must be careful how they live and behave in the sight of their children; for if they make themselves vile and cheap in their eyes by too much familiarity, by light and indiscreet carriage, they will in vain expect the reverence and respect that is due to their character. The foundation of respect is some supposed excellence and worth, and in consequence of this, some kind of superiority; but when parents either admit their children to an equality, or make them privy to

their follies and indiscretions, [they do in effect invite contempt. And, therefore, all due care should be taken, that the domestic differences, and idle and unseemly quarrels and debates, and silly and unkind words and actions, that too frequently pass between parents, should be concealed from children.

The third branch of a child's duty is *obedience*. This will vary greatly at different times of life ; but it should never cease. It must be absolute and implicit during childhood. It can admit of very few exceptions in youth. It will ever be general in manhood ; even when a son or daughter is of age to judge for himself, he ought to perceive clear and strong reasons before he take upon him to go against his parents' directions and admonitions : before he be able to judge for himself, which is not so soon as many young persons imagine they are able, no excuse can be sufficient. And there is one of the strongest possible reasons for our showing great deference to a parent's pleasure, and that is, that we are sure (which we can never be on following any other person's counsel), that it is meant for our good. A child ought to reason thus with himself : " I have received every proof imaginable of their affection and good will, nor can I suspect the least design they can have upon me, unless it be to do me good, and prevent me from falling into any miscarriage, which I find affects them rather more than it does myself. They have made me their pride, happiness, and glory. They have placed all their content and

satisfaction in my welfare, and therefore I cannot but believe that their counsels and commands are the best that, considering circumstances, they can give, and the safest for me to follow." If children, I say, would but reason thus with themselves, and at the same time reflect upon the ties and obligations they have to be obedient to their parents—the reasonableness, the pleasure, and the security of being so—the approbation of all good people, and the blessing of God going along with it; they would soon bring themselves to a ready disposition of obedience, even though there were some things not so agreeable to their own desires, in what their parents might enjoin.

There is one duty more included under the word "honour;" and that is the support and maintenance of our parents, or our administering to them in their wants and weaknesses. For considering the care and pains which our father, and the sleepless nights and homely offices which our mother, underwent for us—how tender they both were of us in our infancy, when we were incapable of helping ourselves—how liberal of their substance to give us an education and settle us in a station of life, to the utmost of their abilities; we cannot but think it incumbent on us to requite their care, and make them a suitable return, when either poverty, which is a heavy load and requires our support, or old age, which is a second childhood, and requires our attention, comes upon them.



Upon the whole, parents, in respect to their children, do bear the signal stamp and image of God himself, not only as He is their Maker, but as He is their Preserver and Benefactor; and, therefore, we may observe, that as the duties to other men are termed kindnesses or charity, or courtesies, or liberality, &c. those towards parents in every language are entitled *piety*: which implies something peculiarly divine in the object of them, and denotes that the offences of children in this respect are greatly increased; that to slight our parents is more than unkindness; to refuse them support is more than uncharitableness; to be unmannerly towards them is more than discourtesy; and in their necessities not to be liberal is more sordid than avarice, nay, is high impiety and flagitiousness against Heaven. For “He that forsaketh his father is a blasphemer; and he that angereth his mother is cursed of God: but he that honoureth his father shall have long life.” These words of Holy Writ bring us to the nature of that encouragement which God has annexed to the performance of our duty towards our parents, “that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

Now it is evident that this promise was peculiar to the children of Israel, from being limited to the land of Canaan, which they only were to inhabit; and therefore it cannot from hence be concluded, either that obedient children shall always inherit long life, or that they who arrive at old age have

therefore been obedient children ; since every day's experience shows the contrary. But the encouragement which children have from hence is this—that if long life be most convenient for them, all circumstances considered, they may expect it ; but if it will not prove a blessing, as of itself it seldom does, then is not God unfaithful to his promise, if the best and most obedient children are translated betimes into that better and heavenly country, of which the land of promise was but a poor type or shadow. And therefore we find the son of Sirach exhorting to honour and observe parents, from motives of a higher consideration than what are given to the Jews. “ My son, help thy father in his age, and grieve him not as long as he liveth ; and if his understanding fail, have patience and despise him not, when thou art in thy full strength ; for the relieving of thy father will not be forgotten—in the days of thy affliction it shall be remembered.”

## XXXI.

## THE DUTIES OF SERVANTS.

## EPHESIANS VI. 5—8.

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

THESE words are a lesson to servants, from no other than the Apostle Paul. It was his custom, at the conclusion of his Epistles, to add short practical precepts and rules of behaviour, adapted to the various understandings of the persons to whom he wrote. So in this and the preceding, which are the last two chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle sets forth the duties of husbands and wives, and children and parents; and in the words which I have read to you, of servants and masters. Now, that in which this lesson exceeds all others, is the religion that it carries with it: and this religion re-

spects both the motives upon which servants ought to act towards their masters, and the rule by which they should regulate themselves. Another instructor, a mere human teacher, would have had servants be faithful and diligent in their calling, that they might please and satisfy their masters; because, he would have said, that is the way of recommending one's self—that is the way of bettering our condition, and of keeping a good situation if we have one—that is the way of obtaining and preserving a good name and a good character, upon which our livelihood and our success in the world depend.

He who has nothing to trust to but his hands and labour must recommend himself to an employment by industry, honesty, care, and sobriety. These qualities will constantly be sought for in servants; and qualities contrary to these, laziness, carelessness, dishonesty, and drunkenness, will as constantly be avoided by all who need them. Therefore a prudent counsellor would suggest, if you have a view to pass your time creditably in your situation, and to have your service sought after—if you would maintain yourself and your family with decency, and have a maintenance always to trust to, secure to yourself by the regularity of your behaviour, as well as by the diligence, skilfulness, and activity of your service, the approbation of those who employ you, and of the neighbourhood in which you live: that will always do, and nothing else will. A merely human teacher, of experience in the world, would probably tell a

servant all this, and it is all true. But what says the Apostle? A divine monitor like Saint Paul puts the matter on a different foundation. He inculcates far higher views: "Do," says he, "the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." In which words three things are imported: First, that servants are to look up, not to the person who employs them, but to God as their master, "doing service as to the Lord and not to man." Secondly; that it is in truth God, and not man, that sets them their work and their task, "Do the will of God." Thirdly; they are to look to God, and not to man, for the reward of their faithful service, "Knowing this, that whatever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord."

First; the words of the text import this: if God is, so far, the proper master of all servants, then it is He, and not man, who has assigned them their works and their tasks. The foundation of the contract is, that the different lots and conditions of human life are all appointed by God, and that each man's calling and destination is that which God has fixed for him. The general frame of human society, and the origin and constitution of different societies, are points not understood by all, but all can understand some things in every society; for instance, that there must be masters and there must be ser-

vants—some to direct and some to be directed. The business of the world must be carried on; and it is only by labour that we are all maintained. Our food and raiment, our habitations and accommodations, and in part our enjoyments, we owe to the hand of industry. Now there are but two methods possible—one is, every man working for himself, to supply himself with every thing he has occasion for—the second is, working for another. The former is the condition of savages, among whom, though every man toils night and day to procure himself food and clothing, every man is wretchedly and scarcely provided with either. In such a state, they who are best provided are worse off than the poorest inhabitant of this country can be. Therefore by such a rule, if it were possible to establish it, the poor would gain nothing, and all who are above poverty would lose a great deal. The second is the condition of civilized life, in which one man sets himself to work whatever he is qualified to carry on for the benefit of others, and is in return rewarded with the benefit of his industry in some other way. There goes through the different employments of life a general exchange. Service, in particular, is a fair exchange of maintenance for industry, of wages for labour. The exchange is honest and advantageous on both sides. The master is no less obliged to a good servant, than the servant to a good master. There must be property. The face of the earth would be a waste without it. The ground would be uncultivated,

if no man had a property in it. No business of any kind need or would be carried on, if they who carried it on had not a property in the produce and the profit: but if there be property at all, it must be regulated by some fixed rules; and let these rules be what they will, property will run into unequal masses. This is inevitable. The art of man cannot hinder it. One man will have a great deal to spare, another will want. But there is one species of property which every man is born to—the use of his liberty; and thanks be to God, things are in such a state with us that this, in general, is equal: but then to turn his strength, faculties, and activity to account, he must engage with some one who has that to spare which he stands in need of. He must give him what he has to give, namely, his personal service, in order to obtain from him what he must obtain, his maintenance; and there is no service in this country but what is founded in the interest of the servant himself. Now the reflection that arises from all this, and which is the reflection contained in the text, is, that some service necessarily results from the order and constitution of civil life; and since that order was of God Almighty's fixing, that constitution of His appointment, service also itself may be truly said to be the destination and contrivance of his Providence. The state is what God made and designed, because it is owing to that order of things which he has settled in the world; but we are moreover to refer to His Providence the

state in which each finds himself: and this is true of the lowest as well as the highest—of the servant in his state as well as the prince upon his throne. We are all disposed into our different states by the appointment of God. Wherefore the business and duties of these several stations may justly be called the task which God has given us to perform; and, be it what it will, whilst we perform it we are performing the will of God. A servant, therefore, as the Apostle admonishes, is doing service to the Lord. The work assigned him is assigned, not only by the will of man, but by the appointment of God; and therefore, as the Apostle proceeds, in the execution of that work he is to look, not merely to the favour of men, but to the approbation of God. Honesty and diligence in a servant are so far their own reward, that they ensure to him a good character, and nothing else will; and his character is his livelihood: but the Apostle of Christ, in giving this servant of his for his wages the reward of a future state, carries his disciple farther; he teaches him that, whatever be a man's state, if he discharge the duties and business of it, he will be rewarded for it by God Almighty. The words are these: "Whatever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free."

Now as this is the principle and motive which the Apostle proposes, namely, the constant consideration that they are doing God's work, and in doing that work well are serving and pleasing him,



the rule by which a servant is to guide himself must correspond with this principle.

Saint Paul delivers his rule in these words : “ Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service.” Now the first quality that we find required here is, singleness of heart as unto Christ—that is, not only sincerity of heart, but the same sincerity as if they were immediately serving the Lord Christ. This excludes all pretences, all contrivances and machinations, all affectation and ‘appearance of service, which is not true and real at the bottom. The second thing laid down in the text, in the duty of a servant, is, that he do his duty, “ not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ.” Eye-service is the service of him who works only under the eye of his master—only while he is seen and observed by him ; who is good according as he is watched, diligent so long as he is well looked after. This sort of service is condemned in the text ; and for a very plain reason : if pleasing man, if pleasing his master, was the whole and sole object of a servant’s view, this might do ; but it can never do with God : it can never, therefore, satisfy him who looks to God and not to man for the final recompense of his labours ; it can never be his part who conducts himself, not as a man-pleaser, but according to Saint Paul’s direction, as the servant of Christ ; it can never be

his part who considers himself, whilst he is working for his master, as doing that business, that task of life, which God Almighty has appointed him, and looks, as Saint Paul speaks, to receive of the Lord for his service. Such a one knows, that whether his earthly master be absent or present, be negligent or careful, be skilful or ignorant, be difficult to impose upon or easy to impose upon, He who is to be the ultimate rewarder of him can never be deceived—is watching him when no one else is—seeth in secret—rewards that fidelity and that diligence which is not to be corrupted by opportunity of negligence or dishonesty, or which forgets itself when out of sight.

Having thus stated what I take to be the mind and meaning of the Apostle, as to the duty and condition of servants, I will add, as a concluding consideration, some of the various intimations given us in Scripture how greatly our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ esteemed the character of a good servant. And this appears from hence, that when he would set forth the merit and acceptance of a virtuous disciple, he generally does it by comparing his with that of a good servant: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made a ruler over his household, to give them their meat in due season: blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. I say unto you he will make him ruler over all his house.”

Here you see the reception which a true Christian

may expect from God, as compared with that which a faithful servant shall meet with from his master.

“ The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his servants and delivered unto them his goods ; and unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one. After a long time the lord of these servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And he that had received five talents came in and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents, behold I have gained besides them five talents more ; and the lord said unto him, Thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”—We know that this is but a parable or similitude, and that in truth Christ is representing how God will applaud and recompense those who have improved and best used the abilities and opportunities put into their power ; but what I argue is this, that Christ conveys this representation under the comparison of a just, orderly, and faithful servant ; and that he would never have used this comparison, if the character of such a servant had not been what he approved, and what those who heard him were presumed to approve also. It may be observed also, what were the circumstances of this servant whom our Saviour here describes. They were circumstances, in the first place, of great trust. The master had delivered to the servant certain goods ;

the behaviour of the servant was the more praiseworthy, the trial of his fidelity the greater, inasmuch as he had exerted himself so diligently and so successfully when his master was absent, "afar off on a journey;" and absent for a long time: this increases the virtue and merit of such conduct, and is mentioned by our Lord because it did increase it.

These parables admit of two applications: a good Christian sees his duty and his reward described by the fidelity and recompense of a good servant. A good servant sees how highly that character is prized and valued by Christ, when he finds that Christ makes choice of it as the type and similitude by which he delineates the qualities and virtues which he wishes to find in his disciples, and how those virtues will be accepted at the coming of their heavenly Master.



# CHARGES.

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## CHARGE I.

DELIVERED TO THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF  
CARLISLE, IN THE YEAR 1785, ON THE DISTRI-  
BUTION OF RELIGIOUS TRACTS.

REVEREND BRETHERN,

THE choice of our venerable Diocesan—dictated, no doubt, by great partiality to me, but not without a hope, I trust, of providing for the care and government of his diocese—having called me to succeed your late excellent chancellor, I approach a station which hath been occupied by abilities so conspicuous under a just conviction of my incapacity to replace, by any qualifications I possess, the loss you have sustained of the talents and services of that valuable person: his consummate professional learning, his unwearied diligence, the reputation of his writings, the accuracy, method, and perspicuity by which they are distin-

guished, not only conferred honour upon the office which he held in this diocese, but have rendered his name familiar to every part of these kingdoms.

There is no branch of my duty in which I regret my own deficiency more than on those occasions in which the clergy, especially the younger and less experienced part of them, were wont, upon any doubt or emergency that arose, to resort to my predecessor for counsel and advice. I can only promise, that they shall meet in me with the same attention to their inquiries, the same readiness to communicate the information that is asked for; whilst I lament that they cannot place upon that information a like reliance, or find in it equal satisfaction and security.

The ecclesiastical laws of the realm having undergone no alteration that I am acquainted with during the course of the last year, and being yet too recent in my office to advert with sufficient exactness to any irregularities that may prevail within the cognizance of this jurisdiction, I cannot, I conceive, employ the present opportunity better than in suggesting two recommendations, of different kinds, indeed, and of very different importance, but neither perhaps undeserving of consideration.

The first thing I take the liberty to propose relates to the registering of baptisms. It has been intimated to me, by very high legal authority, that, in the investigation of pedigrees from parish registers, great uncertainty has been found to arise from the want of the family surname of the mother appearing in the

entry. It is well known, that one half of the controversies which occur upon the subject of descents result from the confusion of whole blood and half blood, and the difficulty of tracing back genealogies in the maternal line. Doubts of this kind can seldom be ascertained by the register, in which nothing at present is found but the christian name of the mother; they are rather indeed increased by consulting the register, whenever it appears, as it frequently may happen, that an ancestor has married two wives of the same christian name, and has had children by both. It is evident that this ambiguity may be completely obviated, by so easy an expedient as the addition of the maiden name of the mother to the rest of the record: it is a single question to ask, and a single word to write down. At present the entries stand thus: "John, the son of Richard Peters," for instance, "of such a place and profession, and of Mary, his wife." What I propose is, to add a parenthesis, containing the name which the mother bore before her marriage; so that the whole entry may run in this form: "John, the son of Richard Peters," particularizing, as before, the father's profession and place of residence, "and of Mary, his wife, late Johnson." For the better exposition of this plan, though it can hardly, I think, be mistaken, I have caused to be circulated, together with the book of articles, a printed formulary, which, *mutatis mutandis*, may serve as a direction where any such is wanted. I understand that this alteration has been adopted in the



diocese of Norwich, and perhaps in some others, with great approbation; and if it appear likely to promote in any degree the purposes of future peace and justice, I am persuaded the little trouble it may occasion will not be grudged or declined, though the generations are yet unborn which will reap the effects of it.

The next particular to which I am desirous of inviting your attention is the distribution of religious books in our respective parishes. What I before mentioned belongs to the formal or technical part of a clergyman's duty, which, however, cannot be left undone, nor ought at any time to be done negligently; but what I now take the liberty of suggesting, is a matter of higher character and of more serious importance, as appertaining to that which composes the substance and object of the pastoral office—the edification of the people in christian knowledge. I am apprehensive that it is not so generally known amongst us as it ought to be, that there exists in London a society for the propagation of christian knowledge, by the best method, according to my judgement, in which a society can act, by facilitating the circulation of devotional compositions and of popular treatises upon the chief subjects of practical religion. The annual subscription to this society is one guinea; in consideration of which, the subscriber is entitled to receive whatever books he may select out of a very numerous catalogue, at about half the price which the same books would cost in any other way of procuring them. The whole collection is furnished to

subscribers for eighteen shillings ; which, beside that it supplies a clergyman with no mean library in this species of reading, enables him to select, for the use of his parish, what he may deem best suited to the particular wants and circumstances of his parishioners. In my opinion, this expedient of subscribing to the society, and of procuring books for the use of our poorer parishioners, upon the terms of the society, admits of the strongest argument in its favour, by which any mode of charity can be shown to be preferable to another—that of doing much good at a little expense. But beside its general utility, there are two descriptions of clergy to whom the recommendation I am now urging seems to be peculiarly applicable. It was in old times much the practice, and is at all times, as far as it can be attempted with probability of success, the duty of the parochial clergy to hold personal conferences with their parishioners upon religious subjects ; nevertheless, it is very true, that many clergymen of great worth and learning find themselves unapt for this exercise ; they find a want of that presence of mind and promptness of thought which enable a man to say at the proper instant what he afterwards discovers ought to have been said, or to discourse freely and persuasively upon subjects of importance, and yet with truth and correctness.

Amongst many excellencies, it is one defect of a retired and studious life, that it indisposes men from entering with ease and familiarity into the conversa-

tion of the mixed ranks of human society. Now the only substitute for religious conversation is religious reading. A clergyman, therefore, who believes some application to the consciences of his parishioners more appropriate and domestic than addresses from the pulpit to be his duty, and that some instruction is wanting more minute and circumstantial than befits the decorum of public discourses, but who finds himself embarrassed by every endeavour to introduce conferences with them upon serious topics, will receive some contentment to his thoughts from being able to supply, in a good degree, the place and effect of such conferences, by putting into the hands of his parishioners plain and affecting treatises upon the subjects to which he wishes to draw their meditations.

The next class of parochial clergy who, I think, may avail themselves of this expedient with singular propriety, is that of nonresident incumbents: it is a mode of instruction in their power, and the only one that is so. By this means, though absent in body, they may in some measure, as the Apostle speaks, be present in spirit; not entirely forgetful of their cure, or so regardless of the charge that hath been committed to them, as to consider themselves under no other relation to their parish than as having an estate in it. It is not my design to examine the legal or conscientious excuses of nonresidents; it is enough for my present purpose to observe, that even where both exist, and under the most justifiable circumstances, something is not done by the minister for

the advantage of his flock, which might be done if he was living amongst them. This deficiency a good man will desire to make up ; and, after due care and circumspection in the choice of a curate, I know not by what better method the incumbent of a parish can compensate for his absence than by a judicious distribution of religious books amongst his parishioners.

## CHARGE II.

## ON THE OATHS OF CHURCHWARDENS.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

I KNOW nothing in which the obligation of an oath is so egregiously trifled with, or rather in which that obligation is so entirely overlooked, as in the office of a Churchwarden ; and in no part of their duty is this inadvertency more observable than in the answers which are returned in the book of articles. It does not seem to occur to the apprehension of Churchwardens that this is a business in which their consciences are at all concerned, or to which their oath extends. I must entreat, therefore, my Reverend Brethren, your concurrence with me in endeavouring to remind your respective Churchwardens of this branch of their office, and your and their attention for a few minutes, whilst I attempt to show how Churchwardens stand obliged by their oath in filling up, as it is called, the book of articles, to deliver careful, well-considered, true, and explicit answers to the questions proposed to them.

The Churchwarden's oath, after some controversy and much deliberation between the best civilians and common lawyers of the age, was settled in its present

form, with a view on the one hand of binding the Churchwarden to every thing that properly belongs to his office, and with due caution on the other not to leave it in the power of the Ordinary to cast upon him what burthens he pleased. The concluding clause of this oath is that by which the Churchwarden swears, "according to the best of his skill and judgement, to present such things and persons as are presentable by the laws ecclesiastical of this realm;" but lest his skill and judgement should not be sufficient to inform him what things are and what things are not presentable by the laws of the realm, a book of articles is put into his hands to supply that information; so that it is, in truth, a book of instruction to the Churchwarden in the discharge of his duty. A conscientious man, who remembers that he has sworn to present such things as are presentable, will be led in the first place to inquire what things are presentable; and this inquiry the contents of the book of articles satisfy, by enumerating and disposing, under different titles, the matters which are ordinarily presentable, and to which consequently his oath extends. Emergent cases may arise which are not comprehended in the book, but they are few: the plain account of the connexion between the oath and the articles is this—the oath obliges the Churchwarden to present such things as are presentable, the articles let him know what these things are. There are a few chapels within this district which do not receive books of articles at all. I am sorry there are any such: for since the Chapel-

wardens of these places swear to present such things as are presentable, unless they can take upon themselves to judge what things are presentable, and will frame presentments according to that judgement, they ought not to refuse the assistance that is held out to them; it is not consistent with their oath to do so. It was expected, I have no doubt, that they should resort to the mother church, and return their presentments in the general articles of the parish; but this is neither convenient nor often practised. Suppose, for instance, there being any irreparable in the fabric of the chapel, the fence of the chapel yard, or of any of the buildings belonging to its estate, or any insufficiency in any article employed about divine service, such defects are things presentable; yet how is the Chapelwarden to present them, if he neither receive a separate book of articles, nor join in answering the book sent to the parish church, nor return written presentments of his own? The expense of a book of articles is trifling, and what the Chapelwarden is undoubtedly entitled to bring into his accounts.

These instances, however, are not numerous. A subject of much more general complaint is the heedlessness and negligence with which answers are returned; upon which account I wish to impress upon the minds of Churchwardens this one weighty reflection, that every answer they give is an answer upon oath. I am afraid this is little attended to, or hardly indeed understood to be the case, by reason that the oath is not taken at the same time that the answers

are put down, and because the Churchwarden is not separately sworn to the truth of each answer; but where is the difference, in a view of religious or moral probity, whether a person swears distinctly to the truth of each answer, or swears beforehand and once for all, that he will make true answers to the questions that shall be asked him; or where is the difference whether this oath be taken at the time or some months before? Now observe how this applies to the case of a Churchwarden: upon his admission to his office he solemnly swears "that he will present such things and persons as are presentable, according to the best of his skill and judgement." Near the conclusion of his office, at the distance of almost a year, but still under the continued obligation, and as it ought to be, under the consciousness of his oath, he comes to make his presentments, by subscribing answers in the margin of the book of articles, when the several matters presentable are enumerated, and proposed to his consideration in distinct interrogatories. Can any thing be plainer than that the force of the oath attaches upon these answers? and that every false and (what is a species of falsehood, because it is a suppression of truth), every imperfect answer that is returned, must be deemed, in the consideration of reason and religion, and why may we not say in the sight of God, a violation of the oath; and moreover, that every heedless or negligent answer that is returned, though certainly not to be placed upon a level with deliberate misrepresentation, is yet heed-



lessness and negligence under the most solemn of all human obligations. I should not willingly believe that this point is known to Churchwardens, when I remark the irregular, unconsidered, and defective returns that are made in the book of articles, or the slovenly hurried manner in which the business is executed: sometimes, I believe, in the very morning of the visitation, or at setting off upon their journey to it, in a few minutes when the Churchwardens can be got together, or at the close of a parish meeting, without time, without inquiry, without consultation. Is this the conduct of serious men under the obligation of an oath, or of men concerned for the honest discharge of their duty? The effect of this inadvertency I have frequent occasion to witness. To many articles, and sometimes to whole pages or to whole titles in the book, no answer whatever is returned. This is always wrong, for if things are as they should be in the matter inquired after, there can be no objection to the saying so: if they be not, of which this silence indeed is a negative confession, they ought to present, at once; that is, the case ought to be stated fully, truly, and exactly as it is. At other times a short answer of yes or no is given, when a circumstantial specification is necessary to convey the information that is sought for by the inquiry; this holds particularly of those parts of the inquiry which relate to the state of the church, of the churchyard, of the articles employed in the celebration of divine service, or of the buildings upon the glebe. At other times

the question is not answered by the reply, but eluded ; such as by saying, “as usual,” “as it has been,” “as formerly:” from which it is impossible for the Ordinary to form any correct opinion, much less to found upon it any judicial cognizance ; all which arises, partly from the easiness with which men sign what they would not say ; partly, as hath been observed, from their unconsciousness of their oath ; and partly from the fear of bringing blame or trouble upon themselves, by giving occasion to further proceedings : motives which cannot be justified upon any principles of moral integrity.

Amidst the various duties of Churchwardens, that which more particularly belongs to the design of my visitation, and that indeed which composes one of the most useful, at least one of the most practicable parts of their function, is the care of the church, and of the decency, order, cleanliness, and sufficiency of every thing within it and belonging to it. To this branch of their office the provisions of law are perfectly adequate ; there is neither any defect in their powers, nor any obscurity in their duty : the whole of both may be comprised in almost one sentence. Repairs, the Churchwarden may always make of his own authority, and the parish in vestry assembled is bound upon his requisition to lay an assessment to defray the expenses, and if they refuse, he may lay one himself, and the persons charged may be compelled by the process of the Ecclesiastical Court to pay their

quota. Under this word repair is included every thing that is necessary to keep up, or restore to their former condition, the fabric of the church, its roof, windows, plaster, floor, pulpit, reading desk, and seats (where the seats are repaired by the parish at large), and also the fence of the churchyard; likewise the replacing of books, surplices, bier and bier cloth, communion cloth and communion linen, plate, chalices and cups, when any of them are damaged or decayed. For the supply of these, as occasion requires, the Churchwarden wants no authority but his own; and for the defect, if they be not supplied, he is personally answerable, and subjects himself to ecclesiastical censure. Alterations and improvements stand upon a different footing: before these can be undertaken, the consent and resolution of a vestry must be had, and it must be a general vestry of the parish, assembled in pursuance of public notice, specifying the occasion upon which they are to meet; but even here a majority binds the whole. In strictness and for the purpose of enforcing the payment of the rate to any alteration, the faculty or consent of the Ordinary is further necessary; and where the alteration is either considerable of itself or likely to be opposed, that consent, in prudence as well as regularity, ought to be applied for. The example of many parishes in this diocese, in some of which churches have lately been rebuilt, and in others new seated, newly fitted up, shows that these

improvements are so sanctioned and counterlanced by law, as to be entered upon with ease and safety by the persons who engage in them; and also shows that there is not entirely wanting amongst us a sense of religious decency and decorum, and a disposition to have the public worship of Almighty God conducted with reverence, solemnity, piety, and order.

## CHARGE III.

## ON PARISH CLERKS.

MY REVEREND BRETHREN,

I DESIRE it to be distinctly understood, that the delay of the visitation, which, I am sensible, must be attended with inconveniency, both to the Churchwardens who have been detained in their office, and to all who attend here at this advanced season of the year, is occasioned solely by the change that has taken place in the see; which change frustrated the late bishop's intention of visiting the diocese himself in the course of the summer, and suspended my authority to hold any visitation at all.

As it hath been usual upon this occasion to notice any alterations that may have taken place in the laws relating to the church or to religion, I mention what, no doubt, is well known to most of you, that in the last session of parliament an act passed in favour of the Roman catholics, which, upon the condition of their taking an oath therein prescribed, consolidating what may be called the civil part of the several oaths of allegiance, abjuration, and supremacy, places them nearly upon a level with other dissenters from the established church, except in the

capacity of voting for members of parliament, or of sitting in either house of parliament themselves. It repeals the penal laws which passed against them in the reigns of Elizabeth and William and Mary; which laws had been dictated by the fears that were entertained, in one case for the reformation, in the other for the revolution. It authorizes their public worship, and their places of worship, in like manner as the meetings of dissenting congregations, provided the places be what is called licensed; that is, described and recorded in the entries of the quarter sessions. It authorizes, subject, however, to the same condition, their schools and schoolmasters, provided they do not receive into them the children of protestant fathers; but it prohibits any foundation or endowment of such schools. It lays open to the Roman catholics the profession of the law, in its several descriptions of counsellors, proctors, and attorneys, by substituting the new oath in the place of another, by which they found themselves excluded from these employments. In the same way, it renders them capable of serving upon juries. But the part of the act which it more immediately concerns me to notify to you is that which puts them in the situation of protestant dissenters in regard to their eligibility to parish offices, and amongst these, to that of churchwarden. It directs that Roman catholics may be appointed to these offices in common with the other inhabitants of the parish; and that if they, being so appointed, object

to any thing in the oaths, or the duties belonging to the office, they shall and may substitute a deputy, who is to be approved, admitted, and sworn as the principal would have been. This is all that I think it in any wise material to remark in this act; which, so far as it extends the just principles of toleration, will be received, I hope, both by the clergy and the laity, with approbation.

As I last year laid before the clergy such advice as I was able to give them, and that somewhat more at large than usual, I know not whether I can employ the present opportunity better than in recommending to the consideration of the churchwardens and parishes the situation of many of their parish clerks, and of a certain description of schoolmasters in country villages. The change in the value of fixed payments, which in many cases is felt severely by the clergy, has absolutely ruined the provision that was intended for parish clerks. The small payments, arising in most places from houses, in some from communicants, and in some from tenements, and which, when they were fixed, might in a good degree be adequate to the trouble of the office and the station of the person who held it, are become hardly worth collecting; the consequence of which is, that some parishes within this jurisdiction have no parish clerks at all. I am hardly able to judge how the service proceeds without this assistance, where the minister and the congregation are accustomed to the want of it; but I have found, when the clerk has been occa-

sionally absent, and his office not supplied, great confusion to arise from the want of the responses and the alternate parts of the liturgy being regularly supported; and I am afraid that some part of this inconveniency is felt where the congregation and their minister are obliged to go on as they can, without the attendance of any parish clerks at all. I am sorry, therefore, to see this defect in any parish; because it is a defect which impairs, in some degree, what we are all concerned to maintain—the decorum of public worship. There is reason also to apprehend, that the extreme scantiness of the income, which leaves some parishes without any parish clerk at all, in others obliges the minister, or whoever has the appointment, to take up with insufficient or improper persons. The remedy which I would recommend for this evil, for so I must call it, is, that, in parishes in which the income of the parish clerk is extremely small, an allowance should be made to them by the parish, of an annual stipend, to be paid out of the church rate. I have no doubt that a vestry is authorized to do this. From the earliest times of our legal history, and long anterior to any statutes upon the subject, parishes or their vestries were corporations for the purpose of providing for public worship, and the assigning a competent salary to a parish clerk; like providing books, vestments, furniture for the communion table and church, which the law casts upon parishes in all places. This method, I am very glad to observe, is already



adopted in some parishes in the diocese. I am now only expressing my wish, that it may be extended to others, in which it is equally wanted.

The description of schoolmasters to which I refer is that of schools in country villages, endowed with fixed salaries of from ten to twenty pounds a year; in consideration of which they are obliged, or supposed to be obliged, to teach all the children of the parish or township that may be sent to them. The consequence of which is, that the schoolmaster is not maintained as the decency of his character and the importance of his service require that he should be; that his school is crowded with more children than the care of one man can superintend; and that he has no emolument from the number of his scholars, to reward or stimulate his exertions: and thus, upon the whole, these well intended benefactions do more harm than good. Wherever this is the case, and cases of this sort abound in the diocese, I would earnestly recommend, that, in addition to the fixed salary, the scholars should pay half quarterage.

By this means, with a very moderate charge upon the inhabitants, the income of the schoolmaster will be advanced to something like a provision for his decent support; and he will find, in the profits of his school, what every man ought to find, an advantage proportioned to his abilities and diligence, by an increase of which parents will be amply repaid for the expense that they incur. The endowment will not be thrown away; but, on the contrary, made to

answer a better purpose to all persons interested in it, than it does at present: the schoolmaster will receive the benefit of it, in having a certainty to depend upon; and the inhabitants will save one half of what they must otherwise pay for the same instruction.

I cannot conclude this charge without adding one more to the miscellaneous subjects which compose it. It may be expected that the bishop will next year hold a public confirmation: this solemnity may become the instrument of many good purposes; but its utility depends entirely upon the preparation that is made for it, and, in my opinion, upon another circumstance, which is little attended to, that of not bringing young persons to it too soon; I should think the age of fourteen was quite as early as any impression could be received from it that was likely to last. But what I wish to recommend upon this subject is, to distribute among the catechumens a tract published by the present bishop of Landaff, entitled, "An Address to Young Persons after Confirmation," and which appears to me to be by much the best adapted to the occasion of any that I have seen. Such of the clergy as may not find it convenient to distribute the pamphlet at their own expense will do well to put their parishioners in the way of procuring it for themselves.

## CHARGE IV.

## ON AFTERNOON LECTURES.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

OF every ecclesiastical constitution the essential part is the parochial clergy; so much more important, indeed, do they appear to me than any other part of our establishment, that other parts, in my judgement, are only so far valuable, and so far worth retaining, as they contribute, or can be made to contribute, to the good order, the reward, or the encouragement of this. The incumbent of a parish, resident among his flock, and engaged in the quiet and serious exercise of his duty, composes one of the most respectable characters of human society; and, notwithstanding that insensibility both to public merit and to religious concerns which is complained of, and justly complained of amongst us, a character of this description will never fail of obtaining the sincere esteem and veneration of mankind.

The duty of a Christian teacher is of two kinds; one kind consists in a regular performance of the various services which are prescribed by the laws and canons of the church; this may be called the technical part of our office: the other kind consists in such a laying out for opportunities of working by

every means upon the consciences and understandings of those committed to our care, as is prompted by a firm conviction in ourselves of the truth of Christianity, and a corresponding solicitude to bring men to the knowledge and practice of its duties; this may be called the effective and substantial part of our occupation. Of the former it may be observed, that whilst it is indispensable, in point of decency and order,—whilst it is all which any form of church government, or any system of ecclesiastical discipline, can enforce,—it may yet fall far short of a faithful discharge of our public trust: a man may comply with every article of the rubric, and every direction of the canons; and yet perform to his parishioners a cold, reluctant, and ineffectual service. On the other hand, where the principle I have described has taken due possession of the mind, a clergyman no longer asks concerning any expedient which occurs, or which is suggested to him, whether it be required by law, or whether he can be censured for the neglect of it; but whether the expedient itself be likely to produce any solid effect upon the religious character of the persons with whom he has to deal. I have premised this reflection, in order to introduce to your notice the recommendation of a practice, which I have reason to believe would be attended with beneficial consequences to many congregations. The practice I wish to recommend is the expounding portions of Scripture after evening service; and I must request your indulgence, whilst

I lay before you what has occurred to me concerning the use and practicability of this expedient. The advantages which I apprehend would result from such interpretations of Scripture are either direct or consequential. The end immediately aimed at is to produce amongst the people a more general and familiar acquaintance with the records of our religion than is at present to be met with. I am one of those who think that the Christian Scriptures speak, in a great measure, for themselves; and that the best service we can render to our parishioners is to induce them to read these Scriptures at home, and with attention. Now the way to induce men to read, is to enable them to understand. When a private person, reading the Scripture, is stopped by perpetual difficulties, he grows tired of the employment; on the other hand, when he is furnished as he proceeds with illustrations of apparent obscurities, or answers to obvious doubts, the attention is both engaged, sustained, and gratified. There are difficulties in Scripture, in common with all ancient books, which cannot be resolved, if resolved at all, without a minute and critical disquisition, which will end probably at last in a dubious or controverted explication. Topics like these cannot be accommodated to the apprehension of a popular audience, or be successfully agitated in a public discourse. Again, there are difficulties which a simple recourse to the original, — to a parallel text, — to circumstances of time, occasion, and place, — and

short reference to some usage or opinion then prevailing, or to some passage in the history of that age and country, will render clear and easy. Points of this sort may be set forth, to the greatest part of every congregation, with advantage to their minds, and with great satisfaction. I am apt also to believe, that admonitions against any particular vice may be delivered, in commenting upon a text in which such vice is reprov'd, with more weight and efficacy than in any other form.

This describes the direct purpose to be aimed at in the exercise I am recommending; but there is also a secondary object, of no small utility, which it will be found in a good measure to promote, and that is, the increasing of the afternoon congregations. Some expedient for this end is peculiarly necessary in this diocese; in most parishes of which the inhabitants are dispersed through a wide district, living, some one, some two or three miles distant from their church, which is commonly situated in a small village, or within the vicinage of a few straggling houses. Where the parishioners must go so far to church, if nothing but evening service be performed, they do not go at all; and their vacant afternoons are often so ill employed, that I am afraid it may be said, of a numerous part of many parishes, that Sunday is the worst spent day of the week. This thinness and desertion of the afternoon congregation not incumbent of a country parish can be insensible of; and there are two ways of treating

the evil; one, in discontinuing evening service entirely, — the other, in endeavouring to bring our parishioners to it. Which of those resolutions is more conscientious, and more satisfactory, judge ye. Now, I have reason to believe, that this want of due attendance would be remedied by some such exertion, on the part of the minister, as that I am now suggesting. As I did not think myself at liberty to recommend an experiment to others which I had not tried myself, I have for some short time past attempted these expositions in my own parish church; and I will tell you the result. The afternoon congregation, which consisted of a few aged persons in the neighbourhood of the church, seldom amounted to more than twelve or fifteen; since the time I commenced this practice, the congregation have advanced from under twenty to above two hundred. This is a fact worthy your observation; because I have not a doubt but every clergyman, who makes a like attempt, will meet with the same success, and many, I am persuaded, with much more. The increase of the congregation was greater than I looked for, and some abatements are to be made; some effect must be attributed to novelty, which, of course, will not hold long; perhaps, also, there exists some small diminution of the morning congregation; but, with both these deductions, it still shows, as far as a single instance can show it, the complete efficacy of the expedient for the purpose of collecting a congregation. I am ready to admit, that much of the

same benefit would arise from many other modes of instruction: from lectures upon the Catechism, upon the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Commandments, the Thirty-nine Articles; and if any clergyman prefers any of these matters to that which I am suggesting, or judges himself better prepared for one than the other, he certainly ought to exercise his discretion in adopting what he thinks best. All that I mean to advance, is that *something* should be done. This opportunity could not be less usefully employed than in setting one good thing in competition with another good thing; or, where both are excellent, in contending which is best. Nevertheless, I may be allowed to remark, that expositions of Scripture possess manifest advantage over other schemes of teaching; that they supply a more extensive variety of subject; as one short chapter, or half of a long one, will always be sufficient for one occasion. A lecturer may hold on for a considerable length of time before he be brought back to begin his course anew, or to repeat what has been heard before.

Having thus stated what I apprehend to be the use of this expedient, it remains that I add something to show its practicability; for whatever was the advantage or merit of the plan, if it was only practicable by men of extraordinary attainments, I should not have proposed it in this place—such men want no directions from me; but unless I am much deceived in my notions of this measure, it will be found



as easy in the execution as it is laudable in the design. Any one commentary upon the New Testament will supply materials for the work, and is indeed all the apparatus necessary for undertaking it. I say any one; because those subtle and recondite criticisms, in which different commentators hold different opinions, cannot be brought within the compass of this design. Grotius, Whitby, Hammond, Clark, and, above all, Daddridge, will any of them be found to contain what is sufficient for the present purpose. I mention this last author in preference to the rest, because his paraphrase, beside that it for the most part exhibits a sound and judicious interpretation of the text, is both more copious and expressive, in clearer and better-chosen terms, than any other I have met with—qualities which render it peculiarly adapted to the province of public expounding. His notes likewise discover great learning, and in many instances much sagacity and acuteness. But in recommending this author, it is necessary to warn you against a part of his work, extremely unlike and unworthy of the rest; and that is, what he calls his improvements of the several sections, into which he divides the text. These improvements betray such a straining to raise reflections out of passages of Scripture, for which there is often no just place or real foundation,—and are delivered in a style so ill-considered, not to say fantastical, at least so inconsistent with the sober and temperate judgement which pervades the paraphrase itself,—that no account can

be given of the incongruity, but that this excellent person found it necessary to accommodate his language to the prevailing tone of the dissenting congregations of these times. All that I mean to guard against is, that I may not be thought, in praising the work itself, to recommend to your imitation this part of it.

I have said that any one commentary will furnish what is necessary for expounding Scripture to a mixed congregation; nevertheless, I must take the liberty of adding, to the younger clergy especially, a recommendation which, whether applied to this purpose or not, will be found an useful direction in the conduct of their studies; and that is, to provide themselves with an interleaved Greek Testament, into the blank pages of which they may not only transcribe the substance of such commentary as they regularly go through, but in which they may, from time to time, insert such occasional remarks on any text as they happen to collect in the course of their reading: this in time will grow into a commentary, in some measure, of a man's own; it will possess more variety and selection, as well as be more familiar and commodious to the compiler himself, than any published commentary can be.

For the purpose of public expounding, a different preparation will be necessary for different persons, and for the same person in the progress of the undertaking: one may choose at first to write down the greatest part of what he delivers; another may find

it sufficient to have before him the substance of the observations he means to offer, which will gradually contract itself into heads, or notes, or common-places, upon which he will dilate and enlarge at his discretion. In the mode also of conducting the work great room is left for difference of choice : one may choose to expound the Second Lesson ; another, the Gospel of the day ; another, portions of Scripture selected by himself ; and to another, it may appear best to begin with a Gospel and go regularly forward ; which last method I have practised, as the most simple and connected. But in this last method I should propose, after having finished one Gospel, to proceed to such portions of the rest as contained something different from what was found in the first, which portions are pointed out in every harmony. The congregation would find themselves greatly assisted if they could be prevailed upon to bring their Bibles along with them to church, that they might have their eye upon the text whilst the minister was delivering his exposition. I hardly need observe, that in country parishes this scheme is only practicable during the summer season, when the length of the day and the state of the roads easily admit of the parishioners' coming twice a day to church.

I have made this recommendation the subject of my present address, because I know not any by which I could detain you so well worthy your consideration and regard. The best and highest purpose of these

meetings would be answered, if, by a communication of sentiment and observation, we could be made to profit by one another's experience and by one another's judgement; that, by cheerfully imparting to our brethren whatever any of us may have found conducive to the object of our common profession and our common endeavour, we may provoke one another to love and to good works, and carry on the great business of public instruction with united zeal, information, and ability.

### CHARGE V.

#### ON THE STUDIES SUITABLE TO THE CLERGY.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

Addressing an audience of clergymen and scholars, I cannot be improperly employed in pointing out to their attention, especially to that of the younger and less experienced, a few plain rules for the conduct and assistance of their professional studies. And these rules I may in some sort call mechanical, because as to the more important qualities, which are the foundation of success in literary pursuits, taste, judgement, and erudition; they are very imperfectly, if at all the subjects of rules, and certainly cannot be taught by any which it is in my power to deliver.

It may seem the tritest of all trite topics to recommend study to clergymen; but I am persuaded that very few who have not fallen into studious habits are sufficiently sensible how conducive they are to satisfaction. And to no person can they, in this view, be of so much importance as to us; I mean to such of us as have no other employment than our profession. The chief fault of a clergyman's life is the want of constant engagement. There is no way of supplying this vacancy so good as study, because

there is hardly any other method of spending time which does not oblige or tempt us to spend also money. They, and they alone, who have experienced the difference, can tell how rapidly, how smoothly, and how cheerfully the time passes which is passed in study; and how tedious and wearisome leisure oftentimes becomes without it. I must be understood, however, to speak of something which deserves the name of study, for mere reading, without thought, method, or distinction, does not come up to this character. In truth, it may be rendered so much an amusement as to be entitled to no other name, rank, or merit; and what is worse, when followed merely as an amusement, it ceases to be even that. Light entertaining reading ought to be the relaxation, not the employment of a vigorous mind; not the substance of our intellectual food, but the seasoning of the desert.

VIII. Supposing, therefore, a clergyman to be conscious of a great deal of unoccupied time, and desirous of applying it to the improvement of his knowledge and his usefulness, and that more particularly in discharging the duties of his office, I would strongly recommend to him the revival of two old-fashioned but excellent helps to learning—an interleaved Bible and a common-place book.

In the last age, when study was more in fashion than it is, and when the studies of clergymen were more appropriated to their calling than they are, no man of character in the profession was without a

Bible, or at least a Greek Testament interleaved with blank pages. It was usual to divide the page into two columns, in one of which he inserted from time to time such comments and remarks upon each text as struck him in the course of his various readings, and as struck him by their value and probability; for it was not intended by the person who provided himself with this apparatus to transcribe into his manuscript any continued comment, merely for the purpose of reading in his own handwriting what he might read in the original, but to enable him to find at once, and in its proper place, what lies dispersed in different authors. The other column was set apart for observations, or perhaps conjectures, which had at any time occurred to himself whilst reading the Scriptures or hearing them read. When a number of years had replenished this collection, it became a treasure; for it became both a grateful and edifying employment to peruse a chapter, the lesson for instance of the day, with the remarks and information before him which former thoughts or researches had suggested.

That excellent prelate, with the close of whose studious life it was my lot to be intimately acquainted, for many years took great delight in these recollections. Old age never appeared more venerable than when so employed.

Another useful contrivance was a common-place book. This may be serviceable in every branch of science, and in every species of study; but it is for

me only at present to render it as applicable to the studies of a clergyman, and especially to what every clergyman must wish to be provided with, a due choice and variety of subjects for his public discourses, and an assortment of topics suitable to each. Mr. Locke long ago observed, that the most valuable of our thoughts are those which drop as it were into the mind by accident; and no one exercised in these matters will be backward to allow, that they are almost always preferable to what is forced up from the mind by pumping, or as Milton has more strongly expressed it, "wrung like drops of blood from the nose," that is, in plainer terms, to such as we are compelled to furnish at the time. This being so, it becomes of consequence to possess some means of preserving those ideas which our more fortunate moments may cast up, and to preserve them in such order and arrangement that we can turn to them when we want them. I recommend, therefore, for this purpose, a common-place book for sermons, so contrived as to answer two ends; first, to collect proper subjects, and secondly, under each subject to collect proper sentiments. Whenever, which will happen more frequently than we expect, reading, meditation, conversation, especially with persons of the same class and rank of life as our congregations are composed of, what we hear them say, or what we perceive them to think, shall suggest any useful subject of discourse, of explanation, advice, caution, or instruction, let it be marked down at the time.



We may not want it at the time, but let it be marked down. A distinct subject should stand at the head of a distinct page, and have a whole page left to it, in order that when afterwards any thing relating to the same subject is presented to our minds, it may be inserted under its proper head. By which means when we sit down to the composition of a sermon, we have only to go to our book for a subject, and not only for a subject, but for many of the sentences which belong to it, and the division of argument into which our doctrine will run. And these are more likely to be natural, solid, and useful, from the very circumstance of having occurred spontaneously and occasionally, instead of being sought by labour and straining.

In the office of composition, to which the remainder of my address will relate, there are three distinctions which appear to me to comprehend all that can be laid down as to artificial assistance. These are, repeated transcribing, repeated revisions, and revisions with intervals of considerable length. The late Mr. Hartley, whose knowledge of human understanding no one will dispute, whenver he saw a faulty composition, was wont to say it had not been written over often enough. Whatever be the cause of it, there is no position of the mind which brings the attention so closely and separately to the words of a composition, both to their choice and strangeness, or which enables a writer to descry so readily his own mistakes and oversights as that in which

the act of transcribing places him. No man ever sketches over his composition without mending it. By reading, he may judge perhaps better of the texture and disposition of the argument, than by writing, because he takes in more parts at once; his eye surveys a larger field: but for the language, for a minute and as I have called it, separate attention to sentences, expressions, and even words, and for all the advantage which a vigorous scrutiny can give, in point of correctness and propriety, one writing is worth many readings. It may be said, perhaps, that so much anxiety about diction will destroy one of the best properties of popular writing, ease of style and manner. The very reverse of this is the truth, unless we choose to call slovenliness ease. There are no compositions in the language which have been so admired for this very quality of ease as those of Mr. Sterne; yet none, I believe, ever cost their author more trouble. I remember to have seen a letter of his, in which he speaks of himself as having been incessantly employed for six months upon one small volume. I mention this for the sake of those who are not sufficiently apprised, that in writing, as in many other things, ease is not the result of negligence, but the perfection of art.

But, secondly, I would recommend frequent revisions of every thing you write. This advice is more particularly necessary to young composers, and it is necessary on this account; of most men it may be said, that the genius is ripe before the judgement.

The imagination is at its perfection about thirty. It opens with the bloom of youth, and sometimes does not survive it; on the contrary, the judgement seldom attains its maturity till much later. Being in a great measure the fruit of experience, it is of slow growth, and is in a state, perhaps, of constant progress, at least so long as the powers of the understanding remain entire. He, therefore, who addresses himself to any species of composition in the earlier part of his life, comes to it with the advantage of a fertile and glowing imagination, but often with great imbecility and unsoundness of judgement. Any man who peruses, after a lapse of years, his early productions, will be sensible of this. This danger, arising from the constitution of the human mind, can only be guarded against by two precautions—patience in writing and industry in revising. Upon the question of slow or rapid composition, I have nothing to deliver; every man must be guided by the experience of his own faculties. In general, I think, slow composition does not answer well, for what is composed slowly must necessarily be composed a little at a time, the consequence of which is, that the piecings and joinings will be numerous and difficult to unravel; perhaps, also, the flow of thought ought not to be interrupted too often. But in proportion as the first sketch or draught of any work is hastily struck off, a more careful and rigorous correction ought to be applied. In the process of composing a man puts down every thing. When he comes, there-

fore, to exercise a second and severer judgement, a large crop of weeds will fall before him. And it is not one revision nor two that will be sufficient. Many faults will escape a first, many a second scrutiny, and it is only by a successive application of the attention, that accuracy, I mean such a degree of it as every one would wish to give to his compositions, can be finally attained.

But, thirdly, it is necessary that these revisions be made at due distances of time. A very simple example will show the reason of this rule. In the easiest operation of arithmetic, the casting up an account, a person may do it twenty times together, and twenty times together commit the same mistake. But if he should repeat the process at due distances of time, it is scarcely possible that that should take place. So it fares with our critical sagacity: very gross improprieties may elude examination, and if they once escape our attention, it is probable they will continue to escape it at that time, let us read over our composition ever so often. It is necessary, therefore, that the mind should come fresh to the subject, that the taste be not blunted by too much exercise, the thought too much implicated in the same trains and habits; and above all, that the familiarity of words and ideas be passed off, which, whilst it lasts, renders the perception of faults almost impossible. To me it appears, that this principle was very well known to the classic ages of literature. The *nonum prematur in annum* was not merely for

the purpose of frequent revisions, for which surely a much less time would have been sufficient, but to allow such space also and distance between them, as that they might be made with the best effect. It is also of consequence to view a subject in different states of spirits, different moods of temper, and different dispositions of thought. That can hardly be wrong which pleases under all these varieties of mind or situation: that may be very much so which pleases only in one. For instance, an inflated diction, fantastic or extravagant bold conceits, violent or daring expressions, may gratify a mind heated or elated with its subject, which, when the animal spirits were subsided and the enthusiasm gone, would appear intolerable even to the same person.

If it be asked what use may be expected from these directions, I answer, that neither these nor any other rules will of themselves form a good writer, either for the pulpit or for any thing else, but they will do that where the great essentials of genius and knowledge are present; they will prevent these indispensable qualities being thrown away, as they sometimes are, either upon crude and negligent, or upon offensive, hurtful, extravagant, or injudicious productions.

When I state the want of rather detect, of engagement as forming the principal inconvenience in the life of a clergyman, I mean to understand to speak of our profession in its general nature; under which view it may be said that a clergyman's duty is to

of and justified need and would have been satisfied but for the want of a more liberal and liberal education.

**CHARGE VI.**

**AMUSEMENTS SUITABLE TO THE CLERGY.**

**REVEREND BRETHREN,**

I have repeatedly said from this place, that if there be any principal objections to the life of a clergyman, in regard to the sources of personal satisfaction, it is this—that it does not supply sufficient engagements to the time and thoughts of an active mind. I am ready to allow, that it is in the power only of a few to fill up every day with study; but if studies solely of a theological kind, it is still less so. I do not, however, by granting this, mean to admit that it is not necessary to employ a solid portion of our time in the proper studies of our calling. On the contrary, I contend, and ever shall contend, that without a due mixture of religious reading and researches with our other employments of mind, be they what they will, and of professional studies strictly and properly so called, the character of a clergyman can neither be respectable nor sufficiently useful. When I state the want, or rather defect, of engagement, as forming the principal inconvenience in the life of a clergyman, I must be understood to speak of our profession in its general nature; under which view it may be said, that if this difficulty were re-

moved from it, we should not have much to repine at in other lines of life ; for the safety which it affords, compared with the great risk and frequent miscarriages of secular employments, and of almost all attempts to raise fortunes, compensates in a great measure for the mediocrity, or perhaps something less than mediocrity, with which most of us, both in our views and possessions, must be content. What clergyman recollects the disappointments and distresses, the changes and failures, which the disturbed state of commerce hath lately brought upon those who are engaged in it, without seeing reason to be satisfied with—might I not say thankful for—the security and repose, the exemption from dread and anxiety, if not from actual losses and privations, by which so many have suffered ?

In a clergyman's, however, in common with all other situations, a succession of agreeable engagements is necessary to the passing of life with satisfaction ; and since the profession does not of its own accord supply these, or supply them to all, with sufficient copiousness and variety, and since it is of great consequence to the character of a clergyman, not only that his duties be properly performed, but that his occupations be innocent and liberal, I think it may be useful to suggest to him some pursuits and employments which will fill up his leisure with credit and advantage.

Amongst the principal of these, I should recommend, in the first place, each and every branch of

natural history. The cultivation of this study has not only all the advantage of inviting to exercise and action ; of carrying us abroad into the fields and into the country ; of always finding something for us to do, and something to observe ; of ministering objects of notice and attention to our walks and to our rides, to the most solitary retirement, or the most sequestered situation,—it has not only this advantage, but it has a much greater ; it is connected with the most immediate object of our profession. Natural history is the basis of natural religion ; and to learn the principles of natural religion is to prepare the understanding for the reception of that which is revealed. In every view, therefore, it is a subject of commendation. As a mere amusement, it is of all others the most ingenuous ; the best suited, and the most relative, to the profession of a clergyman. As a study, it is capable of producing the most beneficial effects upon the frame and disposition of the mind which entertains it.

Of the several branches of natural history I can only so far take notice as they are adapted to our particular situation or local opportunities. Botany is an extremely important and entertaining part of the science of nature ; and there is no situation in the world more favourable to the prosecution of this study than those which many clergymen enjoy in this diocese. All mountainous regions, and none more so than ours, supply a variety of plants which are little known where the face of the country is



less broken and diversified. Botanists come from a great distance to visit our mountains, and think themselves repaid for the expense and trouble of a long journey, by the opportunity of climbing amongst them for a week or a few days: yet for obtaining a knowledge of the vegetable productions of a country, for the searching out of rare plants, for the acquainting ourselves with their seasons, growth, their appearance in different states, the soil, aspect and climate which they delight in, together with their other properties or singularities, what are the few weeks, or perhaps few days of a stranger's visit, to the opportunities of a clergyman residing the year round upon the spot, and exercising his observation in every season? A wise man, in any situation into which he may be thrown, tries to compensate the inconveniences with the advantages, and to draw from it what peculiar materials of satisfaction it may happen to afford. In the present instance, the deepest and most secluded recesses of our mountains are the best fitted for the researches I am recommending; and he who does not turn his mind to the subject when he finds himself placed in the midst of a magnificent museum, not only neglects an opportunity of rational recreation, but neglects the best thing, in some cases perhaps the only good thing, which his situation affords.

Natural history easily ascends from vegetable to animal life. No one who is a botanist, is a botanist alone. The turn of thought which directs a man

to remark the structure of plants, will of course carry him to the economy of animals; and here, no doubt, is the widest space for observation, and for observation immediately tending to establish the most important truth which a human being can learn—the wisdom of God in the work of the creation. Instead of expatiating, however, upon the general utility of natural history—of which no person can think more highly than I do—it will be more to our present purpose to point out how applicable it is, and how properly it may be made to mix with those occupations into which we usually fall. We most of us become gardeners or farmers. It is not for me to censure these employments indiscriminately, but they may be carried on (the latter especially) to such an extent as to be exceedingly degrading; as so to engross our time, our thoughts and our cares, as to extinguish almost entirely the clerical character. Now, what I am recommending, namely, the scientific cultivation of botany and natural history, that is, the collecting and reading at least the elementary books upon the subject, and afterwards forming for ourselves a course and habit of observation, and which will greatly assist and improve us, a habit also of committing our observations to writing, is the precise thing which will dignify our employments in the field and the garden; and will give to both the appearance, and not only the appearance, but the real character, of an intellectual and contemplative

as well as of an active and manual employment. If a clergyman will farm, he should not be a common farmer; if he will garden, he should not be a mere delver—let him philosophize his occupation, let him mix science with work. If he draw from his farm or garden any improvement in the knowledge of nature, he draws from it the greatest, in many cases the only, profit he will receive.

Beside natural history, or rather together with it several branches of natural philosophy, especially those which consist in experiment and observation, are within the reach of a country clergyman's means and opportunities, and will contribute greatly to fill his time with satisfactory and useful engagement. Electrical experiments are of this kind. These I have seen executed in the greatest perfection in the back shop of a linen-draper, with an apparatus which did not cost forty shillings. The use of the microscope is also another endless source of novelty, and by consequence, of entertainment and instruction. More and more beautiful discoveries of this kind I have seen made by a private clergyman in Wales, who fabricated all his own apparatus, than by any other person whom I have known or heard of in these times. Those who display philosophical experiments to the public are wont to gratify the eyes of the spectators with the show of a costly apparatus; but a philosopher knows that almost the whole of this is embellishment; that the real effects are produced, the real instruction is

gained, with a few simple instruments in a closet as completely as at a dressed-up lecture.

Astronomy, at least so much of it (and that is a great deal) as requires only a telescope and a quadrant, is a proper, I had almost said the most proper, of all possible recreations to a clergyman. The heavens declare the glory of God to all: but to the astronomer they point it out by proofs and significations most powerful, convincing, and infinitely sublime. In common with all science, and more so, I think, than any one branch of it, the contemplation of the heavenly bodies tends to lift up the spirit of man above those entanglements of cares and difficulties with which we are all of us more than enough encumbered and weighed down. Chemistry, however, the popular part of it, may be pursued at very moderate expense, and with great advantage.

It is not my intention to run round the Encyclopædia in order to show the subjects of engagement, and the sources of information which almost every branch of natural philosophy may afford to an active, intelligent, and inquisitive mind, furnished with the leisure which our profession naturally supplies to us. I will rather content myself with briefly pointing out two articles—not so much of science, strictly so called, as of useful investigation, and suggested to our attention by the natural circumstances of the country in which we live:—the admeasurement of the height of mountains, by the application of the

barometer and thermometer, is very practicable in the operation, unexpensive in the apparatus; and in no part of the island do more, or more curious, subjects for trial offer themselves than in ours. Meteorological observations—that is, observations upon the phenomena of the atmosphere; such as the quantity of rain which falls in a year, the course of the winds, the dependency of the rain upon the state of the barometer, or upon other appearances and prognostics, which in mountainous countries are always irregular—are very deserving of being known, and can only be known by a long-continued and attentive course of observation. This is more particularly true in this very neighbourhood; in which great singularities of the kind I am speaking of are said to exist, of which neither the cause has been explained, nor even the appearances themselves sufficiently ascertained.

I will beg leave to conclude with two short reflections. First; that the various sources of intellectual and active occupation which have been pointed out, prove that there is no man of liberal education who need be at a loss to know what to do with his time; that leisure need never be a burthen; that if we sink into sloth, it is our fault, and not that of our situation: and secondly, that whatever direction we give to our studies—I mean those collateral and adscititious studies which have been described—we are contributing our proportion to that which is of great importance

to the general diffusion of knowledge, and thereby to the interest of religion, and the credit and usefulness of our order—the furnishing of every portion of the country, as well as of every class of the community, with the presence and society of a well informed clergy.

The first of these objects is to be accomplished by the establishment of a seminary for the education of youth in the liberal arts and sciences, and in the principles of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures. The second is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of religion and morality. The third is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of law and equity. The fourth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of medicine and surgery. The fifth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of music and poetry. The sixth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of painting and sculpture. The seventh is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of architecture and engineering. The eighth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of astronomy and geography. The ninth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of natural philosophy and natural history. The tenth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of metaphysics and logic. The eleventh is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of politics and government. The twelfth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of jurisprudence and equity. The thirteenth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of medicine and surgery. The fourteenth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of music and poetry. The fifteenth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of painting and sculpture. The sixteenth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of architecture and engineering. The seventeenth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of astronomy and geography. The eighteenth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of natural philosophy and natural history. The nineteenth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of metaphysics and logic. The twentieth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of politics and government. The twenty-first is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of jurisprudence and equity. The twenty-second is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of medicine and surgery. The twenty-third is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of music and poetry. The twenty-fourth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of painting and sculpture. The twenty-fifth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of architecture and engineering. The twenty-sixth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of astronomy and geography. The twenty-seventh is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of natural philosophy and natural history. The twenty-eighth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of metaphysics and logic. The twenty-ninth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of politics and government. The thirtieth is to be accomplished by the establishment of a school for the education of youth in the principles of jurisprudence and equity.

## CHARGE VII.

USE AND PROPRIETY OF LOCAL AND  
OCCASIONAL PREACHING.

REVEREND BRETHERN,

THE late archbishop Secker, whose memory is entitled to public respect, as on many accounts, so especially for the judgement with which he described, and the affecting seriousness with which he recommended the duties of his profession, in one of his charges to the clergy of his diocese\*, exhorts them "to make their sermons local." I have always considered this advice as founded in a knowledge of human life, but as requiring, in its application, a more than ordinary exercise of Christian prudence. Whilst I repeat therefore the rule itself, with great veneration for the authority by which it was delivered, I think it no unfit employment of the present opportunity, to enlarge so far upon its use and meaning, as to point out some of the instances in which it may be adopted, with a probability of making salutary impressions upon the minds of our hearers.

But, before I proceed, I would warn you, and that with all the solemnity that can belong to any admo-

\* Archbishop of Canterbury's Third Charge to his Clergy. Abp. Secker's Works, vol. iv.

tion of mine, against rendering your discourses *so local*, as to be pointed and levelled at particular persons in your congregation. This species of address may produce in the party for whom it is intended confusion perhaps and shame, but not with their proper fruits of penitence and humility. Instead of which, these sensations will be accompanied with bitter resentment against the preacher, and a kind of obstinate and determined opposition to his reproof. He will impute your officiousness to personal enmity, to party spirit, to the pleasure of triumphing over an adversary without interruption or reply, to insult assuming the form of advice, or to any motive rather than a conscientious solicitude for the amendment and salvation of your flock. And as the person himself seldom profits by admonitions conveyed in this way, so are they equally useless, or perhaps noxious, to the rest of the assembly; for the moment the congregation discover to whom the chastisement is directed, from that moment they cease to apply any part of it to themselves. They are not edified, they are not affected; on the contrary, they are diverted, by descriptions of which they see the design, and by invectives of which they think they comprehend the aim. Some who would feel strongly the impropriety of gross and evident personalities may yet hope to hit their mark by covert and oblique allusions. Now of this scheme, even when conducted with the greatest skill, it may be observed, that the allusions must either be perceived, or not. If they be not per-



ceived, they fail of the effect intended by them; if they be, they are open to the objections which lie against more explicit and undissembled attacks.

Whenever we are conscious, in the composition of our discourses, of a view to particular characters in our congregation or parish, we ought to take for granted that our view will be understood. Those applications therefore, which, if they were direct, would produce more bad emotions than good ones, it is better to discard entirely from our sermons; that is to say, it is better to lay aside the design altogether, than to attempt to disguise it by a management which is generally detected, and which, if not seen through, defeats its purpose by its obscurity. The crimes, then, of individuals let us reserve for opportunities of private and seasonable expostulation. Happy is the clergyman who has the faculty of communicating advice and remonstrance with persuasion and effect, and the virtue to seize and improve every proper occasion of doing it; but in the pulpit, let private characters be no otherwise adverted to, than as they fall in with the delineations of sins and duties which our discourses must necessarily contain, and which, whilst they avoid personalities, can never be too close or circumstantial. For the same reason that I think personal allusions reprehensible, I should condemn any, even the remotest, reference to party or political transactions and disputes. These are at all times unfit subjects, not only of discussion in the pulpit, but of hints and surmises. The Christian

preacher has no other province than that of religion and morality. He is seldom led out of his way by honourable motives, and, I think, never with a beneficial effect.

Having premised this necessary caution, I return to the rule itself. By "local" sermons I would understand, what the reverend prelate who used the expression seems principally to have meant by it, sermons adapted to the particular state of thought and opinion which we perceive to prevail in our congregation. A careful attention to this circumstance is of the utmost importance, because, as it varies, the same sermon may do a great deal of good, none at all, or much harm. So that it is not the truth of what we are about to offer which alone we ought to consider, but whether the argument itself be likely to correct or to promote the turn and bias of opinion to which we already perceive too strong a tendency and inclination. Without this circumspection we may be found to have imitated the folly of the architect who placed his buttress on the wrong side. The more the column pressed, the more firm its construction, and the deeper its foundation—the more certainly it hastened the ruin of the fabric. I do not mean that we should, upon any emergency, advance what is not true; but that, out of many truths, we should select those, the consideration of which seems best suited to rectify the dispositions of thought, that were previously declining into error or extravagancy. For this model of preaching we may allege the

highest of all possible authorities, the example of our blessed Saviour himself. He always had in view the posture of mind of the persons whom he addressed. He did not entertain the Pharisees with invectives against the open impiety of their Sadducean rivals; nor, on the other hand, did he soothe the Sadducee's ear with descriptions of Pharisaical pomp and folly. In the presence of the Pharisee he preached against hypocrisy: to the Sadducees he proved the resurrection of the dead. In like manner, of that known enmity which subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans, this faithful Teacher took no undue advantage to make friends or proselytes of either. Upon the Jews he inculcated a more comprehensive benevolence: with the Samaritan he defended the orthodoxy of the Jewish creed.

But I apprehend that I shall render my advice more intelligible, by exemplifying it in two or three instances, drawn from what appears to be the predominant disposition and religious character of this country, and of the present times.

In many former ages of religion, the strong propensity of men's minds was to overvalue positive duties; which temper, when carried to excess, not only multiplied unauthorized rites and observances, not only laid an unwarrantable stress upon those which were prescribed; but, what was worst of all, led men to expect, that, by a punctual attention to the ordinances of religion, they could compound for a relaxation of its weighty and difficult duties of

personal purity and relative justice. This was the depraved state of religion amongst the Jews when our Saviour appeared; and it was the degeneracy, against which some of the most forcible of his admonitions, and the severest of his reproofs, were directed. Yet, notwithstanding that Christ's own preaching, as well as the plan and spirit of his religion, were as adverse as possible to the exalting or over-valuing of positive institutions, the error which had corrupted the old dispensation revived under the new; and revived with double force, inasmuch as it went to transform Christianity into a service more prolix and burdensome than the Jewish, and to ascribe an efficacy to certain religious performances, which, in a great measure, superseded the obligations of substantial virtue. That age, however, with us, is long since past. I fear there is room to apprehend that we are falling into mistakes of a contrary kind. Sadducees are more common amongst us than Pharisees. We seem disposed, not only to cast off the decent offices, which the temperate piety of our church hath enjoined, as aids of devotion, calls to repentance, or instruments of improvement, but to contemn and neglect, under the name of forms and ceremonies, even those rites, which, forasmuch as they were ordained by the divine Founder of our religion, or by his inspired messengers, and ordained with a view of their continuing in force through future generations, are entitled to be accounted parts of Christianity itself. In this situation of religion,

and of men's thoughts with respect of it, he makes a bad choice of his subject, who discourses upon the futility of rites and ordinances, upon their insignificance when taken by themselves, or even who insists too frequently, and in terms too strong, upon their inferiority to moral precepts. We are rather called upon to sustain the authority of those institutions which proceed from Christ or his apostles, and the reasonableness and credit of those which claim no higher original than public appointment. We are called upon to contend with respect to the first, that they cannot be omitted with safety any more than other duties; that the will of God, once ascertained, is the immediate foundation of every duty; that, when this will is known, it makes little difference to us what is the subject of it, still less by what denomination the precept is called, under what class or division the duty is arranged. If it be commanded, and we have sufficient reason to believe that it is so, it matters nothing whether the obligation be moral or natural, or positive or instituted. He who places before him the will of God as the rule of his life, will not refine, or even dwell much, upon these distinctions. The ordinances of Christianity, it is true, are all of them significant. Their meaning, and even their use, is not obscure. But were it otherwise; was the design of any positive institution inexplicable, did it appear to have been proposed only as an exercise of obedience, it was not for us to hesitate in our compliance. Even to inquire, with too much curiosity

and impatience, into the cause and reason of a religious command, is no evidence of an humble and submissive disposition; of a disposition, I mean, humble under the Deity's government of his creation, and submissive to his will however signified.

It may be seasonable also to maintain, what I am convinced is true, that the principle of general utility, which upholds moral obligation itself, may, in various instances, be applied to evince the duty of attending upon positive institutions; in other words, that the difference between natural and positive duties is often more in the name than in the thing. The precepts of natural justice are therefore only binding upon the conscience, because the observation of them is necessary or conducive to the prosperity and happiness of social life. If there be, as there certainly are, religious institutions which contribute greatly to form and support impressions upon the mind, that render men better members of civilised community, if these institutions can only be preserved in their reputation and influence by the general respect which is paid to them; there is the same reason to each of us for bearing our part in these observances, that there is for discharging the most acknowledged duties of natural religion. When I say "the reason is the same," I mean that it is the same in *kind*. The *degree* of strength and cogency which this reason possesses in any particular case, must always depend upon the value and importance of the particular duty; which admits of great variety. But moral and posi-

tive duties do not in this respect differ more than moral duties differ from one another. So that when men accustom themselves to look upon positive duties as universally and necessarily inferior to moral ones, as of a subordinate species, as placed upon a different foundation, or deduced from a different original; and consequently to regard them as unworthy of being made a part of their plan of life, or of entering into their sense of obligation, they appear to be egregiously misled by names. It is our business, not to aid, but to correct, the deception. Still, nevertheless, is it as true as ever it was, that "except we exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven;" that "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath;" that "the weightier matters of the law are faith, justice, and mercy;" but to insist strenuously, and, as some do, almost exclusively, upon these points at present, tends to diminish the respect for religious ordinances, which is already too little; and, whilst it guards against dangers that have ceased to exist, augments those which are really formidable.

Again; upon the first reformation from Popery, a method very much prevailed in the seceding churches, of resolving the whole of religion into faith—*good works*, as they were called, or the practice of virtue, holding not only a secondary but even distant place in value and esteem: being represented, indeed, as possessing no share or efficacy in the attainment of

human salvation. This doctrine we have seen revived in our own times, and carried to still greater lengths. And it is a theory, or rather perhaps a language, which required, whilst it lasted, very serious animadversion; not only because it disposed men to rest in an unproductive faith, without endeavours to render themselves useful by exertion and activity; not only because it was naturally capable of being converted to the encouragement of licentiousness; but because it misrepresented Christianity as a moral institution, by making it place little stress upon the distinction of virtue and vice, and by making it require the practice of external duties, if it required them at all, only as casual, neglected, and almost unthought of consequences of that faith which it extolled; instead of directing men's attention to them, as to those things which alone compose an unquestionable and effective obedience to the divine will. So long as this turn of mind prevailed, we could not be too industrious in bringing together and exhibiting to our hearers those many and positive declarations of Scripture which enforce, and insist upon, practical religion; which divide mankind into those who do good, and those who do evil; which hold out to the one favour and happiness, and to the other repulse and condemnation. The danger, however, from this quarter is nearly overpast. We are, on the contrary, setting up a kind of philosophical morality, detached from religion and independent of its influence, which may be cultivated, it is said, as well without Christianity as with it; and



which, if cultivated, renders religion and religious institutions superfluous. A mode of thought so contrary to truth, and so derogatory from the value of revelation, cannot escape the vigilance of a Christian ministry. We are entitled to ask upon what foundation this morality rests. If it refer to the divine will (and, without that, where will it find its sanctions, or how support its authority?) there cannot be a conduct of the understanding more irrational, than to appeal to those intimations of the Deity's character which the light and order of nature afford, as to the rule and measure of our duty, yet to disregard, and affect to overlook, the declarations of his pleasure which Christianity communicates. It is impossible to distinguish between the authority of natural and revealed religion. We are bound to receive the precepts of revelation for the same reason that we comply with the dictates of nature. He who despises a command which proceeds from his Maker, no matter by what means, or through what medium, instead of advancing, as he pretends to do, the dominion of reason, and the authority of natural religion, disobeys the first injunction of both. Although it be true what the Apostle affirms, that, "when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, they are a law unto themselves;" that is, they will be accepted together with those who are instructed in the law and obey it: yet is this truth not applicable to such, as having a law contemn it, and with the means of access to the word of God,

keep themselves at a voluntary distance from it. This temper, whilst it continues, makes it necessary for us to assert the superiority of a religious principle above every other by which human conduct can be regulated—more especially above that fashionable system, which recommends virtue only as a true and refined policy ; which policy in effect is, and in the end commonly proves itself to be, nothing else than a more exquisite cunning, which, by a specious behaviour in the easy and visible concerns of life, collects a fund of reputation, in order either to cherish more securely concealed vices, or to reserve itself for some great stroke of selfishness, perfidy, and desertion, in a pressing conjuncture of fortunes. Nor less justly may we superinduce the guidance of Christianity to the direction of sentiment ; which depends so much upon constitution, upon early impressions, upon habit and imitation, that unless it be compared with, and adjusted by, some safer rule, it can in no wise be trusted. Least of all ought we to yield the authority of religion to the law of honour : a law (if it deserve that name), which, besides its continual mutability, is at best but a system of manners suited to the intercourse and accommodation of higher life ; and which consequently neglects every duty, and permits every vice, that has no relation to these purposes. Amongst the rules which contend with religion for the government of life, the law of the land also has not a few who think it very sufficient to act up to its direction, and to keep

within the limits which it prescribes : and this sort of character is common in our congregations. We are not to omit, therefore, to apprise those who make the statutes of the realm the standard of their duty, that they propose to themselves a measure of conduct totally inadequate to the purpose. The boundaries which nature has assigned to human authority and control, the partial ends to which every legislator is obliged to confine his views, prevent human laws, even were they, what they never are, as perfect as they might be made, from becoming competent rules of life to any one who advances his hopes to the attainment of God Almighty's favour. In contradiction, then, to these several systems, which divide a great portion of mankind amongst them, we preach "faith which worketh by love," that principle of action and restraint which is found in a Christian alone. It possesses qualities to which none of *them* can make pretensions. It operates where they fail : is present upon all occasions, firm upon the greatest ; pure, as under the inspection of a vigilant omniscience ; innocent, where guilt could not be discovered ; just, exact, and upright, without a witness to its proceedings ; uniform amidst the caprices of fashion, unchanged by the vicissitudes of popular opinion ; often applauded, not seldom misunderstood, it holds on its straight and equal course, through "good report and evil report," through encouragement and neglect, approbation and disgrace. If the philosopher or the politician can point

out to us any influence but that of Christianity which has these properties, I had almost said which does not want them all, we will listen with reverence to his instruction. But until this be done, we may be permitted to resist every plan which would place virtue upon any other foundation, or seek final happiness through any other medium, than faith in Jesus Christ. At least whilst an inclination to these rival systems remains, no good end, I am apt to think, is attained by decrying faith under any form; by stating the competition between faith and good works, or by pointing out, with too much anxiety, even the abuses and extravagances into which the doctrine of salvation by faith alone has sometimes been carried. The truth is, that, in the two subjects which I have considered, we are in such haste to fly from enthusiasm and superstition, that we are approaching towards an insensibility to all religious influence. I certainly do not mean to advise you to endeavour to bring men back to enthusiasm and superstition, but to retard, if you can, their progress towards an opposite and a worse extreme; and both in these, and in all other instances, to regulate the choice of your subjects, by the particular bias and tendency of opinion which you perceive already to prevail amongst your hearers, and by a consideration, not of the truth only of what you deliver, which, however, must always be an indispensable condition, but of its effects: and those not the effects which it would produce upon sound, enlightened, and impartial judge-

ments, but what are likely to take place in the weak and pre-occupied understandings with which we have to do.

Having thus considered the rule as it applies to the argument of our discourses, in which its principal importance consists, I proceed to illustrate its use as it relates to another object—the means of exciting attention. The transition from local to occasional sermons is so easy, and the reason for both is so much the same, that what I have further to add will include the one as well as the other. And though nothing more be proposed in the few directions which I am about to offer than to move and awaken the attention of our audience, yet is this a purpose of no inconsiderable magnitude. We have great reason to complain of listlessness in our congregations. Whether this be their fault or ours, the fault of neither or of both, it is much to be desired that it could by any means be removed. Our sermons are in general more informing, as well as more correct and chastised both in matter and composition, than those of any denomination of dissenting teachers. I wish it were in our power to render them as impressive as some of theirs seem to be. Now I think we may observe that we are heard with somewhat more than ordinary advertency, whenever our discourses are recommended by any occasional propriety. The more, therefore, of these proprieties we contrive to weave into our preaching, the better. One which is very obvious, and which should never

be neglected, is that of making our sermons as suitable as we can to the service of the day. On the principal fasts and festivals of the church, the subjects which they are designed to commemorate ought invariably to be made the subjects of our discourses. Indeed, the best sermon, if it do not treat of the argument which the congregation come prepared to hear, is received with coldness, and with a sense of disappointment. This respect to the order of public worship almost every one pays. But the adaptation, I apprehend, may be carried much farther. Whenever any thing like a unity of subject is pursued throughout the collect, epistle, and gospel of the day, that subject is with great advantage revived in the pulpit. It is perhaps to be wished that this unity had been more consulted in the compilation of this part of the liturgy than it has been. When from the want of it a subject is not distinctly presented to us, there may, however, be some portion of the service more striking than the rest, some instructive parable, some interesting narration, some concise but forcible precept, some pregnant sentence, which may be recalled to the hearer's attention with peculiar effect. I think it no contemptible advantage if we even draw our text from the epistle or gospel, or the psalms or lessons. Our congregation will be more likely to retain what they hear from us, when it, in any manner, falls in with what they have been reading in their prayer-books, or when they are afterwards reminded of it by reading the psalms and

lessons at home. But there is another species of accommodation of more importance, and that is the choice of such disquisitions, as may either meet the difficulties or assist the reflections which are suggested by the portions of Scripture that are delivered from the reading-desk. Thus, whilst the wars of Joshua and the Judges are related in the course of the lessons which occupy some of the first Sundays after Trinity, it will be very seasonable to explain the reasons upon which that dispensation was founded, the moral and beneficial purposes which are declared to have been designed, and which were probably accomplished, by its execution; because such an explanation will obviate the doubts concerning either the divine goodness or the credibility of the narrative which may arise in the mind of a hearer—who is not instructed to regard the transaction as a method of inflicting an exemplary, just, and necessary punishment. In like manner, whilst the history of the delivery of the law from mount Sinai, or rather the recapitulation of that history by Moses, in the book of Deuteronomy, is carried on in the Sunday lessons which are read between Easter and Whitsunday, we shall be well engaged in discourses upon the *commandments* which stand at the head of that institution; in showing from the history their high original and authority, and in explaining their reasonableness, application, and extent. Whilst the history of Joseph is successively presented to the congregation during the Sundays in Lent, we shall

be very negligent of the opportunity, if we do not take occasion to point out to our hearers, those observations upon the benevolent but secret direction, the wise though circuitous measures, of Providence, of which this beautiful passage of Scripture supplies a train of apposite examples. There are, I doubt not, other series of subjects dictated by the service as edifying as these; but these I propose as illustrations of the rule.

Next to the service of the church, the season of the year may be made to suggest useful and appropriate topics of meditation. The beginning of a new year has belonging to it a train of very solemn reflections. In the devotional pieces of the late Dr. Johnson, this occasion was never passed by. We may learn from these writings the proper use to be made of it; and by the example of that excellent person, how much a pious mind is wont to be affected by this memorial of the lapse of life. There are also certain proprieties which correspond with the different parts of the year. For example, the wisdom of God in the work of the creation is a theme which ought to be reserved for the return of the spring, when nature renews, as it were, her activity; when every animal is cheerful and busy, and seems to feel the influence of its Maker's kindness; when our senses and spirits, the objects and enjoyments that surround us, accord and harmonize with those sentiments of delight and gratitude, which this subject, above all others, is calculated to inspire.



There is no devotion so genuine as that which flows from these meditations, because it is unforced and self-excited. There is no frame of mind more desirable, and, consequently, no preaching more useful, than that which leads the thought to this exercise. It is laying a foundation for Christianity itself. If it be not to sow the seed, it is at least to prepare the soil. The evidence of revelation arrives with much greater ease at an understanding, which is already possessed by the persuasion, that an unseen intelligence framed and conducts the universe; and which is accustomed to refer the order and operations of nature to the agency of a supreme will. The influence also of religion is almost always in proportion to the degree and strength of this conviction. It is, moreover, a species of instruction of which our hearers are more capable than we may at first sight suppose. It is not necessary to be a philosopher, or to be skilled in the names and distinctions of natural history, in order to perceive marks of contrivance and design in the creation. It is only to turn our observation to them. Now, besides that this requires neither more ability nor leisure than every man can command, there are many things in the life of a country parishioner which will dispose his thoughts to the employment. In his fields, amidst his flocks, in the progress of vegetation, the structure, faculties, and manners, of domestic animals, he has constant occasion to remark proofs of intention and of consummate wisdom. The minister

of a country parish is never, therefore, better engaged, than when he is assisting this turn of contemplation. Nor will he ever do it with so much effect, as when the appearance and face of external nature conspire with the sentiments which he wishes to excite.

Again: if we would enlarge upon the various bounty of Providence, in furnishing a regular supply for animal, and especially for human subsistence, not by one, but by numerous and diversified species of food and clothing, we shall be best heard in the time and amidst the occupations of harvest, when our hearers are reaping the effects of those contrivances for their support, and of that care for their preservation, which their Father which is in heaven hath exercised for them. If the year has been favourable, we rejoice with them in the plenty which fills their granaries, covers their tables, and feeds their families. If otherwise, or less so, we have still to remark how, through all the husbandman's disappointments, through the dangers and inclemencies of precarious seasons, a competent proportion of the fruits of the earth is conducted to its destined purpose. We may observe also to the repining farmer, that the value, if not the existence, of his own occupation, depends upon the very uncertainty of which he complains. It is found to be almost universally true, that the partition of the profits between the owner and the occupier of the soil is in favour of the

latter in proportion to the risk which he incurs by the disadvantage of the climate. This is a very just reflection, and particularly intelligible to a rural audience. We may add, when the occasion requires it, that scarcity itself hath its use: by acting as a stimulus to new exertions and to farther improvements, it often produces, through a temporary distress, a permanent benefit.

Lastly; sudden, violent, or untimely deaths, or death accompanied by any circumstances of surprise or singularity, usually leave an impression upon a whole neighbourhood. A Christian teacher is wanting in attention to opportunities who does not avail himself of this impression. The uncertainty of life requires no proof. But the power and influence which this consideration shall obtain over the decisions of the mind will depend greatly upon the circumstances under which it is presented to the imagination. Discourses upon the subject come with tenfold force, when they are directed to a heart already touched by some near, recent, and affecting example of human mortality. I do not lament that funeral sermons are discontinued amongst us. They generally contained so much of unseasonable, and oftentimes undeserved panegyric, that the hearers came away from them, rather with remarks in their mouths upon what was said of the deceased, than with any internal reflections upon the solemnity which they had left, or how nearly it related to their

own condition. But by decent allusions in the stated course of our preaching to events of this sort, or by, what is better, such a well-timed choice of our subject as may lead our audience to make the allusion for themselves, it is possible, I think, to retain much of the good effect of funeral discourses, without their adulation, and without exciting vain curiosity.

If other occurrences have arisen within our neighbourhood, which serve to exemplify the progress and fate of vice, the solid advantages and ultimate success of virtue, the providential discovery of guilt or protection of innocence, the folly of avarice, the disappointments of ambition, the vanity of worldly schemes, the fallaciousness of human foresight; in a word, which may remind us, "what shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue," and thereby induce us to collect our views and endeavours to one point, the attainment of final salvation; such occurrences may be made to introduce topics of serious and useful meditation. I have heard popular preachers amongst the Methodists avail themselves of these occasions with very powerful effect. It must be acknowledged that they frequently transgress the limits of decorum and propriety, and that these transgressions wound the modesty of a cultivated ear. But the method itself is not to be blamed. Under the correction of a sounder judgment it might be rendered very beneficial. Perhaps,

as hath been already intimated, the safest way is, not to refer to these incidents by any direct allusion, but merely to discourse at the time upon subjects which are allied to and connected with them.

The sum of what I have been recommending amounts to this : that we consider diligently the probable effects of our discourses, upon the particular characters and dispositions of those who are to hear them ; but that we apply this consideration solely to the choice of truths, by no means to the admission of falsehood or insincerity\* : Secondly, that we endeavour to profit by circumstances, that is, to assist, not the reasoning, but the efficacy of our discourses, by an opportune and skilful use of the service of the church, the season of the year, and of all such occurrences and situations as are capable of receiving a religious turn ; and such as, being yet recent in the memory of our hearers, may dispose their minds for the admission and influence of salutary reflections.

My Reverend Brethren, I am sensible that the discourse with which I have now detained you is not of that kind which is usually delivered at a chancellor's visitation. But since (by the favour of that excellent prelate, who by me must long be remembered with gratitude and affection) I hold

\* This distinction fixes the limits of exoteric doctrine, as far as any thing called by that name is allowable to a Christian teacher.

another public station in the diocese, I embrace the only opportunity afforded me of submitting to you that species of counsel and exhortation, which, with more propriety perhaps, you would have received from me in the character of your archdeacon, if the functions of that office had remained entire.

*[The following text is extremely faint and largely illegible due to fading and bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. It appears to be a long, multi-paragraph letter or sermon.]*

## CHARGE VIII.

## SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

THE absence of your chancellor from the kingdom upon a mission connected with the interests of learning and with religious inquiry (and for this reason excused by his diocesan, as I hope it will be thought excusable by you), has led me to supply his place upon the present occasion.

I know of no late alteration in our ecclesiastical laws, or in the state of the church, which requires to be noticed; but I think that there is a new and growing opinion which, if it should come to prevail in the public mind, would be injurious not only to the ends proposed by the establishment of a national church, but to the general improvement of civilized life: and that opinion is, that it is not for the advantage or safety of the state that the children of the poor should receive any kind of education, or be even taught to read. This opinion I have found by experience to have been taken up of late—not as a pretence to fence off from subscribing to Sunday or charity schools; not merely as a doubt thrown out at random, but advanced politically as a grave pro-

position. Did I believe that there were any just foundation for this opinion, I can only say that I should lament it most extremely; because it is in the highest degree both dishonourable to human reason, and disparaging to the institutions of social life; it, in fact, insinuates that the bulk of mankind can only be governed by the suppression and debasement of their intellectual faculties; and it likewise insinuates that the institutions of civil life rest for their support upon the ignorance of the greatest part of those who live under them. Both these opinions I believe to be false; and yet they are both implied in the doctrine of those who would alarm us with the danger of instructing the poor. It has been said, that when the poor are once taught to read, bad books may be put into their hands:—to which it might be sufficient to give the answer which has often been given; namely, that not only liability, but proneness to abuse, adheres to every faculty, to every attainment, to every energy of our nature. But in the case before us, a more particular answer may be returned to the objection; which is this—Let parents and masters be what they will, they always wish to have their children and servants good. I think that this admits of few exceptions: consequently the books which come into the hands of young persons, so long as they are under the superintendence of others, will generally be of a kind favourable to virtue—and these are the books which



influence the disposition, because this is the time of life when deep and strong impressions are made.

In after life, bad books can always be met by good ones. If we should concede to the adversaries of education the superior activity of those who circulate noxious writings to that of those who wish to diffuse wholesome knowledge, or the avidity and relish with which one sort are received more than the other, the consequence would only be diversity of sentiment; and this is agreeable to experience. When men read and think, diversity of opinion ensues,—more perhaps than might be desired. Where men neither read nor reason, there is little diversity of opinion at all. Now what I contend for is, that amidst diversity of opinion, though it be an evil, public authority can support and maintain itself. The ascendancy which necessarily belongs to it, added to the reasons which strike every man in favour of order and tranquillity, will usually confer upon it strength sufficient to meet the difficulties which arise from diversity of sentiment. I have said that where the bulk of the common people are kept in profound ignorance, there is seldom much diversity of sentiment amongst them: whilst, therefore, government continues in possession of this sentiment all is well—but how if this sentiment take an opposite direction? how if it set in against the order of things which is established? It then actuates the whole mass, and that mass moves with a force which

can hardly be encountered. This is the case of most real danger, and this is a case most likely to arise where the common people are in a state of the greatest ignorance.

It has been alleged as another objection, that any intellectual attainment which others have not, though it were only the being able to read, indisposes the person who is conscious of it for bodily labour, for submission, for the offices which the poor are required to perform. The answer is, that were there any truth in the observation, of which I doubt extremely, it would form an objection, not to the instruction of the poor, but to the imperfectness and partiality with which that instruction is communicated. I should be glad to see the day when every child in the kingdom was taught to read; and then, besides other advantages, there would be an end of the pretence for this objection.

I know not whether the opinion we are considering may not have arisen from the extraordinary events which have taken place in the age in which we live; but I am convinced that these events lead to a conclusion the very opposite of that which is thus drawn from them. The transactions nearest to us and the freshest in our memory, are those of our sister kingdom. And what do they teach us?—If ignorance could have secured the quiet of a country, Ireland had remained at rest: for in no country of Europe were the poor in a state of lower degr-

dation, or under a more complete absence of every species of rational education. The friends of public order in that kingdom bewailed this circumstance, both as the source of the calamities which they endured, and as rendering the evil almost impossible to be remedied. When the people were once deluded, the delusion was incurable : such was their ignorance, that they were not only liable to be practised upon by the grossest impositions, but there was no way of setting them right ; no approach could be made, no access could be gained to their understanding ; no argument could be addressed to them but at the point of the bayonet. Let the case of Ireland, therefore, stand for ever as a warning against the system of ignorance.

The convulsions in France did not arise from any care that was taken to teach the poor. I believe that in no civilized country, Ireland perhaps excepted, was the education of the poor more neglected. The genius of the religion tended to interdict reading and books to the common people, and the ancient government did not counteract that tendency. We have seen the consequence—a sentiment hostile to the established government spread amongst the people, and that happened, which we have already said will happen under like circumstances—when they did move, they moved in a mass. Here, therefore, is a second instance against the system of ignorance.

The ignorant system has for ages been the prin-

ciple of the Turkish government : so much so, as till within a very few years, to forbid the introduction into their dominions of the art of printing. Yet the countries subject to that government have, more than any others with which we are acquainted, been the scenes of insurrection and disturbance. This, therefore, though not properly a modern, is another and a third strong instance against the system of ignorance.

I do not compare our country with foreign nations ; but if we may compare one part of the island with another, it is understood, I believe, that there is no part in which reading is so universal as in Scotland ; yet I never heard that any danger arose from thence to government, or any loss of public industry in the various branches of manufactures which are carried on in that country.

Reading also is much more general in the northern than the southern parts of the island. Has any inconvenience been from thence perceived, any disadvantage to the state, either political, moral, or commercial ?

From instances we pass on to authorities.

The government of Russia, though notoriously a despotic and jealous government, has, in the hands both of its present and late sovereign, applied itself industriously to the erecting of village schools, and to other methods of promoting (at least as far as

reading) the education of the very lowest order of its subjects.

The present king of Prussia, as tenacious as his ancestors of the prerogatives of his station, has nevertheless imitated his neighbour, in supplying what he found and considered as a defect in this respect in the economical institutions of the country, and has formed various regulations and provisions for that purpose.

The proprietors and planters of estates in the West Indies have, by a resolution of their assembly in several of those islands, lately established a fund for the procuring of clergymen from England, for the purpose of instructing the children of negroes.

The late General Washington, who appears to have bent his mind to the subject of public education with peculiar attention, made provision in his will both for the education of the poor children of his neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood of his estates, and also for the education of the young slaves until the period of their legal manumission should arrive.

These are all so many concessions in favour of the expediency of educating the poor, and carry with them an answer to those who imagine that they see in it danger to the stability of government. The last two instances are particularly strong, because if education was not deemed to disqualify children for slavery, it cannot be inconsistent with any, even

the most servile, station which subsists in a free country.

To conclude : if there be any weight in the reasons, or in the instances, or in the authorities which have been alleged, the inference is, that the new suspicions which have been conceived of education, as it relates to the poor, are unjust, unfounded, neither supported by argument nor verified by experience.

END OF VOL. I.

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# S E R M O N S

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

BY

WILLIAM PALEY.

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EDITED BY

THE REV. EDMUND PALEY, A.M.

VICAR OF EASINGWOLD.

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*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

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# SERMONS

## ON PARTICULAR OCCASIONS.

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### I.

[Preached at Durham, at the Visitation of the Right Reverend  
Shute, Lord Bishop of Durham.]

#### 1 TIMOTHY IV. 13.

*Till I come give attention to reading, to exhortation,  
to doctrine.*

NEXT to the lessons which proceeded from our Lord himself, I know nothing that can well be imagined more interesting to a believer in Christianity than letters of advice and instruction from an original missionary of the religion to one whom he had associated with himself in the office, especially from the most active and zealous of its teachers; to a disciple and colleague favoured with his highest confidence; from the chiefest of the apostles to the most beloved of his converts.

It might be expected that the apostolic character would flow in pages which were dictated by Christian

zeal united with personal affection. They came from a mind filled at all times with the momentous truths of the religion it had embraced, but now in particular excited by sentiments of the warmest friendship for the person whom he addressed ; by a sense, as it should seem, of responsibility for his conduct, and by the most ardent desire for the success of his ministry. Still more important would this correspondence become, if any of the letters should appear to have been written under circumstances the most trying to human sincerity of any in which mankind can be placed—the view of impending death ; because we should presume, that under such circumstances we were reading the mind of the author without reserve or disguise—the thoughts which most constantly dwelt in it, and with which it was most powerfully impressed, without the admixture of any thing futile or extraneous.

The account which we have given does nothing more than describe the epistles of Saint Paul to Timothy, and the last part of the account belongs to the second of these epistles. “ I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.” In this situation of mind, and under the solemnity of these impressions, the apostle sat down to exhort his friend and his disciple. And what is there which

can come with more weight to the votaries of Christianity, and above all, to the teachers of that religion, in every age of its duration, than admonitions so delivered, and from such authority? Nor do the admonitions themselves fall short of the occasion—“ Watch thou in all things; endure afflictions; do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of thy ministry; preach the word; be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.” These are the lessons of a master in Christianity: every word is ponderous and significant.

The peculiar circumstances under which these two epistles were written,—partaking of the qualities of a private correspondence, displaying those strong emotions of mind which the author's interest in the subject, the native earnestness of his temper, and the pressing dangers of his situation, conspired to produce—these circumstances, I say, give to them a character in some measure distinguishable from the rest of Saint Paul's writings. They are, more than any of his epistles, methodical. They embrace three objects; they have three parts: they are doctrinal, economical, personal. But these parts, whilst each exhibits sentiments and precepts which can nowhere be excelled, are intermixed, not to say confounded, with one another. The writer is at one moment impressing upon the mind of his disciple the important propositions which constitute the religion that he taught: in the next, is called away perhaps

from his train of reflection by some circumstance of local urgency, which the thea state of the new society, or, it might be, of that particular church, forced upon his attention. He passes from both these topics to rules of personal conduct, adapted to the office which Timothy sustained ; and the delivery of these rules formed perhaps the proper and immediate occasion of his letter.

This description accords with what might be expected in private letters between real parties, on real business. The subjects which possess the mind of the writer are seen in his letter ; but seldom with the same degree of order and division as when a writing is prepared for public inspection. If this difference be observable even at present, when the advantages of method and order are understood, and when method and order themselves are become so habitual as to have pervaded every species of composition, the observation will hold still more true of the writings of an age and country in which much of this sort was unknown ; and of an author, the energy of whose thought was not wont to be confined by rules of art, and whose subject overpowered all the lesser considerations and attentions which a colder mind, on an occasion more indifferent, would have employed in the composition of his epistle. If we perceive, therefore, unexpected and unnoticed transitions from one topic to another, frequent recurrences to those which were left, and a consequent mixture and discontinuance of thought ; what do we perceive but

the effusions of a mind intent, not upon one, but upon several great subjects, occasionally possessed by each, and set loose from the restraints of method by the liberty natural to an affectionate and confidential correspondence? But I hasten from these observations on the general character of the two epistles, to the single subject which I have selected for my present discourse.

In what we have called the personal part of the epistle, Saint Paul gives to Timothy directions, as well for discharging the occasional offices of his ministry, as for the habitual regulation of his private conduct; and amongst these, as indeed it was of the first importance to do, for the fit employment of his time. The apostle expected, it appears, ere long to visit the church in which Timothy was placed. When he should do so, he might require, it was possible, from his disciples more active services in the mission in which they were both engaged. But in the mean time—in an interval, as it should seem, of comparative repose—he fails not to point out to the Ephesian bishop, beside the extraordinary or critical exertions to which he might be called by the demands of his station, the objects which ought to engage his regular and constant attention.

How then was the man and minister of God to divide his time? Between study, you hear, and teaching: “Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” Exhortation and doctrine are both put down as being, as indeed they are, different



things: the first relates to practice, the second to belief. The first is to urge upon our hearers the duties of Christianity, the second to communicate the knowledge of those articles which compose its faith—but both are parts of public instruction; and what could be spared from these was to be bestowed upon “reading.” From this advice, therefore, and from this example, we collect the recommendations of a studious life; and to set forth some of the advantages and some of the satisfactions of such a life will be no unsuitable employment of the present occasion.

Now wherein, we may ask, consists the satisfaction of any life whatever?

They who have observed human nature most closely will tell you, with one voice, that it consists in a succession of exercise and rest, in the exertion of our faculties in some pursuit which interests them, and in the repose of these faculties after such exertion.

The inert and passive pleasures, as they are called, of life, or those in which we are mere recipients, are of small account in the sum and constitution of human happiness. Man was made for action—the seat of action is the mind: when he ceases to employ its powers, he not only neglects, it is probable, the duties of his station, but loses the source and principle of his own enjoyment.

These being truths drawn from experience, we are authorized to teach what is their necessary result—

that it is incumbent upon every man, who is studious of his own comfort, to seek out for himself a supply of constant occupation. The subject of this occupation, to answer its purpose, must be interesting, various, accessible; suited to each man's opportunity, worthy of his character. I hardly need say, to be allowable it must be innocent; or that it doubles every advantage belonging to it by being virtuous and useful. Now what employment of our time can we propose in which so many of these qualities concur, as in the pursuits of learning?

It must be a stupid or frivolous mind indeed, to which no science is interesting. Such also is the compass of human research, that the understanding exultates in unbounded variety. Study is as diversified as nature itself, because it hath nature for its object; nay, it adds to nature the operations of art, the knowledge of language, the testimony of ages. Secondly; it reckons also amongst its recommendations, that it is within the reach of almost every man's opportunity who possesses the inclination. It is at the mercy of external circumstances less than any other engagement to which we can addict ourselves; it depends not upon season, climate, or place. Thirdly; different studies have both a different general value, and also a different propriety, according to the profession of the person who cultivates them, but all science is ingenuous and liberal. No station was ever degraded by study: there never was, nor will be, the age or country of the world in

which learning was not respected. Lastly; it must be owing to a depravity of taste seldom heard of, that study is ever vicious; and to a singular misfortune of choice, and defect of judgement, that it is not always useful\*.

But when we speak of study, either as an exercise of duty or a source of satisfaction, it ought to be known what we mean by the term. We have stated one, indeed the first requisite, of a life of satisfaction to be, the application of our faculties to some interesting pursuit. To bring study within this description, it must be such as is attended with an exertion of our understanding. I do not say that it is necessary the subject should be abstruse, or the application always intense; but it must be such as to solicit a positive effort of the mind. I the rather mention this, because it is possible, and I am afraid

\* To the dogma that truth alone is immutable, might it not be added that nothing but learning is permanent? The writings of Greece have long survived every place which they commemorate. We have Homer in our hands—we seek in vain for Troy. The alphabet of Cadmus is preserved—his seven-gated city lies in the dust. In like manner of the labours of our countrymen; the time may come when no monuments shall remain but of their learning. A discovery in science, the improvement of an art, a just sentiment, or even a beautiful line, may be recorded with respect, when it shall cease to be known where the metropolis of this island stood. It is enough to have mentioned this reflection, in order to show the place in dignity and perpetuity which learning holds, amongst the effects of human industry or the distinctions of human life.

not very uncommon, to make reading as idle an occupation as any of those in which the most trifling of mankind consume their time. There is reading without method or object; in which the mind is entirely passive, without endeavour to investigate, collect, or retain—reading, in a word, without thought. From this reading, or ever so much of it, no knowledge can spring. It assumes not—it ought not to assume—the name of study. It affords not the satisfaction of which we speak; it is not what we mean: nay, its tendency is rather to dissipate than to fix attention, to dissolve than to call forth the intellectual functions, to destroy that patience of thought upon which all progression of science depends.

But every argument, by which study can be recommended to others, is doubled upon the clergy. Thus religion, by its very nature, calls for a great degree of it. It is an historical religion, founded upon transactions which took place, and upon discourses which were held, in a distant age and country of the world; in a language, and under a state of opinion and customs, very different from our own. It is evident that the knowledge of such a religion cannot be transmitted in its purity without scholars. It is not possible that every Christian should be a scholar; but it is necessary that a knowledge of the original records of the religion should reside somewhere: and from whom can this be expected, if it

be not found with those who profess themselves to be public teachers of its doctrines ?

A volume is spread out before us, containing intelligence, which, if true, is of infinite and of universal value. To investigate the authority, and to interpret the sense of these important pages, is one of the most respectable offices which can be imposed upon learning or talents—and that office is ours. The return, the appeal, must always be to original information, and to those who are furnished with the means of acquiring it. It is with Christianity as with other subjects of importance, multitudes may be benefited by the knowledge of a few.

And as the clergy are called upon by the duties, and by one at least of the confessed designs of their order, to give attendance to “reading,”—so are they invited to it by the leisure and tranquillity usually indulged to their situation, and by the habits of life which best, which alone, I might have said, befit their profession.

Retiredness is the very characteristic of our calling ; it is impossible to be a good clergyman and to be always upon the streets, or to be continually mixing with the diversions, the follies, or even the business and pursuits of the world.

And in our church, the offices of religion assigned to her ministers, though they well deserve to be performed with seriousness and punctuality, and being so performed are sufficient for Christian edification,

are yet neither so numerous nor prolix as not to leave large portions of our time unoccupied. Of these vacancies study is the application and the resource. It has been truly said to be impossible that learning of any kind should flourish with a description of persons of whom no one was at his ease. This complaint, however, belongs not to us as a body. Amongst the clergy of the Church of England, many, without doubt, are very much at their ease. The proper return for this privilege, the proper use of the opportunity, is to convert it to beneficial study. But we go farther. If there be a danger or disadvantage in the clerical profession, which does not belong equally to other professions—I mean with respect to the person's own comfort and satisfaction—it is the having too much time at liberty, and too little engagement for it. I have known deplorable examples of the spirits sinking under this vacuity; oftener, perhaps, of their taking refuge in resources which were hardly innocent, or, if innocent in their kind, indecorous by their excess. A literary station without learning is always gloomy to the possessor. Every thing which should have been a benefit to him becomes a burthen. The calm and silence which should dispose to meditation induces only melancholy. In the leisure to which the contemplative mind returns as to its home, the person we speak of sees nothing but a banishment from recreation or cheerfulness. There is no greater difference in the human character than in the disposition of different

men towards retirement. The longing with which some seek, the delight with which they enjoy, and the reluctance with which they leave it, contrasted with the impatience by which others endure, or the fear with which they dread it, form an opposition of choice and temper both remarkable in itself, and upon which the happiness of individuals and their suitability for the station which they occupy very much depend.

It can admit of no question which of these two is the temper for a clergyman. That which is desirable by him (I think by all, but certainly by him) results from the conduct of the mind, when it is not acted upon by strong internal impressions; from the power at those times of commanding the objects of its thoughts, and directing it to such as will detain its attention, exercise its faculties, and reward its pursuits. This ability cannot subsist without a love of knowledge, and, what must always accompany a love of knowledge, or rather indeed is the thing itself, a taste and relish for instructive reading. This being felt, retirement is no longer either slothful or tedious, leisure tasteless, or even solitude without support.

Perhaps no moments are passed with so much complacency as those which a scholar spends in his study; none with less perception of their weight or tardiness, less sense of restlessness or desire of change; I will add, none in which alacrity of spirits is better sustained. Few things are more exhilarating than the successful investigation of an important

truth : or even where probability alone is attainable, the discovery or prosecution of a just argument is an employment always grateful to a sound and cultivated understanding. It seems scarcely necessary that we should mention the pleasures which are derived from every branch of elegant literature. It is a recommendation likewise of this mode of passing our time, that it is without expense of fortune ; and a still greater, that it is never followed by disgust or reproach.

But what, it will be asked, shall we study? I am supplied with an answer to the question by the very terms of our ordination service ; which after having stated the weightiness of our office and its duties, exhorts us with much solemnity “to draw all our cares and studies this way :” —in which words two things are implied. First ; that the more directly our studies bear upon the separate object of our profession, the better they fulfil the obligations which we have undertaken. It cannot be doubted but that the reading to which Timothy was to give attendance related closely to the mission in which he was engaged ; most likely, that it was confined to the Jewish Scriptures, to the Law (as they were then divided), the Psalms, and the Prophets. If Saint Paul has nowhere spoken with respect, and sometimes disparagingly, of the learning of his age and country, it was for two reasons which do not apply to us : one, that this learning was in a great degree frivolous ; the other, that any learning was unnecessary



for an apostle, his knowledge of some points being inspired, of others original, immediate, and sensible. With believers of future ages the case is different. What the apostles saw with their eyes, and handled with their hands, of the Word of Life, we must discover by inquiry and research. They knew with certainty, and they testified with courage; but their knowledge and testimony can only reach us through the medium of a dead language, and by the interpretation of ancient records. The subject also of Divine Revelation itself we approach with more advantage for being prepared with the information which composes and constitutes the basis of natural religion.

Therefore, secondly, I do not consider the injunction at our ordination as prohibiting to us all other studies, but rather as requiring from us that, whatever be the study which we have chosen, we make it subservient to the diffusion and illustration of Christianity. Draw it this way, and I believe what the precept of our liturgy directs us to do to be more practicable than is generally understood. Have languages been the early and favourite subject of our studies—have we possessed ourselves of that golden key, which unlocks the treasures of the ancient world—it is, that we may employ our acquirements in elucidating the writings which transmit to us the history and canon of our faith. When the works of ancient authors are to be explained, grammar and criticism must lend their aid, let the subject of

which they treat be what it will. In none certainly is this aid more wanted than in those in which the ideas expressed are not ideas of sense. Sciences, still more remote from religion in appearance, will be found capable of being brought into connexion with it. Are we geometricians, algebraists, or analysts, it is in order to become sound and accurate philosophers : and of true philosophy the first business is to explore and to display the agency of a benevolent Power. For instance, there exists not so decisive a proof of design, and of contrivance to accomplish it, as in the structure of the eye of animals : but this proof, and indeed this contrivance entirely depends upon optical principles ; which principles can only be known and explained by the application of a very subtle geometry.

Observe, therefore, how we ascend from lines and angles to the most momentous and sublime truths. These enable us to trace the action of different surfaces and different media upon rays of light ; which being ascertained, we discover in the organ of vision an apparatus, complex indeed, which increases the wonder, but accurately adapted to that action. What is this, but to discover God ?

The same remark, if not more true, is perhaps still more striking, when applied to astronomy. Not the conjecture (for active imaginations can conjecture any thing), but the demonstration of that system, is justly ranked amongst the noblest efforts of the human intellect. Yet could it be conceived, unless

we know it to be so, that whilst Newton and his predecessors in the same studies were investigating the properties of a conic section, they were tracing the finger of the Almighty in the heavens? Nor let it be said that this is foreign from Christianity—for the presence in the universe of a supreme mind being once established upon these principles, the business of religion is half done. Of such a Being we can never cease to think. We shall receive with readiness the history of his dispensations, and with deeper submission every intimation of his will. Of the several branches of natural history the application is more obvious. They all tend to the discovery or confirmation of a just theology: they inspire those sentiments which Christianity wishes to find in her disciples.

But here we are met by a reflection more than sufficiently discouraging, arising from the imbecility of our faculties, and the frequent disappointment and unsatisfactoriness of our inquiries. Did learning, in the several subjects upon which it is employed, turn darkness into light, doubt into certainty, or always remove our difficulties, every step in its progress would be marked by pleasure and contentment; but a different representation is nearer to the truth. Some doubts will continue, some difficulties will remain, in a great degree such as they were, and new ones will spring up. Yet much, after all these deductions, will be gained; and for the rest, we have the consciousness to rely upon, that we have

discharged our duty to the subject, and the inquiry according to the measure of our faculties and opportunities ; and the assurance, that having done this, neither ignorance, nor doubt, nor error, will be imputed to us as voluntary offences—that although they may sometimes perplex, as they will do, or distress us here, we have nothing to fear from their consequences hereafter. Much, I say, will after all be gained ; and in no article of satisfaction shall we perceive the advantage of a contemplative life more than in that fixedness of temper by which we shall be taught to view the changes and chances of a transitory world. Many secular studies have this tendency. When a philosopher surveys the magnificence and stability of nature, seen in regions of immeasurable space—worlds revolving round worlds with inconceivable rapidity, yet with such exactness as to be found to circumsolve at the point where they are expected ; or when he sees upon the globe which he inhabits the same nature proceeding in her grand and beneficial operations with unconcerned regularity—when from these speculations his mind is carried to observe the strifes and contentions of men, the rise and decline of their institutions and establishments, what does he experience in the greatest of these changes but the little vicissitudes of little things? Again, when he advances his meditations from the works of nature to its Author, his attributes, his dispensations, his promises, his word, his will,—most especially, when he looks to the wonders and the mercies of a renovated existence,

to the tutelary hand of his Creator conducting him safely through the different stages of his being—through the grave and gate of death to an order of things disposed and appointed for the reward of faith and virtue, as the present is for trial and improvement; when he reflects how entirely this change supersedes all others, how fast it approaches, and how soon it will take place—in what a state of inferiority, I had almost said of indifference, is every interest placed in which it is not included? And if ever there was a time when that stedfastness of mind, which ought to result from the study and contemplation of divine subjects, is more wanted than at another, it is the present. It is our lot to live in a disturbed and eventful period. During the concussions which have shaken, and are yet shaking, the social edifice to its foundation; in the fate which we have seen of every thing man calls great, of power, of wealth, and splendour—where shall thought find refuge, except in the prospects which Christianity unfolds, and in a well-grounded confidence that Christianity is true? And this support will not fail us. Erect amidst the ruins of a tottering age, the pilgrim proceeds in his course without perturbation or dismay: endeavouring, indeed, according to his power, and interceding earnestly for, the peace and welfare of a world, through which he is but directing his constant eye to a more abiding city,—to that country beyond the great river, to which the sojourning tribes are bound, and where there remaineth rest for the people of God.

## II.

## ADVENT.

## MATTHEW XI. 3.

*Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

THE Advent of Jesus Christ into the world, which the order of our public service proposes at this season to our thoughts, the appearance he made, and the character he assumed, compared with the circumstances and expectations of the age and country in which he lived, contain attestations to the truth of the evangelical history which I shall make it my business, as it will not be unsuitable to the occasion, to lay before you ; and suggest reflections which will serve, both to confirm the truth of our religion, and to explain some points and passages of the New Testament which are well deserving of observation.

It is clearly to be collected from Scripture, that about the time of our Lord's coming, some great person, who was to be called Messiah or Christ, by the Jews, was expected to appear amongst them, who also would prove a mighty chief and conqueror; and by the aid, it should seem, of supernatural powers, not

only deliver the Jewish nation from the subjection into which they had been brought to the Roman government, but place that nation and himself at the head of them, in the highest condition of prosperity, and in possession of the universal empire of the world. Traces of this opinion, both of the coming of this extraordinary person, and of what he was to do when he did come, are dispersed in various parts of the New Testament :—“ Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another ? ”—“ When Christ cometh, will he do more (or do more miracles) than this man doeth ? ” “ I know,” saith the woman of Samaria, “ that Messiah cometh ; when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is : tell us whether thou be Christ or no.” Herod demanded of the wise men where Christ should be born. It was revealed to Simeon that he should not die before he had seen Christ. “ Shall Christ come out of Galilee ? ” “ Hath not the Scripture said that Christ cometh of the seed of David ? ” “ We know that Christ abideth for ever.” “ Men mused in their hearts of John, whether *he* was the Christ.” From these, and some other similar expressions, it is manifest that there was a previous and prevailing expectation that an extraordinary person, who was to be called Christ, or the Messiah, was at that time to appear.

Then as to the second point, what he was to do when he came : “ We trusted it had been he,” said his two disciples, “ who should have saved Israel.” And again, upon his appearance to them after his

resurrection, "Wilt thou at this time," they asked him, "restore again the kingdom to Israel?" And this notion of theirs, that he was to set up a kingdom upon earth, and become a mighty prince and conqueror in the world, is proved by, and accounts for, a great number of incidents recorded in the Gospels.

It was this that alarmed Herod so much when he heard reports of the miraculous birth. Herod then possessed the kingdom of Judea. Now he, together with the other Jews, expected the Christ which should appear would become a king, by conquering and taking Herod's kingdom from him; and this apprehension urged him to the desperate expedient of destroying all the children in Bethlehem who were about the age that agreed with the supernatural circumstances that had been talked of. Had Herod looked for no more than a moral teacher, a spiritual ruler, he would have had nothing to fear. This opinion likewise accounts for their attempting to make him a king, when they were convinced by the miracle of the loaves and fishes, "that he was, of a truth, that prophet that should come into the world," John vi. 15. And also for their receiving him with the pomp and ceremony of an earthly prince when he entered into Jerusalem, cutting down branches, and spreading their garments upon the road, and crying, "blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord."

This same reason also accounts for the sudden and seemingly strange revolution in the sentiments of



the people concerning him. Those who received him with much acclamation, and would not be restrained by the rules from paying him the greatest honours, in a few days afterwards we find crying out that he should be crucified. The case was, when they introduced him to Jerusalem, they supposed that he should forthwith show and make himself, what they had no doubt Christ was to be, a great and mighty conqueror; conquering, probably, by some supernatural assistance, all who opposed him, and delivering his own nation from servitude and subjection to power and glory. When nothing of this came to pass, the disappointment provoked them, and they were as eager to punish him as they were before to acknowledge him for their deliverer. This earthly kingdom was what the two sons of Zebedee had in view when they prevailed upon their mother to ask him that they might sit, one at his right hand and the other at his left; that is, be both chief men under him in his kingdom. And this we see was also the source of the frequent strifes and disputings amongst them, who should be greatest in that expected promotion to power and glory. Lastly, this was the cause that they could never believe, nor so much as comprehend, the many notices he gave them of his approaching crucifixion, because all idea of his being put to death like a malefactor was absolutely inconsistent with the notions which they and all the Jews firmly maintained, that he was to be king himself, and a deliverer of the Jewish nation.

When he told them, upon their going up to Jerusalem, that he should be delivered unto the Gentiles, mocked, spitefully intreated, spitted on, and that they should scourge him and put him to death; we read that they *understood* none of these things, and the saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. And in confirmation of what has been said, I have only to remark, that the Jews at that day expected both a Messiah to appear, and that, when he should appear, he would make them masters of their own land again, and of the world.

Such, therefore, were the opinions and expectations then actually prevailing amongst the Jewish people. Now what I contend for is, that had Jesus, in professing himself, as he did, to be the king of the Jews, been either an impostor or enthusiast, or any other (which he must have been, if the Christian religion be not true), he might have founded his pretensions on any other thing than truth; he would necessarily have fallen in with the established opinion of the country, and produced himself in the character which they expected. Suppose he was an impostor, and had a scheme of taking advantage of the popular expectation, to impose himself upon the Jews for the great person whose appearance they were looking for, it was certainly his business to have framed his account and pretensions agreeably to those expectations.

Had he been an enthusiast whose enthusiasm, or

madness, if you choose to call it so, had been so far infected with the popular phrensy as to imagine itself to be the person promised and expected, then such enthusiasm must at the same time have unavoidably led him to *prove* himself to be such an one, and to be and to do what these expectations pointed out. And what is a better proof than any reasonings, the fact was so. All the false Christs, all the pretended Messiahs, of which there have been some hundreds, have to a man given themselves out to be the destined deliverers of the Jewish nation, and improvers of the world. We read in the Acts of the Apostles of Theudas and Judas, who, before the days of the Apostles, had drawn much people after them. Josephus, the famous Jewish historian, mentions only nine by name, and multitudes of others whom he does not name conformably with our Saviour's prediction: "that there should arise false Christs, false prophets, and deceive many." Some of these might be impostors whom the expectations of the times and consequent eagerness to listen to such pretences called forth; others might be enthusiasts, whose disturbed imagination caught the contagion from the public throng. But both the one and the other, expectants and enthusiasts, they who adapted these things to the received prejudices of the age, boasted and professed to be what they knew their followers wished for, or what they and every one expected.

Now why Christ did not go along with the rest

who have called themselves Messiahs, if he was like them, it will be difficult to say. But where it will be asked, did our Saviour in fact differ or depart from the common and received notion of what the Messiah was to be? This remains to be shown.

Now the difference consists in this; that whereas the Messiah, according to the Jewish notion, was to be in his nature a mere man, and like all other men, but in his condition in the world exalted to summits of honour and grandeur above the kings and princes of this world; he, on the contrary, describes himself and is described by his followers, as low and mean in his outward visible condition, but in his nature very different from the whole race of mankind.

First; I say that the Jewish Messiah was, in their expectation, to be a mere man. The Jews did not suppose Moses himself to be any thing more; nor is there any trace that they had a conception of any thing more in the Messiah. None of the false Messiahs set up for any thing different as to their nature from an ordinary man. The Jews themselves were at a loss to understand those expressions of our Saviour, by which he intended to intimate the distinction and superiority of his own nature. This was so little thought of, that they were unable to resolve the difficulty he proposed to them: "If Christ be David's son, how calleth he him the Lord?"

But in his condition their Messiah is to be exalted to superior power and dignity; he is to rule and

triumph over all the enemies of the Jewish state; he was to restore the kingdom to Israel; he was to sit upon the throne of his father David, and reign over the house of Jacob for ever. All these expressions the Jews interpreted and applied literally. The contrary, however, of all this, our Saviour represents his worldly condition, which it evidently was—so mean and low, and humble and contemptible—born in a manger, and of parents of very inferior station—brought up with these parents—appearing, when he did appear, with a few poor fishermen—without name, fortune, or learning—the son of man had not where to lay his head—indebted to the benevolence of a certain Galilean who ministered unto him of his substance. He came, indeed, as he expresses it, to minister to others, and not to be ministered unto himself; and at last, as he all along foretold he should be, was delivered to the malice of the Jews, and to the power of the Roman yoke. He never attempted to shake off the Roman yoke, nor encouraged any such attempts in his followers; on the contrary, he withdrew himself when the populace would have hailed their king. He disclaimed the idea of altering or subverting the civil governments of the world—the very purpose for which the Jewish Messiah was expected—expressly declaring that his kingdom was not of this world, and replying, when he was requested to interfere in a private dispute, “Man, who made me a judge over you?”

Secondly; but if the condition in which our Saviour appeared exceedingly disappointed the Jewish expectation, the nature of which he described himself to be differed as much from what they conceived or expected. He described himself as a being, though in form and fashion as a mere man, yet in reality, and in his nature, far transcending the whole human race—*far*, inasmuch as these are but creatures of a birth; “Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return.” He was from the beginning,—“before Abraham;”—possessed glory with the Father before the world was. “He came forth from the Father, and came into the world, as he left the world, and went to the Father.” “He came down from heaven, even as he *ascended up* to heaven.”

Again; we believe that there are orders of creation in the universe much above us, as much, at least, as we are above the brute creation. He was elevated far beyond all these, a “being so much better than these, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they,”—for unto which of the angels, said he, at any time, “thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?”

Again; whereas no man hath seen God at any time: he was with the Father, in the bosom of the Father; he spake that which he had seen with the Father—the Father loved him, and showed him all things.

Again; he was next and dearest to his father,

above and beyond all creatures: he was not only the first born of every creature, but of all others "the only begotten of the Father;" which phrase must needs denote a relation, unknown, it is true, and unintelligible to us, but of peculiar value to him, and well understood. He was appointed also to be judge of the quick and the dead; "for the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgement unto the Son." "It is he," saith Saint Peter, "which was ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and dead." "We shall all stand," Saint Paul assures us, "before the judgement-seat of Christ."

Lastly; he was invested by the Father with power to raise us up, to recall us to life at the last day. "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; *i. e.* to have the same power over life." "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise them up at the last day." "I am the resurrection and the life; as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." It seems by this, not only figuratively, but literally true, that through the sin of Adam human nature became mortal. By the efficacy and power of Christ, the same nature is made capable of a restoration to life. "It is he," St. Paul assures us, "who is to change our vile body, that it may be like his glorious body."

Now these several particulars put together compose

a character, or more properly speaking, a nature, not only different from any thing the Jews looked for from the Messiah, and in many particulars the reverse of it; but it is entirely, absolutely, and truly original. There was no example that could suggest it, no precedent to authorise it.

The next natural, and as I have argued already, not at all improbable, supposition, had he been guided by any thing else than truth, was, that he would be seen just what the Jews expected the Messiah should be seen; that these expectations had suggested the thought, and were to be the foundation of his claims, and the means of success.

But had our Saviour presented himself as a public and better instructor of mankind in his day, he would have had examples of this in the old philosophers. Had he assumed the character of a Jew, to the Jews he would have been a second Moses. Had he appeared an inspired prophet, instances of such had been of old frequent among the Jews.

But why he should not only depart from the established persuasion of his own country, and of all the world, concerning the Messiah who was expected, but assume pretensions different and unforeseen, superior to any of these already mentioned, and without any instance or example to lead to or suggest such a scheme and character, unless he was, as we believe him to be, really and truly what he called himself, it seems impossible to account for.

The character of Christ is single and alone in



the history of mankind. If he was an impostor, there never was such lame and useless imposture. If he was an enthusiast, produce an instance of any character made up so well of enthusiasm, so calm, so rational, so sublime.

## III.

## CHRISTMAS DAY.

MATT. XVII. 54.

*Truly this was the Son of God.*

OUR Saviour's miraculous birth, and still more miraculous life, distinguished him from every person that ever appeared in the world. History affords nothing like him—and these miracles form, no doubt, our assurance, that "He was sent from God." He preserved his pretensions by his works: the wonders of his nativity were followed by the performances of his life. This was the reason his followers believed on him at the time; and this must be a reason for believing on him, throughout all ages.

But, with considerate minds, there is a further reason for believing in him, exceedingly impressive, and that is, the excellency of his character. In this respect he surpasses the best men, of whom we have any knowledge. It might be expected that it would be so, with so great, so distinguished a messenger, sent from God; and it was so.

Pilate said of Jesus, "I find no fault with this man," and he spoke truly; nor has any one, that

has examined his history, ever been able to lay a single charge against his conduct. The temper of his soul and the tenor of his life were blameless throughout. From the first moment of his birth (which we this day commemorate) to his last agony on the cross, he never once fell into the smallest error of conduct; never once "spake unadvisedly with his lips." This is a negative kind of excellence; but observe, it is more than can be said of any person, that ever yet came into the world. But however, though a thing so extraordinary is to be found in no other man, it formed but a small part of that perfection, which belonged to our Lord Jesus. He was not only exempt from every the slightest failing, but he possessed and practised every imaginable virtue, that was consistent with his situation; and that too, in the highest degree of excellence, to which virtue is capable of being exalted. We may in particular fix upon the following points of his character; namely, his zeal for the service, his resignation to the will, his complete obedience to the commands, of his heavenly Father. These constituted his piety. Then, the compassion, the kindness, the solicitude, the tenderness, he showed for the whole human race, even for the worst of sinners, and the bitterest of his enemies. These constituted, if such qualities can constitute, unparalleled benevolence. Then again; the perfect command he had over his own passions; and the exquisite prudence, with which he eluded all the snares that were laid for him; the wisdom, the justice

of his replies; the purity and the gentleness of his manners; the sweetness, yet dignity of his deportment; the mildness with which he reproved the mistakes, the prejudices, and the failings of his disciples; the temper he preserved under the severest provocations from his enemies; the patience, and composure, and meekness, with which he endured the cruellest insults, and the grossest indignities; the fortitude he displayed under the most painful and ignominious death, that human ingenuity could devise, or human malice inflict; and that divinely charitable prayer, which he put up for his murderers in the midst of his agony, "Father, forgive them! for they know not what they do:" these concur to render the head and founder of our religion beyond comparison the greatest, according to true greatness; the wisest, according to true wisdom; and, in every sense, the best of men.

However, our Lord's proper office in the world was that of a public teacher. In that character, therefore, we ought more particularly to view him. And, in the first place, how astonishing, how inspired, and from what source inspired, must the mind of that man be, who could entertain so vast a thought in so low a condition, as that of instructing and reforming the whole world—a world, at that time more particularly, divided between atheism and superstition; but universally abandoned to sin; differing perhaps in the forms of their idolatry, but agreeing in giving loose to their passions and desires; a plan,

I say, of teaching not a few hearers, not a few congregations, not a few towns or cities, not a single country or nation, but the whole race of mankind; for to that length did his plan, not his personal ministry, but the plan of his religion, extend. Surely such a plan was only to be found in the Son of God. In the execution of this immense design, what condescension without meanness, what majesty without pride, what firmness without obstinacy, what zeal without bitterness or enthusiasm, what piety without superstition, does our Lord display! In his discourses and instructions all was calmness. No emotions, no violence, no agitation, when he delivered the most sublime and affecting doctrines, and most comfortable, or most terrifying predictions. The prophets before him fainted and sunk under the communications, which they received from above, so strong was the impression, so unequal their strength; but truths, that overwhelmed the *servants* of God, were familiar to his *Son*. He was composed upon the greatest occasions. He was tried every way; by wicked men; by the wicked one; by weak or false friends, as well as by open enemies. He proved himself superior to every artifice, to every temptation, to every difficulty.

It was asked, and will always be asked, "whence had this man these things—and what wisdom is this, that is given unto him?" He had no means or opportunity of cultivating his understanding, or improving his heart. He was born, as the history

testifies, in a low and indigent condition. He was without education, without learning, without any models to form himself upon, either in his own time and in his own country, or in any records of former ages, that were at all likely to fall into his hands. Yet, notwithstanding these great disadvantages—disadvantages I mean to a mere mortal man, he supported, throughout a most singular and difficult life, such wisdom and such virtue, as were never before found united ; and we may venture to say, never will be again united in any human being.

Our Lord's history is given us in the Gospels in a very plain, unornamented manner, and so much the better. There is an air of godly sincerity, of simplicity, and of solid undisguised truth in every thing, which is related. Nothing is wrought up with art : no endeavour to place things in the fairest light : no praise or panegyric, or very little : no solicitude to dwell on the most favourable, or striking, or illustrious parts of our Saviour's character. These circumstances added to the whole turn and tenor of the Evangelist's writings, prove that they followed truth, and fact, and nothing else. Lay open then the Bible before you, regard and contemplate the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it is there candidly and honestly set forth.

Again, if Jesus be the Son of God, then every thing which he taught comes to us with the weight and sanction of divine authority ; and demands, from every sincere disciple of Christ, implicit belief, and

implicit obedience. Christ delivered all his doctrines in the name of God: all of them, therefore, from their nature are to be received. He has given no man a license to adopt as much or as little of them as he thinks fit. He has authorised no human being to "add thereto, or diminish therefrom." We are not to receive one precept, and refuse another; we are not to receive one article of belief, and reject another article of belief; all are stamped by the same authority, and that authority is decisive. There may be truths very imperfectly apprehended by our finite understandings. There is nothing surprising in this; on the contrary, it was natural and reasonable to expect it to be so, in a revelation pertaining to that incomprehensible Being, "the High and Mighty One, that inhabiteth eternity." But we have this for our trust and consolation: we have a heavenly guide, we may put ourselves without reserve into his hands, and submit our judgments with boundless confidence to his direction; "for He is the way, and the truth, and the life:" we must obey him with our understandings, we must obey him with our wills.

"Let us bring, therefore," according to the strong expression of the Apostle, "let us bring every thought to the obedience of Christ, receiving with meekness the ingrafted word, that is able to save our souls."

## IV.

## LENT.

2 COR. VII. 10.

*For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation,  
not to be repented of.*

THE piety of good men in good times having appointed this season of Lent for a more particular attention to the concerns of religion, and especially that momentous part of religion, inward penitence and contrition; I know not how I can employ the beginning of this season better than by setting before you the nature of repentance; so far, at least, as to point out the marks and rules by which we may judge of its truth, and its sincerity.

And when I talk of judging of the sincerity of repentance, I do not mean other men's repentance, but our own. Under these words I shall apply myself to consider the rules and tokens, whereby we may judge of the sincerity of repentance; not of other men's repentance, with which we have nothing to do, but of our own. Repentance is a change of the heart, from an evil to a good disposition. When that change is made, repentance is true. This is a short definition of repentance; but it will of itself



teach us many truths concerning the subject. As 1st, that sorrow for our past sins, however earnest and contrite it be, is not alone repentance. Repentance is the change of the disposition. Sorrow for the past is likely to produce that change, which always accompanies it; but still it is not the change itself, nor indeed does it, as experience testifies, always and certainly work that change.

Sorrow for the past must necessarily be a part of repentance: for why should we repent, or wish to repent, of that for which we are not sorry? but still it is only a part; and it is extremely material that we do not mistake a part of our duty for the whole. When the change, as I said, is made, repentance is complete, and not till then. Sorrow or contrition are the instruments and means towards that change; but if the instrument does not perform its office, and if the means do not produce the end, still all the instruments and means then go for nothing. 2dly. If you ask whether repentance be in its nature a sudden and hasty thing, to be brought about at once, and as some think at a single instant, at a precise and perceivable moment: I answer, that usually, perhaps, it is not. Repentance is the change of the disposition. Few changes are made on a sudden; at least few sudden changes are lasting. If there be constitutional vices of mind and temper, it is equally the work of long reflection and endeavour to beat them down, and keep them down. If there be some old confirmed habit of gratification to contend with,

the struggle is commonly tedious, even when it is successful. This I say for the sake of those who because they do not find their change at once, give up ; who quit the contest, because it continues longer than they were prepared to expect. The duty of such is comprised in one word—perseverance, and a determined perseverance, is the very substance of virtue.

Almost every man can be sorry for his sins : every man can deplore and forsake them. Most men, indeed, make some short-lived efforts to become virtuous ; but perseverance is what they want, and fail in. Yet in one sense there is one essential change made in every sinner who repents ; which change consists in this, that whereas before he was growing worse, he is now growing better. His improvement may be slow, but be it ever so slow, there is still this difference between growing better and growing worse. It resembles, to my apprehension, the case of a patient in a fever. We say that his distemper has had a turn ; yet take him an hour or a day past the turn, or so much before, and you will observe little alteration : for the alteration is, that whereas he was before growing worse, and weaker, by almost insensible degrees, so now he is growing better and stronger, though by degrees equally slow. And this the physician accounts a great alteration ; and so it is, although it be long before he be well ; and though he be in perpetual danger of a relapse, during the progress of his recovery. And the physician pro-

nounces expressly, that there has been a turn in the disorder ; that the crisis is past, not because his patient is now well, who before was ill ; but because he finds him now gradually growing stronger and well, who before was gradually becoming ill.

Thus the sinner may securely, though humbly, hope that he has repented, who observes himself growing continually better ; who is conscious that he is in an amended state, though there be yet much to be done and suffered, before the amendment be complete. And as the patient was far from being out of danger, because he had passed the turn, so is the sinner. As the patient often relapses, so does the sinner. As the relapse is often more fatal than the first sickness ; so is it with the sinner : as the patient must still, for a long time, use extraordinary care and caution, so must the sinner.

On the other hand, there may be some few instances of very hasty reformation ; of the libertine, the drunkard, the profane, the swearer, the knave, the thief, the miser, becoming on a sudden modest, sober, serious, honest, charitable : and some, though still fewer, of extraordinary changes of temper ; of the proud, the overbearing, the passionate, the envious, the quarrelsome, the malicious, becoming mild, patient, generous, forbearing, and forgiving. And when we do see such instances, we ought to rejoice at them, rather than suspect them. The frame of the mind may receive such a wrench at once, as to give it a happy turn. All I mean to say is, that this

is not common ; that the sinner must not be surprised and disheartened, because it was not his case. He is not to let go, or leave off, because his old sins and old habits will return. The work is begun at least. It is for his comfort, I say again, that he grows better. In the same way may be determined, in the third place, the question—Is repentance ever brought about by calamity and affliction, or sickness? Repentance is the change of the disposition ; and if the change be but made, no matter by what cause it is effected. The disposition is still changed, and the repentance is true. Besides which, we have good reason to believe that judgments and visitations, and sore calamities, afflictions and sickness, are sent and permitted by our gracious Governor for this very purpose of bringing us to repentance, and a better sense of things. It must not be made, therefore, an objection to the efficacy of our repentance, that it springs from the root, which God himself hath planted. The sinner need not suspect the sincerity of his repentance, or doubt concerning its being accepted with God, merely because he was first put upon it by some misfortune, sickness, or great affliction.

Repentance we describe to be a change of the heart, from an evil to a good disposition. But how are we to know when the change is made? That is the question. In the general state of a christian life, repentance is such a sorrow for sin as produces a change of *manners*, and an actual amendment of life. It is that disposition of mind by which "he

who stole, steals no more ;” by which “the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right.” And to the man thus actually reformed, it is expressly promised, “that he shall save his soul alive.” Of this repentance the proof is visible, and the sincerity certain, because the new state of mind is discovered, by a new train of outward actions. I say, this is the nature of repentance ; in the general state of christian life, where life and opportunity are left to the penitent : and then, to be sure there is no authority for us to say, that repentance will be effectual without amendment ; and that the repentance which is thus proved and followed by actual amendment is not effectual.

But numerous instances occur, in which, from the nature of the case, it is impossible for the sinner to testify the truth of his repentance, either to himself or to the world, by actual reformation. It is so with the repentance of a death-bed. It is so when confinement from sickness, for crimes, or for any other cause, disables men from the duties and vices of active life. It is so where poverty puts it out of men’s power to repeat their old sins ; when many vices as well as many virtues are become impossible. The shortness of their time, the distress of their situation, the feebleness of their constitutions, the narrowness and reduction of their circumstances, leave little power of active virtue, and of themselves (without any merit on their part) preclude them from

the commission of most vices. Therefore some other measure must be appointed for them ; because, to expect actual reformation, where virtue and vice are equally out of their power, is to require impossibilities. Here then we seem to have authority for saying, that this simple decision is the truth ; namely, that God will consider that life as amended, which would have been amended, if he had spared it, and vouchsafed opportunities. Whether this would take effect, can never be known to the world. It cannot always be known to the penitent himself ; but it is known to God. He can see the fruit in the blossom, or the seed. He knows those resolutions that are fixed, and would hold—those conversions which would be permanent ; and will receive them who are qualified by these new dispositions and desires for works of righteousness, without exacting from them those outward duties, which the circumstances of their health, their confinement, their inability, or the shortness of their lives, hinder them from performing. Nothing therefore remains to conditions like these, but that the persons in them apply with all their strength to rectify their desires and purify their thoughts ; that they set God before them in his goodness, and in his terror ; that they consider him as the Father and the Judge of all the earth—as a gracious Father desirous to save—as a wise Judge who cannot, consistently with the rules of good government, pardon unrepented iniquity ; that they excite

in themselves an intense detestation of crimes (for if they cannot do this, it is not probable they would forsake them if they retained the power of acting); with vehement and steady resolutions; that if life and opportunity were granted them, they should be spent hereafter in the practice of their duty; that they pray to the giver of grace to strengthen and impress these holy thoughts, and accept the repentance, though late, and in its beginning violent; that they improve any good motion by prayer; and lastly, that they deliver themselves into the hands of their faithful Creator.

The promises of acceptance and forgiveness, which are made to repentance in the Scriptures, are general; and we are not authorised to limit by exceptions, what God has not limited. So far, therefore, we may speak comfort to the contrition of a death-bed, or the circumstances relative to a death-bed, by assuring them of our hope, that God will consider that life as amended, which would have been amended, if he had spared it. On the other hand, it is necessary that they, at least that others in different circumstances, should be apprised that their state is precarious, their hazard great; that though it be possible their present sorrow may be productive of amendment, yet experience forces us to declare, that there is nothing farther from certainty; that they have many disadvantages to contend with, their sins old and obstinate, their faculties of resistance weak,

their vision clouded, distempered, distorted ; that they can never be assured that their repentance would be effectual to their reformation ; and consequently must leave the world, without any well grounded assurance of God's forgiveness : for it is impossible even to ourselves to distinguish the effects of terror from those of conviction—to decide whether our passions and vices be really subdued by the fear of God, or only arrested and restrained for a while by the temporary force of present calamity. And, lastly, the deliberately and designedly putting off repentance to a death-bed makes even that repentance, morally speaking, impossible to prove ; at least, I will venture to pronounce, that no mere repentance can be effectual in consequence of such previous design.

The last, but not the least, test of recovery, which I shall mention, is restitution. Upon the fullest consideration of the matter, it is my judgement, that where restitution is practical, repentance cannot be sincere or effectual without it. In truth, it is only mockery to pretend to repent of our sin, while we keep and enjoy the fruits of it. If we have by mistake, from distress, in haste, or in consequence of disposition and conduct which we now see the guilt of, taken any thing, or withheld any thing from any other person, we must restore what we have so unjustly taken and withheld, or an equivalent,—or it is in vain to talk of repenting of our sin.

I know this is a hard lesson, besides the expense



of restitution, which is very much more than we like, or than we can well bear. There is a shame, and confusion, and humiliation in acknowledging our fault, which is one part of the evil. All this I own, and can only say, that if restitution be a duty, it is not less a duty because it is attended with difficulties or disagreeable circumstances.

When once it has been made apparent that a thing is our duty, it is then of no service to prove that it is inconvenient, that it is chargeable, that it is painful. But then restitution may not be practicable. Some injuries are not capable of it. The person entitled to restitution may be dead. We may not have it in our power to make restitution. In such cases we have not this to exercise. Restitution, like every thing else, is no longer required than while it can be performed. All I mean is, that if it be practicable, it is our duty. Repentance will not avail us without it, and it is no excuse to say that it is unavoidable. I have only farther to observe, that restitution is not merely giving back the property which we unjustly kept, but it is in general the undoing, as far as remains in our power, what we have done wrong, as well as unsaying what we have said wrong. Therefore when, by confessing our mistakes, recanting our falsehoods, exposing our faults, we can put a stop to any bickerings or quarrels we have excited—remove suspicions and irritations which we have infused—call back the evil reports which we have circulated—

or, in short, alleviate any how the uneasiness we have occasioned, we are bound to do so. It may produce shame, but it is false shame. It is false shame—but true magnanimity. But whether shame or magnanimity, it is to be, if we would obtain remission from God of our fault through the merits and death of Christ, by means on our part of a hearty, unreserved, unfeigned repentance.

## V.

## GOOD FRIDAY.

## COLOSSIANS I. 12, 13, 14.

*Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*

It is observable, in the ordinary course of God's providence, that a variety of ends are sometimes brought about by the same means; and it is not unnatural to expect something of the same contrivance in his extraordinary interpositions. Agreeable to this, the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ was probably subservient to many beneficial purposes to one part or other of the universe, and to more than we can understand. Therefore, I question whether those proceed upon any good authority, who propose one single end and use of the death of Christ, as exclusive of all others, or as the only end designed by it, all other being accidental consequences

or figurative applications. The death of Christ is represented as a sacrifice of the same nature, but of superior efficacy, with the Jewish sacrifice of old. Again, it is represented as a price paid for our redemption from sin and death, like the ransom that is paid when captives are redeemed and set at liberty. Again, it is considered as a martyrdom calculated to testify the truth and sincerity of our Lord's profession. Again, it is an exalted instance of love and affection to mankind; for, although he foresaw all along that this would be the consequence of his undertaking, yet, because he loved us, he would not desist from his ministry, though it cost him his life. It may be again conceived, and is in Scripture conceived, that the death of Christ is a pattern to us of patience and humility, of fortitude and resolution in our benevolent endeavours, and firm constancy against whatever man was able to inflict or threaten. Others, lastly, represent it as the method by which God testified his utter and irreconcilable hatred to sin, which nothing was allowed to expiate but the blood of his own Son, and his love also to his creatures, who gave his own Son to die for our sins. But why might not the death of Christ be all these? There are separate passages of Scripture where each one of these is spoken of as the end and effect of Christ's death; and to suppose that but one of those is the strict and literal account, and that all the rest are to be taken in a figurative

or some qualified sense, is bringing great and unnecessary difficulties into the interpretation of Scripture. These ends are all consistent with one another; and it is surely no defect in a scheme, that it serves many purposes at the same time—on the contrary, it affords a striking proof of the wisdom of the contriver; and if he contrive some of them plainly and others figuratively to express what he wants, they may be all equally real ends and equally appropriate: for it is very necessary, in explaining Scripture, to observe, that when a reason, or motive, or end is assigned for a thing, it does not imply that this is the only reason, or motive, or end, though no other be mentioned possibly in that passage. Thus, in one place of the Old Testament it is said that God would deliver Jerusalem “for his servant David’s sake.” No other reason is mentioned here; but turn to the prophet Isaiah, and you there find that God would deliver Jerusalem “for mine own name sake and my servant David’s sake.” God’s distinguished indulgence to the house of Israel is described to be sometimes for Jacob’s sake, for his ancestor’s sake, for God’s own name sake, for his truth’s sake, for his mercy’s sake. All I wish to be observed is, that these reasons are not applicable to one, but are regarded as so many concurring motives and reasons for the same measure. I mean that, in order to give an adequate sense and substance to many passages of Scripture, it is necessary

to regard the manner of the writers; and that this regard may be without unfairness extended to the death of Christ.

The various ends of Christ's death may be divided into two kinds—the spiritual and moral. The spiritual consists in the benefit it procured us in the *attainability* of final salvation. The full nature and extent of this benefit, or in what precise way the death of Christ operates to produce it, needs not perhaps be perfectly understood. Reflect how little we know of the laws of nature, as they are called, or the laws and regulations by which the world of spirits is governed; still less of the lives which we shall experience in a world for which we are destined. According to that, the death of Christ may, both in an intelligible and a natural way, have an efficacy in promoting the salvation of human creatures. The *moral* ends of the death of Christ consist in the additional motives which it furnishes to a life of virtue and religion, as it is a pattern, and example, and encouragement, and incitement to virtue. This last class I propose to make the subject of my present discourse.

It is necessary, in the first place, that nothing I say of this class be construed to exclude the other; for the most probable opinion seems to me to be, that many and different ends were proposed in the death of Christ—all equally real—none of such single importance as to exclude the rest. Now the first great lesson which the death of Christ teaches us is

humility—"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." How does this rebuke the pride or inclination to little strifes and distinctions of human life! Shall we be elated with or made great by any petty superiority, which, if real, is but the difference of an artificial make? Shall we take fire, if our dignity be neglected or affronted? Is it so mighty a matter with us to condescend to place ourselves upon a level with our inferiors? Cannot we deign to submit to be poorly thought of in the world? Will not we dispense with one particle of the respect and deference, which we challenge to our rank, or station, or abilities? Do these high and lofty airs become us, miserable, dust and ashes, taken at first out of the earth, and ready to sink into it again, when he, who was in the form of God—the express image of his Father—by whom, and for whom, all things are and were made—when he scorned not to divest himself of the glory which he had before the foundation of the world—and to become of no reputation—to humble himself, even to the death of a malefactor—to bear the taunts, and triumphs, and insults of his enemies—in meek resignation to his Father's will to bow down his sacred

head upon the cross. This, indeed, reduces all human pride and power to nothing.

Another virtue, equally conspicuous in this great transaction, and equally useful and wanting for ourselves, is that of *patience* under *disappointed affection*. Do men refuse or pervert our intentions—do they return with resentment what we intended with kindness—are some insensible of our good offices—do they repay with ingratitude or ill usage all attempts to do them good by every turn, and disparage us in the opinion of the world, or try to mortify, and vex, and put us to inconvenience in our affairs, whilst we have given them no provocation, or none that we know of—are others lying in wait to over-reach and impose upon and make a property of our ignorance, to prey upon our easiness of temper—to thrust us by in all the competition of life, to encroach because they perceive our weakness—how is all this to be borne? The Scriptures tell us how. The epistle to the Hebrews has the following passage, “Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”

A third just application of the sacrifice and death of Christ is to induce us to *crucify the flesh* with the affections and lusts: for shall our salvation be in the sight of God himself of such infinite importance and price, that “he spared not his own Son” in carrying on the great business of our redemption;



and shall we refuse, for the same end, to resign pleasures of a few hours' continuance, or keep within bounds those destructive passions, the gratification of which we know will be our bane and perdition—which commonly begin their torment here, and are certain of it hereafter? Are we less to consider our redemption, whose final happiness or misery must all depend upon it, than he who undertook it, and who quitted the clouds of happiness to carry it on? Would you know what is meant by "the flesh with the affections and lusts, which they that are Christ's have crucified?" Saint Paul refers distinctly and circumstantially to all uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings; but neither is this all. There are pleasures and pursuits which are criminal only in the excess, such as diversions, riches, honours, power: these are called the *world*; the immoderate love of them is called in Scripture the love of the world. This love in the heart of a Christian is moderated by contemplating on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, "by whom the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world;" that is, so much more affecting considerations present themselves to our thoughts this way, and on this subject, that diversions, riches, and honours lose their charms—their gaudy lustre fades away before such contemplations, and our attention is drawn to the littlenesses of this generation.

But the great inference which the Scriptures continually press upon us from the sufferings of Christ is, that "if Christ so loved us, we ought also to love one another;" and surely with reason: for is it to be endured, that while the shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep, the flock should be killing and devouring one another; that while we live under the obligation of this stupendous love; while we are indebted to it for the eternal salvation of our souls, we should cast off all kindness and affection towards one another, or towards any? Christ died that he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad; that he might unite his followers into one body, firmly connected by the same spirit to the same obedience, to the same regulations, by the same love and mutual affection to one another, that they all might be one, even as we are one. How is this gracious design defeated by our treachery and ill intentions towards one another! How little do we judge one another members of the same household, children of the same parent, washed in the same blood, and saved by the death of one Redeemer, when there is any passion to be gratified by oppressing and vexing each other! But are we sensible, you will say, of our obligation to a Saviour of the world? We acknowledge the infinite debt we owe him; we allow all gratitude and all love to be most fully due; how are we to show it? how shall we love Christ, whom we have not seen? "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a

stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" There is but one way in which we are capable of making any return—the way which he himself has been pleased to point out and declare he will accept—"Forasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." We cannot lay down our lives for him, as he did for us; we cannot pour out our soul a sacrifice for sin—heal human creatures by our stripes, or bear their iniquities; but we can promote peace and good-will, and comfort, and quietness in his family and amongst our brethren. Our influence, it is true, may be small; it may be little we can do even towards these ends, but we can advance them in our neighbourhood, amongst our acquaintance and our families; and the circle of each man's opportunity, be it great or small, is to him the whole world.

But there is also a second consideration on this matter—that it exalts into dignity and respect; it lifts above insult and contempt the meanest of our fellow Christians: be their outward appearance ever so despicable and forbidding, be their quality what it may, be their age or health ever so infirm, still they are those for whom Christ died. "Destroy not him," says Saint Paul, "by *meats* (only) for whom Christ died;" much more despise not, insult not, overbear not, trample not on, the lowest of our brethren in Christ. However vile they may seem in our eyes, he scrupled not to lay down his life for such.

Finally: as high and low, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, have all one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, let us all pass the short time of our sojourning here in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour. We are members one of another, and of Christ; "wherefore let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

## VI.

## GOOD FRIDAY.

## ROM. v. 8.

*But God commendeth his love towards us, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

THE veneration and devout affection which we entertain for the memory and person of Jesus Christ can never be too great or too ardent, whether we respect what he has suffered for our sakes, or the benefit we draw from his sufferings. If we regard his sufferings, one plain reflection presents itself: "greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend." It is the last and highest possible instance of affection which a parent could show for a beloved child, or any one can show for the dearest relation of human life. If we look to the benefits which the Author of our redemption hath procured to us, *this* is manifest, that all favours and all kindnesses are insignificant, compared with those which affect our eternal welfare in another world; because, in proportion as the happiness of a future life is more important to us than any thing we gain or enjoy in this, so whatever helps or promotes

our salvation, our attainment of heaven is more precious than any advantage which can be conferred upon us in this life. We may not be sensible of this now (I fear we are not), but we *shall* be made sensible of it hereafter. The full magnitude and operation of those effects which will result from the death of Christ we can only comprehend in a general way: that is, we can only comprehend from general expressions used in Scripture. These testify that such effects, and the benefit which the faithful in Christ shall draw from them, will be very great; if we consider that they relate to nothing less than the saving of our souls at the day of judgement, infinitely great in comparison they necessarily must be; because then nothing at all will be of any concern but what relates to that. By the efficacy of his death, surpassing in a great degree our present knowledge, and by his powerful and perpetual intercession for us, which we can in some degree comprehend, we may rest assured that he hath brought into the way to heaven millions who, without him, would not have attained it. If we regard the effects which religious love ought to produce upon us, the love of Christ, like the love of any great benefactor, if it be in our heart, will show itself some way or other. In different men it will show itself in different ways; but in all men it will show itself, if it exist. Such is the nature of the affection. It is never a dead principle. If the root be in the ground, it will irresistibly spring up into action.

There is, however, a danger naturally adhering even to the very piety with which we cherish the memory of our Redeemer, and it is this: It leads sometimes to a frame of mind, and to a habit of thinking concerning religion, and concerning the object of all religion, the Supreme Being himself, which is not justified by reason, or by any thing delivered in the Christian revelation. The opinion which I have in view by this caution is, that whilst we contemplate with deserved admiration the exceeding great love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we slide into a way of considering God the Father as a being of a harsh and austere character, at enmity with mankind; which enmity was to be reconciled by the blood of his Son.

Now I do not so much say that this is irrational, because it may be allowed, perhaps, that human reason is a very imperfect judge of such matters; but it is unscriptural; it is not that representation of the subject which the scriptures exhibit, but the contrary.

For, in the first place I remark, that God is never said to be reconciled to us, but we to God. He is always ready to receive mankind returning to their duty. But the difficulty was to induce mankind to return. And in this strain run all the texts in which the term "*reconcile*" occurs. "We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God;" that is, we entreat you, as though Christ himself entreated you, that ye would return to your duty to God. Again, as to be reconciled is to return to their duty,

so *reconcile* is to cause to return, or to bring back to duty and obedience those who had deserted; both which I apprehend to be the sense of the term in the following texts. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, *by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven; and you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, now hath he reconciled.*" Col. i. 20. Again, Eph. xi. 15, Saint Paul, speaking of the Jews and Gentiles, declares "That Christ hath now by his death abolished all distinction between them; that having made of twain one new man, he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross;" so in other places, God is said to *reconcile us* to himself by Jesus Christ: to be *reconciling the world* unto himself; The preaching of the Gospel is called *the word and the ministry of reconciliation*. The same distinction holds concerning some other phrases which occur in the writing of the Apostles. God is never said to be *at enmity with us*, or an *enemy to us*, or *alienated from us*, but we are said to be *at enmity with God*, *enemies to God*, *alienated from God*; and all by the wickedness of our lives. "A friend of the world," saith Saint James, "is an enemy of God." "You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works;" so the Gentiles were said to be alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them.



I proceed, in the second place, to prove, that the redemption of the world, instead of being undertaken by another, to appease the wrath of an incensed or austere God, was itself a thing provided by God ; and was the effect of *his* care and goodness towards his human creatures. The texts I shall lay before you, in support of this proposition, are the following : “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John iii. 16. Again, in the 6th chapter of the same Gospel, Christ speaks, “ I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me ; and this is the Father’s will who hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing.” These are Christ’s own words ; and in what way does Christ describe his office and commission ? Not as coming of himself to pacify God the Father, who was alienated from and averse to the race of mankind, but as sent by God the Father to reclaim and reform this degenerate race—to save them, by turning every one from his sins, and so to bring those back who were gone far astray from their duty, their happiness, and their God ; in other words, Christ’s coming was the appointment of God the Father, and that appointment was the effect of God the Father’s love. These declarations of our Saviour’s own are followed up by many passages in the writings of the Apostles, which speak of Christ’s coming into the world, of his ministry, and more especially of his death, as concerted and

determined of old in the councils of the Almighty Father. "Him being delivered," saith Saint Peter, "by the determinate councils and foreknowledge of God ye have taken." "Against the holy child Jesus they were gathered together, for to do whatsoever *thy* hand and *thy* council determined to be done." But the mission of Christ was not only the counsel and design of God the Father, but it was a counsel of supreme love to mankind. "God commendeth his love towards us, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also give us all things?" But the text the fullest and the plainest to our purpose is in the fourth chapter of the epistle to St. John. "In this was manifest the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live *through* him." "Herein is love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Now in these various texts you will remark the same thing, which is, that they do not describe the redemption of mankind, as if a milder and more benevolent being went about to propitiate the favour of another who was harsh and austere, who was before incensed at the human race, had cast them off, or was averse to their welfare (that certainly was not the idea which dwelt in the mind of those who delivered such declarations as I have now read to you); but it was all along the design and the doing of that being—the

effect of his love, the fruit and manifestation of his affection and good-will.

But it will be asked, if God the Father was always gracious, and merciful, and loving to his creatures, always ready to receive, and desirous to make them happy, what necessity was there for a Redeemer, or for the redemption of the world at all? I answer that, there was still the same necessity to reform and recover mankind from their sins, and there was likewise a necessity for a propitiation for sin. It was a law of God's moral government, that mankind could not be made happy in their future existence without holiness, at least without endeavours after holiness, without turning away from their sins, without a pardon obtained through Jesus Christ his Son. Perhaps the whole rational universe, angels as well as the spirits of departed men, may be interested in the maintenance and preservation of this law. Here God's love to his creatures interposed—not to break through or suspend a rule universally salutary and necessary, but to provide expedients, and to endeavour (if we may so say) to bring the human race, lost in an *almost total depravity*, within the rule which he had appointed for the government of his moral creation. The expedient which his wisdom made choice of, and which it is for us to accept with all humility and all thankfulness, was to send into the world the person nearest and dearest to himself, his own and his only begotten Son, to instruct the ignorance of mankind, to collect a society of men out of all nations,

and countries of the world, united together by faith in him, and through the influence of that faith, producing the fruits of righteousness and of good works. It seemed agreeable, also, to the same supreme wisdom, that this divine messenger should sacrifice his life in the execution of his office. The expediency of this measure we can in part understand, because we can see that it conduced with other causes to fix a deep impression on the hearts and consciences, both of his immediate followers, the living witnesses and spectators of his death and sufferings, and of those who, in after ages, might come to a knowledge of his history. It bound them to him by the tenderest of all reflections, that he died for their sakes. This is one intelligible use of the death of Christ. But we are not to stop at this: in various declarations of Scripture concerning the death of Christ, it is necessary also to acknowledge that there are other and higher consequences attendant upon this event: the particular nature of which consequences, though of the most real and highest nature, we do not understand, nor perhaps are capable of understanding, even if it had been told us, until we be admitted to more knowledge than we at present possess of the order and economy of superior beings, of our own state and destination after death, and of the laws of nature by which the next world will be governed, which probably are very different from the present. But that there are such benefits arising from the death of Christ various passages of Scripture

declare, and cannot be fairly interpreted without supposing them. We are sure that the whole was a wise method of accomplishing the end proposed, because it was the method adopted by the wisest of all beings. Perhaps it was the only method possible ; but what I am at present concerned to point out is, that it is to be referred to the love of God the Father. It is to be regarded as an instance, and the very highest instance, of his paternal affection for us. You have heard, in the several texts which I have read to you, that it was so regarded and so acknowledged by our Lord himself, and by his Apostles.

What remains, therefore, but that, whilst we cherish in our remembrance and our hearts a lively sense of gratitude towards the divine person, who was the visible agent, the great and patient sufferer, in carrying on the redemption of the world, we look also to the source and origin of this, as of every blessing which we enjoy, the love and tender mercies of God the Father. “ Blessed therefore be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, to the praise of his glory in Christ, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

## VII.

## EASTER-DAY.

## 1 COR. xv. 3—9.

*I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures; and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once—of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James; then of all the apostles; and last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time: for I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

AMONGST the various testimonies that have come down to us of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and which, by consequence, ensure to us the hope of our own, no one possesses greater evidence, or carries with it stronger credentials of truth and authenticity, than that which is contained in the words which I have read to you.

I shall employ the present solemn, and surely if any ever was so, this joyful occasion, first, in laying before you such remarks and explanations as the words themselves may seem to suggest; and secondly, in addressing you concerning the author and authority from which they proceed.

Saint Paul, previously to his writing this letter to the Christians of Corinth, had himself been in that city preaching the Gospel amongst them in person.

Those to whom he now writes, whilst he was absent upon the same business in another country, were they whom he had some time before taught *face to face*; and most of them persons who had been moved by that his teaching to embrace the new faith. After having finished some occasional subjects which he was led to treat of in the epistle, he proceeds, as was indeed natural, to bring to their remembrance the great topics which he had set forth amongst them when he appeared at Corinth as an apostle of Jesus Christ.—“I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.” He then introduces that short but clear abstract of the fundamental part of his doctrine, which composes our present text; and he introduces it with this remarkable preface:—“I delivered unto you *first of all*.” This was the first thing I taught you—intimating that this is the fundamental and great essential of the Christian

system. In correspondence with which declaration you will find that the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and what appeared to be, and what is, a plain and undisputed inference from it, that God will fulfil his promise by raising up us also at the last day, were in reality the articles of information to mankind which the apostles carried with them wherever they went; what they first disclosed to their converts, as the groundwork of all their addresses, as the cause and business of their coming amongst them, as the sum indeed and substance of what they were bound to deliver, or their disciples to believe. In proof of this, I desire it to be particularly remarked, that when the apostles, at Peter's suggestion, chose out from the followers of Christ a new apostle in the place of Judas, the great qualification insisted upon in that choice was that he should be one who had accompanied the other apostles at the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst them, that he might be, together with them, a witness of his resurrection: This circumstance shows that what they regarded as the proper office and business of an apostle was, to testify to the world from their own knowledge, and the evidence of their own senses, that he whom they preached had died, been buried, and was raised up again from the dead. After this transaction, the first preaching of Christianity to the public at large, to those, I mean, who had not professed themselves the followers of Christ during his lifetime, was after the descent of the Holy Ghost,



upon the day of Pentecost. Upon this occasion, in the presence of a great multitude who had then resorted to Jerusalem from all quarters of the world, whom the noise of this miracle had gathered together, Saint Peter, with the rest of the apostles standing about him, delivered a discourse, of which the sum and substance was briefly this—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." The same thing may be observed of two discourses held at Jerusalem by Saint Peter a short time afterwards: one upon curing the lame man at the gate of the Temple; the other upon his miraculous deliverance from prison. Christ's resurrection from the dead, and the solemn attestation of the fact, was the theme and subject of both discourses. Follow the apostles to any new place in which their discourses are recorded, and you will find this same thing the stress and constant burthen of their preaching. When Peter was called in so remarkable a manner to open the knowledge of the Gospel to Cornelius and his friends, the intelligence with which he gratified the eager expectation of his audience was this brief but surprising history—"Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead;" When Paul and Barnabas, a short time afterwards, had been solemnly appointed to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles, and for that purpose had set out upon a progress through the Lesser Asia, the most popu-

lous and frequented country of the East, the first public address which Saint Paul is recorded to have delivered was at Antioch in Pisidia, of which this was the message—"We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again."

After much journeying from place to place, for the purpose of diffusing wherever he went the Christian faith, we find his travels at length brought him to Athens, at that time the metropolis, in some measure, of science and learning. We cannot help being curious to know what the apostle would say there; how he would first unfold his extraordinary message to an audience of philosophers. Accordingly his speech upon this remarkable occasion is preserved; in which he first reminds them of the great topics of natural religion, (which we at this day call the unity, omniscience, omnipotence, and infinity or ubiquity of God), all which their own researches might have taught them; and then proceeds to disclose that which was the proper business of his preaching, the great revelation which he was going about the world to communicate:—"God now commandeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed him a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead."

Whenever a set speech of the apostle's at a new

place is recorded, that is, whenever he first opens the great affair of Christianity to strangers (and not where he is addressing those who have been before instructed), the great argument of his discourse is the resurrection; and therefore we are authorised to conclude in those other places where his speeches are not particularly given, that to preach the Gospel, to preach Jesus, to preach the word,—which they are said to have done wherever they came,—meant the advancing of the great fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and the decisive proof which they considered it as affording of a general resurrection at the last day. It was in perfect conformity, therefore, with Saint Paul's practice, as well as with that of the rest of the apostles, that he reminds the Corinthians of his having declared to them this doctrine *first of all*. His ministry amongst them began with it; and not only the most important, but the corner-stone and foundation of all the rest.

But secondly, the apostle tells the Corinthians that he had delivered to them what he himself had received. Saint Paul's knowledge of the Gospel came to him in a manner perfectly peculiar. "I neither," says he, in his epistle to the Galatians, "received it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

It does not, I think, appear that Saint Paul, like the other apostles, knew Christ during his lifetime, or that he had ever seen him. The necessary information concerning this great transaction was im-

parted to him by inspiration, at the time probably that he was miraculously converted. He was assured that it was not an illusion which played upon his fancy; because he was assured of a real public external miracle, which accompanied the reception of this knowledge.

But whatever certainty a divine communication might convey to himself, he was very sensible that it was not the most direct and satisfactory proof to others of a matter of fact, which was capable of being attested by the evidence of men's senses. He therefore does not rest the point upon the communication which he had received, but appeals to what was less questionable by others—the testimony of those who had conversed with Jesus after his resurrection, in the ordinary and natural way of human perception. His account of the matter is very full and circumstantial:—“He was seen of Cephas (which was the name, you remember, that Christ had given to Peter), then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles.” These words are very memorable. A fairer, a more public or candid appeal to the evidence of a fact was never made. Not content with saying in general terms, that he was seen of many; that he was seen of his disciples; he gives the names of two eminent brethren who saw him—men both perfectly well known by reputation, at least, and to many, it

is probable, personally known in the several churches of Christians : and not only so, but men living at the time. He names Peter ; to whose history and character they could be no strangers. He mentions James ; at that time presiding over the church in Jerusalem. He names the twelve ; all well known, by fame, at least, and report, to every Christian convert : and then he refers to “ above five hundred brethren who saw him at one time, of whom the greater part remain unto this present ;” that is, were upon the spot, being witnesses of the fact at the time the epistle was written. He proceeds, in the last place, with great humility to state his own personal assurance of the same fact, by telling them, that—not then, indeed, but some time afterwards—Christ was seen of *him* also. He alludes, no doubt, to Christ’s appearing to him at his conversion, upon his road to Damascus. Accounting, as he well might, the ocular manifestation of Christ raised from the dead as one of the greatest favours that could be vouchsafed, he observes, that whilst all the other apostles were indulged with this satisfaction during Christ’s abode upon earth, it was not granted to him until some considerable time afterwards.

This difference, he acknowledges, was no more than just and due ; inasmuch as he had rendered himself unworthy of the name and character of an apostle ; not simply by being an unbeliever in Christ’s word, but by going about with a furious and mistaken zeal to persecute all who called upon his name ;

“last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time, who am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

What is necessary to remark concerning the separate clauses of the text is in a little compass. Saint Paul says that Christ died for our sins, *according to the Scriptures*. The Scriptures here meant were the prophecies of the Old Testament, which describe the future history of Christ. One of these, amongst many which are more indirect, speaks the circumstance of Christ dying for our sins so plainly, that Saint Paul probably had it now in his thoughts—“He was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquity; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.” This you read in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, written seven hundred years before Christ appeared.

Our apostle proceeds: “and that he was buried, and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.” The circumstance of his burial is particularly noticed in the same prophecy; which gave occasion probably to Saint Paul’s mention of it in this place. “He made,” saith Isaiah, “his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.” The more important fact of his resurrection is both set forth by necessary implication in Isaiah’s prophecy; for he says of Christ, “when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days;” and was also un-

derstood by the apostles to be represented by those words of the sixteenth Psalm, in which David, speaking as they interpreted it, in the person of the Messiah, says, "Thou shalt not leave my soul in hell, nor wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption." The apostle then, in order to establish the reality of Christ's resurrection, enumerates several of his appearances after it. And in comparing this account with the other accounts of Christ's appearance given in the Gospels, we are carefully to remember that none of them undertook or intended to describe all the occasions or all the instances in which Christ was seen. Christ appeared on various occasions, and one history relates what passed upon one occasion, and another what passed upon a different occasion. This produces, as might be expected, considerable variation in the accounts, yet without contradiction or inconsistency. "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." This exactly agrees with Luke's narrative: "Then the eleven were gathered together, saying the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." After this, Saint Paul tells us, "he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once." This number is not specified in any of the Gospels; nevertheless, there is nothing to hinder us from supposing this number might be present at some of the appearances recorded in these Gospels. It is generally supposed to have been at his solemn predicted appearance upon the mountain in Galilee. One circumstance is common to all the different

accounts of the resurrection; namely, that he appeared to none but his disciples; and however the unbelieving Jews might cavil at this circumstance at the time, I think the fair and explicit mention of it is to us at this day a strong confirmation of the truth of the history. It manifests the candour and exactness of the historians. Had they thought themselves at liberty to carve and mould the account, so as to make it pass most plausible and current with the public; had they not conceived of themselves as relating the truth, they could as easily have stated of Christ that he was seen indiscriminately by all, as have confessed, (which they have done), that his appearance was confined to his own followers. We may not at this time know the exact reasons which determined our blessed Lord to make the distinction. It is enough to know that Peter and James, and the eleven apostles, and the Galilean women, and the five hundred brethren, were abundantly sufficient to testify a fact in which they could not be mistaken.

Having observed thus much upon the terms in which Saint Paul delivers his testimony to the resurrection of Christ, it remains in the next place to consider the authority and weight of the testimony itself. Here then, we see a man of learning and education; amongst the first of his countrymen in activity, eloquence, and ability; hardly equalled by any other, as appears not by any commendations bestowed upon him by those of his own persuasion; but from his writings, which are now in our hands:



—we have this man, after being distinguished in the early part of his life by his fierce and eager persecution of the Christian name, now spending his whole time in travelling from country to country, from city to city throughout the most civilized and populous region of the world, to announce wherever he came this important intelligence; that Jesus Christ, a man sent by God into the world for the instruction and salvation of mankind, after having been executed by the Jews as a malefactor, was publicly raised from the dead; that he himself had seen him after his resurrection; that many others whom he names, to whom he appeals, and with whom he conversed and associated, had done the same: that in consequence of this stupendous event, they were each one to look for his own resurrection at the last day; that they were to conduct and prepare themselves accordingly. See this man in the prosecution of his purpose, enduring every hardship, encountering every danger, sacrificing his pleasures, his ease, his safety, in order to bring men to the knowledge of this fact, and, by virtue of that knowledge, to the practice of holiness. Now this is the question, Hath ever any falsehood been supported by testimony like this?

Falsehoods, we confess, have found their way into conversation, into tradition, into books: but is an example to be produced of a man voluntarily undertaking a life of pain, of toil, of ignominy, of incessant fatigue, of continual peril, of want, of hardship; sub-

mitting to the loss of home, of country, of friends—to stripes and stoning, to imprisonment and death; for the sake of carrying about a story of what was false, and of what, if false, he must have known to be so?

What then shall we say to these things? If it be true that Christ is risen, then undoubtedly it is true that we shall live again in a new state.

Christ, we are told, “hath abolished death,” yet men still die. What, then, is the change whereof we boast? Death is so different a thing, according as it is regarded as the destruction of our existence, or only as a transition to some other stage of it, that, when revelation affords us solid ground for viewing it in this latter aspect, death is said by that revelation to be abolished, to be done away, to reign—to exist—no more.

Still farther; if it be not only by the intervention of Christ that the knowledge of this is discovered to mankind, but by his power and agency that the thing itself is effected; if it be his mighty working, which is to change our vile bodies, which is to produce the great renovation that we look for; then is it more literally and strictly true, that by death he hath destroyed him that hath the power of death.

“Men (saith the epistle to the Hebrews), through the fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage:” and well they might! It held them in constant terror; it was a fixed load upon the spirits; it damped the satisfaction, it exasperated the miseries

of life. From that bondage we are delivered. New hopes are inspired, new prospects are unfolded; the virtuous enjoyments of life we possess here—an exceeding and eternal weight of glory we expect hereafter. Are we prosperous and fortunate? Instead of beholding the period of human prosperity with perpetual dread, we have it in our power to make it the commencement of a new series of never-failing pleasures, of purer and better joys. Does the hand of adversity lie heavy upon us? we see before us a reward in heaven for patience, for submission, for trials, for sufferings; and, what is still more important, what is infinitely so—when that hour which is coming shall come, when we find the enjoyments of life slipping from under us, when we feel ourselves loosening from the world, and infirmity and decay gathering fast around us, we have then an anchor of hope, a rock of confidence, a place of refuge: we are then able to commit our souls to the custody of a faithful Creator, knowing, as Saint Paul speaks, in whom we have believed; being persuaded that he is able to keep that which we commit unto him against that day. We shall rise again: but unto what? They that have done good, to the resurrection of life; they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. How tremendous is the alternative; what an event, what a prospect is this to look forward to! If all this be true; if the hour of judgement will certainly come to pass; what manner of men, as the apostle asks, ought we to be—what manner of lives ought we to

lead; seeing, as he expresses it, we have such a cloud of witnesses, such a hope, such a notice and revelation of the things which will befall us! Is it possible, that these things can ever be out of our thoughts? Is it possible that being there they can allow us to sin? He is gone up on high; he hath led captivity captive: he is in glory. Hear what the angels said to the astonished apostles: "In like manner as ye see him ascend up into heaven, ye shall see him come down again from heaven. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" but oh! mayest thou find us in some degree prepared, not indeed to await the severity of thy justice, but to be made objects of thy mercy: prepared by penitence and humility, by prayer, by a desire and study to learn thy will; by what is still more, the return and conversion of our hearts to thee, manifested by a quick and constant fear of offending; by a love of thy laws, thy name, thy Scriptures, thy religion; by sincere, though interrupted, it is to be feared, and imperfect, yet by sincere endeavours to obey thy universal will.

## VIII.

## EASTER-DAY.

ACTS XIII. 29, 30, 31.

*And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre: but God raised him from the dead; and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are witnesses unto this people.*

THE resurrection of Jesus Christ was on this wise. He had frequently, during the course of his ministry, foretold his own resurrection on the third day from his death—sometimes in parables, sometimes in plain terms. In parables, as when, pointing to his body, he said to the Jews, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again;” and upon another occasion, “No sign shall be given you but the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

At other times he foretold the same thing in direct terms: “While they abode in Galilee, Jesus said

unto them, the Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again." And at various other times he declared thus to his disciples.

The Jews, who had come to the knowledge of this declaration, did not, I suppose, give any credit to it, but thought that it might put it into the heads of his disciples to attempt the stealing of his body out of the grave, in order to give colour to the report that he was risen as he had foretold. With this story the chief priests and pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said whilst he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again; command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead." Pilate, upon this application, which probably he judged a very unnecessary caution, ordered them to close up and seal the door of the sepulchre, and place a guard to watch it.

With respect to the apostles and disciples themselves, they hardly seem to have known what to make of it. They scarcely believed or understood our Lord when he had talked of rising from the dead. The truth is, they retained to the last the notion which both they and all the Jews held, that the true Christ, when he appeared, would set up an empire upon earth, and make the Jews the masters of the world. Now when, by his death, they saw an end

put to all such expectations, they were totally at a loss what to think. "We trusted," said one, then in a sort of despair of the cause, "that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel;" that is, from the bondage their country was then in to the Roman people.

Yet these despairing reflections were mixed with some kind of confused notion that all was not yet over. "Besides all this," said the same disciple, "to-day is the third day since these things were done;" which shows that they bore in mind something that he had said of his rising the third day. In this situation of the affair, the Jews feared nothing but that his disciples should steal the body. His disciples, disheartened and perplexed—at a loss what to do, or what they were to look for next—in this disposition, I say, of all parties, mark what came to pass. Some women, early in the morning as of this day, went to the sepulchre with no other intention than to embalm the body with some spices they had prepared, when, to their astonishment and surprise, they found the guards fallen down in fright, the sepulchre open, the body gone, and the clothes it was wrapped in left in their place. They ran back, as was natural, to give his disciples this strange account. Peter and John, the two first they met with, hastened instantly to the sepulchre, and in the mean time, Jesus himself appeared to them: first to the women, then to two of the disciples, then to the eleven apostles all together; afterwards, upon

different occasions, to the apostles and other disciples on the evening of the fourth day after his resurrection; and upon one occasion, as St. Paul relates, "to five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part," says he, "remain to this present," *i. e.* are still living. In one of these appearances he upbraided them, as well he might, for their unbelief and hardness of heart, in not believing those who made the report of his resurrection, and had first seen him after he was risen. On another occasion he bade them handle his body, that they might be convinced it was not, as they had suspected, a spirit which they saw; for "a spirit hath not," says he, "flesh and bones as ye see me have." At other times he was still more circumstantial. Thomas, one of the apostles, happened, it seems, to be absent when he first appeared to the disciples assembled together; and though they all assured him they had seen the Lord, so incredulous was he, that he declared, unless he saw him himself, and not only saw him, but also felt and examined the very marks of the wounds which were given him upon the cross, he would not be convinced. It pleased Christ, for the satisfaction of those who came after, to indulge Thomas in this demand; and when he appeared unto them at their next meeting, he called Thomas to him: "Reach hither," says he, "thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing."

You need not be told that, after forty days, during



which time he occasionally appeared to his disciples, he was, in the sight of the eleven apostles (for the twelfth was Judas the traitor), lifted up into heaven, and the clouds received him out of their sight. It will be proper to return and take notice of the conduct of the Jews upon this occasion. The watch, which they had placed to guard the sepulchre, came into the city and showed to the chief priests the things that were done. "When they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, say ye, his disciples came by night and stole him away; and if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and secure you." So they took the money, and did as they were taught; "and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews," says Matthew, "unto this day."

Now there are some marks of truth in this relation, which, though both obvious and considerable, may perhaps escape you, if you have not heard them mentioned. There are, you will perceive, if you read the narrative, some variations in the accounts of the evangelists, principally arising from one history relating one circumstance, and another, another; when, in truth, both circumstances took place. For example: Christ appeared at many different times. St. Matthew relates what passed at one appearance, St. Luke at another, St. John at a third; and so it must needs happen that their relations will be different, though not at all contradictory. But what, after

all, do these variations, or, if you will, inconsistencies, prove? Why, they prove to demonstration, that the writers of the Gospel did not combine or lay their heads together to fill up a story for the public, but that each wrote according to his memory, information, and judgement, without any scheme or contrivance amongst themselves to make their stories tally and correspond. There are always variations, and often contradictions, where witnesses are without communication and independent of one another; and if there be not, it conveys a strong surmise that they are prepared with a made-up story, constructed and connected amongst themselves beforehand. It is not said, you may likewise remember, that Christ appeared after his resurrection to any but his own disciples. Unbelievers, Jews especially, lay hold of this circumstance. He ought (for so they speak) to have appeared openly to the Jews—to enemies as well as friends. His confining his appearances to his friends and followers is, as they would intimate, suspicious. Now what were Christ's reasons for refusing his appearance to the unbelieving Jews we may not know. It is just like inquiring why he did not come down from the cross when they called upon him to do so. It might be fitting to withhold this last proof from those who had so shamefully and obstinately resisted and abused every other proof he had given in evidence of the resurrection, and might be designed for the instruction, comfort, and support of his followers, to whom it was necessary (for they

could not stir a step without it), rather than for the conviction of the unbelieving Jews, inhabitants of Jerusalem, who had abundant evidence before, if they would have attended to it. And then, whether this was the reason, or whatever was the reason, it proves the sincerity and candour of the four evangelists, who have given the history. They would have said that Christ appeared to the Jews; and, had they thought themselves at liberty to have carved the story as they pleased, in order to make it plausible and probable, no doubt they would have said so. The objection that would be made to their present accounts was obvious; and nothing but a strict adherence to truth, and disposition to relate them honestly as they were, whether they made for them or against them, would have induced them to lay themselves open to their objection. Forgeries of all kinds take care to guard against objection; and we are apt to overdo it with cautious exactness.

With respect to the resurrection itself, as I have collected it briefly out of the four evangelists, you will observe, in the first place, that Christ had publicly foretold his own resurrection at the precise time of it—the third day from his death. This he would not have done, had any imposition been intended, because it was giving the public notice to be upon their guard, and look to themselves that they were not imposed upon. It *had* also this effect; for they did accordingly take such precautions as they thought most secure. Then, foretelling of his resurrection

must likewise have ruined his cause for ever, if it had not actually come to pass.

Not very many years ago, there appeared in this country a set of bold and wild enthusiasts called French prophets. They found means to draw after them a considerable party, till at length they had the confidence to give out that one of their teachers should, at a certain time and place, publicly rise from the dead. The time and place being thus known beforehand, many of all sorts attended. What was the effect? No resurrection being actually accomplished, they and their prophecies were blasted together. And the same thing must have happened to Christ and his followers, had he had not actually risen; for the two cases are in this respect pretty parallel.

Another way of considering this history is this. I think it manifest that the body of Jesus was missing out of the sepulchre. Thus much may be taken for granted, not merely on the credit of the Gospels, but from the nature of the transaction. It is certain, and allowed by all, that the followers of Christ did, after his death, fully preach and assert that he was risen from the dead, and this they did at Jerusalem. Now if the Jews had the dead body of Jesus to produce, while his disciples were preaching that he was risen from the dead, how ready and complete a refutation would it have been of all their pretensions! It must have exposed them in a moment to the derision and scorn of all who heard them.

This being so, we may be very sure that the Jews had not the body forthcoming, as there cannot be a doubt but they would have made this use of it if they could have found it. Allowing, then, the body to be missing, the next question seems to be, whether it was stolen away, as the Jews pretended, by his disciples, or miraculously raised out of the sepulchre, as we maintain. The Jewish story, if you attend to it, is charged with numerous absurdities and improbability. The watch gave out that, while they slept, the disciples stole the body. This watch were Roman soldiers, remarkable for their military discipline and strictness. For a Roman soldier to sleep upon his post was punished, we know, with death. Is it credible, that they should sleep—all of them at this particular time—the third day after his death of all other times? The story carries improbability upon the face of it. Nor is it more likely that the disciples of Christ, dispirited and discouraged by their master's fate, should think of such an attempt as stealing away the body—an attempt likely to be soon detected, and which, if detected, was sure to ruin and confound them for ever. Could they expect to find the guards asleep? Could they hope to escape the vigilance of those who were to answer for it with their lives? Now by the same rule that the Jewish story of the body's being stolen is improbable, the apostles' account of its being raised from the dead is probable, because missing out of the sepulchre it certainly was; and if it could not

be conveyed away by actual means, it must have been removed by a miracle. I thought this circumstance fit to be attended to in confirmation of the apostles' testimony; though, to say the truth, the testimony of the apostles to the resurrection of Christ needs neither this nor any other circumstance to confirm it; for where men lay down their lives, as many of them did, in support of an assertion which they must know whether it was true or false, it was an unaccountable piece of misplaced incredulity not to believe.

In reading the New Testament, especially the Acts of the Apostles, you must have observed what a great stress the apostles in their preaching laid upon the fact of the resurrection: more, by much, than upon any other miracle Christ wrought, or indeed than all. When they chose a successor in the place of Judas, it was to be one, as St. Peter says, to be witness with him of his resurrection. This also was what Peter rested upon in his first and second discourse to the Jews, and in his preaching to Cornelius; and there is reason to believe that it was what he bore with him, and laid the main stress upon, wherever he went.

In like manner, Paul, at Antioch and Athens, and some other places, delivers long discourses to the people, of which, however, the resurrection of Christ was the burthen and substance; and that this was his custom, may be collected from what he writes to the Corinthians. "I delivered unto you first of all

that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day." The reason of which was, that they considered the resurrection of Christ as a direct and decisive proof of their own resurrection at the last day. Without doubt if it pleased God willingly to give mankind the plainest possible argument of his intention to raise them up at the last, we cannot imagine any more satisfactory than his raising up a dead man before their eyes. St. Paul was so struck with this proof, that he thought no man could resist. "If Christ be risen, how then say some among you" (that is, how are any among you so absurd as to say), "there is no resurrection?"

Let us lay these things to heart. If Christ be risen, of which we have proof that cannot deceive us, then most certainly will the day arrive when all that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth. We shall arise indeed—but to what? "They that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, but glory, honour, and peace to every one that worketh good."

## IX.

## ON CONFIRMATION.

## MARK X. 17.

*And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*

THE question which was here asked our Saviour; "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" comprehends the whole of religion. He that can tell me this, tells me every thing. All knowledge and all faith is but to ascertain this one great point.

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is a question which there is no man or woman living, one would suppose, but must have thought upon. In the height and vigour of health and spirits; when every night brings rest, and every morning joy; when pleasures, new and fresh, are continually presenting themselves to the imagination; it is possible to be so in love with this world, as to forget, or rather wilfully to shut our eyes against the thoughts that it is ever to have an end. But this round of festivity and delight is not every man's portion, nor any man's portion



long. The amusements of life flag and slacken. Vexations and disappointments teach us that they are not to be relied upon. We pursue them with the eagerness of a child who is chasing a butterfly; and who, when he has caught it, finds that he is only grasping painted dust. We find that something more solid than mere diversion and sport must be attended to, to make even the present life comfortable and satisfactory. When we once grow serious, the most awful of all reflections opens itself full before our eyes, namely, that our interests and pleasures and prospects here will soon be finished; that we have another, and a far greater, concern to take care of. There is, we acknowledge, a period of man's life, about the time of his coming to manhood, when, himself and his acquaintance being all young and strong, he, for a course of perhaps nine or ten years, sees little alteration in the world about him. All things appear to stand firm. His enjoyments and connexions seem secure and stedfast. Instances of the fickleness of human affairs happen, but none which reach him. He is not yet admonished by experience, the only lesson which many will attend to, that this world is not the place to set up our staff in; and that we are called upon by the events of life, which is the voice of God himself, to look beyond it. However this season, so flattering to thoughtlessness, is of short duration. In the course of no great number of years, the most happy and fortunate have examples brought home to them of the uncertainty of every earthly de-

pendence. Their acquaintance drop off; their friends and equals and companions go down into the grave; instances of mortality take place in their own families, or immediately before their eyes. Decay, and change, and death press upon them on all sides, and in a thousand shapes; the scene of the world moves and shifts; the present generation he sees passing along, and soon to be swept away from off the face of the earth. Finding therefore this world to be no abiding place for any one; that, however it once smiled and delighted, its gay prospects are either gone or going, have either left us or are preparing to leave us: finding, I say, this; not taught it by others, but finding it out itself; the mind musing and meditating upon what is hereafter to become of it, into what new scene it shall next be introduced, is powerfully led to the inquiry which the words of the text present us with, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Diversion, or company, or hurry of business may keep this reflection for a while out of our thoughts; but in a silent hour or a wakeful night, in a solitary walk, or a pensive evening, it must and will come over our souls.

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" If there be any who have not yet asked themselves this grand question, let me assure them that the time will come, and that it will not be long before it comes, when it will be the only question in the world which they will think worth caring about at all: that, although they may try to remove it from their minds

at present, as being too awful for their spirits, they will soon come to know, that awful or not, it must be regarded, and inquired after, and searched into. It is, I think, a strong observation, that in managing our worldly affairs, we always consider ourselves as having an interest and concern after our deaths. Now it appears to me to be the very excess of unreasonableness and stupidity to be so careful and solicitous, so pleased and distressed as we are, about what is to take place after our deaths in this world, in which our existence then is only imaginary; and not to provide and look forward to our fate in the next world, where we are to be, where our interest is real and actual, where we shall ourselves feel, where we shall ourselves enjoy or suffer, the happiness or misery which our former conduct has brought upon us.

These observations are made in order to show the deep importance of the question which was proposed to our blessed Lord, and that it is a point which it is natural for every man and woman breathing to think upon most anxiously. I would next wish you to attend to the character and circumstances of the person who proposed the question; for that is a consideration of some consequence. If you read Saint Matthew's account of the transaction (xix. 20), you will find, that the person who addressed this question to our Saviour was a *young man*; and that is the circumstance in the history which I desire may be particularly taken notice of. The earnestness and anxiety

with which he sought to know what he was to do to inherit eternal life are most significantly expressed by the manner in which he presented himself to Christ : “ And there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life ? ” From what he had seen of our Saviour’s mighty works, and heard of his divine discourses, he seems to have been assured, that, if ever there was a person appeared in the world who could tell him what he was to do to be saved, our Saviour was that person. This was the question which hung and dwelt upon his mind ; and now that he had an opportunity of being informed and satisfied concerning it, he most eagerly and devoutly embraced it. “ He came running, and kneeled to him. ” Here therefore you have a youth, in the bloom and vigour of his age, in full possession of every thing which this world can give (for it appears that he was rich as well as young), solicitously searching after eternal life. He knew, that amidst all the pleasures of his age and station, amidst all the delights and recreations of youth, the salvation of his immortal soul was not to be forgotten or neglected ; nay, was the thing which stood before all other things, the business to be regarded with the deepest anxiety. This disposition was highly acceptable to our blessed Lord. “ Jesus beholding him, loved him ; ” that is, approved affectionately that pious serious temper of mind, which led a young man, in the midst of health and strength and pleasure,

to fix his thoughts upon the concerns of religion. And it is from this example, as well as from the supreme advantage of following it, that I would put it to the consciences of young persons of every rank and station of life, to take up religion *betimes*.

And there is a particular reason to young members of our church for giving attention to this matter at this time, because the bishop is about to hold a public confirmation, which is or ought to be a solemn initiation of young persons into the duties and hopes of a Christian. It is to be considered, with respect to religion, as a point for them to set off from upon their own bottom; as the line from which they start in the great race that is set before them; the term from which they may date their having their spiritual concerns in their own hands, and when it becomes their business to look to themselves and their behaviour, and begin that progress in virtue, which is the only course that can lead them, and which infallibly will lead them, to everlasting peace and rest and happiness in heaven. Such a point, such a term in a man's life, ought to be marked by some peculiar solemnity. And none seems better suited to the purpose, more becoming, or more affecting, than that ancient rite which Christ's church hath practised for a great many ages past, and which so many wise and good men, who have gone before us in the steps and ways of godliness, have left us to celebrate in the office of confirmation.

I have endeavoured to impress upon your atten-

tion; that the great question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" will one day be the only question we shall care about at all. I will now point out the happiness and wisdom of those who make it their care betimes, in their youth, and during the season of strength and activity. And I will admit that sentiments of religion are not the natural growth of youth, nor to be cherished without training and reflection. With us the case is rather different: the time of our life, or the state of our health, may have reminded most of us that our sojourning here cannot be long. But in youth, as I observed before, every thing wears the appearance of firmness and stability. The *appearance*, I say, for in truth, it is a delusion. What is the difference of ten or twenty years to eternity? What matters it to those who are dead, whether they died yesterday, last year, or many years ago; in youth, in manhood, or old age? What, in short, will it signify to us? Besides this, young persons are very much deceived in their calculations. The probability of life is not, as they suppose, in proportion to the shortness of our past years. Many distempers are peculiar to youth; many which are more dangerous at their time of life than at any other; many common to them with others, and quite as frequent amongst persons of their age as amongst persons of advanced years. Every day's experience proves, the very tombstones in the churchyard show, that whilst one, now and then, reaches three or four-score of years, which all young persons reckon upon

as a kind of certainty, and calculate upon having before them,—by far the greatest number are cut off at a much earlier period, and very many in the prime of their lives. There is no age that is safe, no constitution that is secure from the visitation of death; nay, the strongest men and women are more liable to inflammatory disorders than those who are weaker; and these disorders are more fatal to them than to persons in less vigorous health.

But the grand reason for setting forwards early in a religious course is undoubtedly this, namely, that according as a man sets out at first, his character most frequently is fixed for ever, for good or for bad. This is a most solemn consideration indeed, and the fact is so; I mean humanly and generally speaking. Such as is the youth, such is the man. And I further believe it to be true, and the same thing has been remarked by very wise observers of human nature, that the character seldom changes much after the middle of life. I say seldom; I do not say never; because I hold it always possible, with the assistance of God's grace, to put away our sins; and that that assistance may always be procured by sincere prayer and corresponding endeavours, forasmuch as whilst God spares life, he spares it, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come and turn to him." We therefore do not now talk of possibility (for who would trust to possibility in a matter which is of infinite moment?), we are speaking of probability as gathered from actual experience: and ex-

perience proves, that if a person go into a course of vice and irreligion, and hold on in that course through youth to manhood, and from the dawn of manhood towards the middle of life, he seldom changes it effectually. Whether it be owing to the strength of habit, or that the conscience loses its sensibility and timorousness, the fact is so; and the knowledge of this fact, when they are informed of it by those who would be very unwilling to impose upon them, ought at least to quicken the attention, or rather ought to alarm the fears of young persons, I mean persons from the age of fourteen or fifteen to that of twenty. They ought to consider themselves as at the crisis of their fate. They are arrived at the division of the road; and according as they turn to the right hand or to the left, they advance towards heaven, or draw nigh unto hell. A fearful consideration, and calculated, if any thing will do it, to make young people serious and earnest in their resolutions to set out right.

“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” was the question asked. The answer given was, “Keep the commandments.” What God’s commandments are, and how they are to be kept, you will for the most part know sufficiently; your conscience will not often fail of informing you. The point for you to endeavour, is to hold close to the dictates of conscience and the sense of duty, whatever passions, whatever inclinations, whatever allurements of pleasure strive to tempt and draw you aside from it; or



however much the invitation of companions or the example of the world might seem to afford encouragement for so doing. Keep constantly in your minds this short maxim : that resolution at your age for a few years, is probably to fix your character for life, and your fate for ever. Young men and young women, think not that it is too early to be religious. Take heed : for whether you would ensure yourselves against the greatest of all dangers, the danger of being cut off in the midst of your sins, from which no age, no health, no constitution is a security or protection ; whether you will take warning by the thousands and tens of thousands, who, having been drawn at an early age into vicious courses, have never all their lives got out of them ; whether you will credit those who have gone before you in the path of life, as to the danger of once yielding to temptations of sin, or will believe indeed your own eyes and observations as to the same thing ; whether you would avoid that bitter repentance, those sore struggles which every sinner must undergo before he can possibly bring himself back to the right way, which are always painful, and often it is to be feared unsuccessful, that is, are not sufficiently persisted in ; whether, finally, you hope to reach, as you proceed in life, that holiness of heart and temper which the steady practice of virtue produces, and which is sure of receiving from God a crown of proportionable glory and happiness in heaven : whichever of these considerations move and prompt you to a life of re-

ligion, begin it in time : hold fast your innocency : step into the right way. Look not aside to the guilty indulgences which many take delight in ; they will fail you, they will forsake you ; they will ruin you both soul and body, both your comforts in this world and your salvation in the next. Religion has great things in store for you ; it will fill you with peace and joy, and hope and courage to your latest moment ; and it will place you amongst the blessed in heaven, in the presence of your Father and Redeemer.

## X.

## THE DUTY OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

I COR. XI. 31.

*For if we would judge ourselves, we should not  
be judged.*

It is true that these words, together with the exhortation two verses before, "Let a man examine himself;" are spoken particularly of the Lord's supper. The Corinthians having strongly abused that institution, and lost sight of its religious nature entirely, St. Paul here bids them consider and reflect with themselves what they were about, what they were going upon, when they come together to eat the Lord's supper. I think, nevertheless, that these words may in the present day be taken in a general sense, because whatever reason there was for the Corinthians to examine themselves and judge themselves in relation to coming to the Sacrament, there is the same or greater reason for the duty in every other part or point of obligation in which we are apt to go wrong. St. Paul says, "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged;" but as a man cannot judge without first examining himself and making a search into his own heart, I shall take oc-

casation from these words to treat of the duty of self-examination, in which duty there are three things to be considered ; its use, its neglect, and the seasons for it.

Now as to its use—for it is seldom a pleasant task, and therefore, unless useful, one would decline it—the end of all religion is a good life ; but a good life is no such easy thing to be compassed. We stand in need of all the aids and helps which we can procure either from religion or our own reason. Experience proves that they are all often too little. Now of all the instrumental parts of religion, there is none in its nature so likely—none that in fact, I believe, does influence men's behaviour so effectually, as this one of self-examination ; as it is in the first place a man's own doing—what the man does for himself. And in religion, as in many other things in the world, what a man does for himself is of much more avail than what others do, or can do for him. In every religious ordinance, in baptism, in the Lord's supper, in public worship, in reading, in hearing, there is the ministry of others ; but in the business of self-examination, every man is his own minister. He must do it for himself and not another. The other services may be perhaps gone through with a small share of thought and attention ; but this is properly and entirely the business of thought.

Secondly ; self-examination, from the nature of it, is private—which is a circumstance of consequence. I do not mean to dispute or undervalue the use or

obligation of public worship, or of public ordinances; but I do say, that for influence and effect upon a man's self, there is nothing comparable to what passes in private. There is no hypocrisy, for there is no one to see you. There is no restraint; no being tied down to forms, which, be they ever so good, cannot reach every man's private and particular circumstances. There is nothing to disturb or take off your attention. For which reason the impression is always the deepest which a man fastens upon himself in his own meditations. But upon the subject of the use of self-examination, the fact itself may be relied upon; for I believe that it may be said of self-examination with the same truth that it was said of prayer—that self-examination will either make us leave off sinning, or sin will make us leave off self-examination. It is an exercise, which, if honestly persisted in, will make the worst man in the world grow better; consequently, the generality of us, who are mixed characters, composed of some good with a great deal of bad, will be sure of amending and improving ourselves by it. Our good properties will be strengthened and increased, and our bad ones gradually got rid of.

I have said that any sinful course, if not got the better of, makes a man tired of self-examination. It perfectly resembles a case which is common enough in life. When a man's worldly affairs go wrong, when they grow perplexed and involved, and are become desperate and irretrievable, we can never

find that they look into their books, or try to settle their accounts: people in these circumstances have been known never to have looked into a book, or kept an account, for years before they failed. Now I would ask whether their affairs went on the better for never looking into—whether the danger was the less for shutting their eyes against it—whether they were longer before they failed—whether they failed in less debts, or whether people were more lenient towards them, or whether their friends were the better for their conduct? and I would also ask whether, if it had been possible to have retrieved their fortunes, it would have been done any other way than by taking up and searching into their accounts? Now this case and that of a sinner are perfectly similar; except in one circumstance, that a man's worldly affairs are often so far deranged, that no future care or diligence could restore them; whereas the sinner's condition is never desperate, while there is life.

This is all to show the use of self-examination. The next inquiry is into the proper subject of it. And upon this head I shall confine myself to a small part of what might be delivered, in order that this small part may be remembered. Now every one that has attended at all to mankind has observed, and very justly, that the better part of both our virtues and vices are habits—that it is the habit of this or that sort of behaviour or discourse; and not one or two, or a few single acts of virtue or of vice, which constitute the character. The truth is, we are all

the servants of our habits—governed much more by habit than by reason, or argument, or reflection; that is to say, ten actions of our lives spring from habit, for one that proceeds from deliberation. There is no living in the world without falling into habits. Since then we must fall into some habit or other, and since our moral character, our good or bad life, and by consequence, our happiness or misery hereafter, depend upon the choice and formation of our habits, upon the good or bad ones getting possession of us, it leaves the chief and principal business of self-examination to *watch our habits*, to mark what evil custom is growing upon us, to descry the first setting in of a vicious habit, and break it off before it becomes strong and inveterate. The management of our habits is all in all—the end of religion, and the great business of life: and as these are to be managed only when they are young and pliant, at least ordinarily speaking, it becomes of the last importance from time to time to review our conduct, to seek out what new habit is stealing upon us—whether it is fit or not to be tolerated; if not, then we know our enemy, and we know our work; we know in what quarter to keep watch, and where to turn our force and resolution. A man who does not do regularly something of this sort, but thinks it unnecessary or too troublesome, will find himself entangled, before he is conscious of it, in some pernicious habit or other, which he will live to lament as the greatest calamity of his life, but possibly may

never live to break through. When a Christian retires, therefore, to the business of self-examination, I will suppose his first care will be to inquire and look back upon the state of his habits—to inquire how it stands with them—whether growing better or growing worse—what new ones are stealing upon him—whether he has been able of late to manage and discipline the old ones. Now it may give a sort of method to his examination, to remind him that there are habits of acting, habits of speaking, and habits of thinking; and that these all must be taken into the account and estimated. In his habits of acting, such for example as drunkenness, he will ask himself whether his excesses of late in that way have been more or less frequent; whether his ardour after such indulgences be not grown stronger than he remembers it to have been. If he finds the inquiry turning out against him, that such a habit is insensibly advancing, though ever so slowly, upon him, as I said before, he knows his enemy and his business—he knows that if he does not get the better of such a habit in its infancy, it will be in vain to contend with it when fastened and confirmed. He may repeat the same process with respect to all other licentious vices—whether he has fled from opportunity and temptation, or whether he has not courted and sought out for them—whether he has the command and mastery of his passions, or they of him—whether the guilt and danger, and final consequence of any criminal pursuit are as much in his



thoughts as formerly, or less, or at all—whether the remorse and accusation of his conscience be not wearing away by such arguments as are to be found in justification of them, only by practising a little self-deceit. If a man deal faithfully with himself, he will learn the truth of his spiritual condition, and where in any respect he finds matters growing worse, there, if he have his salvation at heart, he will take the alarm, and apply all the diligence, and all the resolution he is possessed of. When he has done with the class of licentious vices, he may turn to the class of mercenary vices—whether his self-interest and worldly concerns be not more in his mind than any thing else, and whether it is not more and more there—whether over-reaching tricks and contrivances are not more frequent with him than heretofore, and less thought of—whether he be not sliding into some unlawful dishonest course of gain, of unfair dealing, or of unfair concealment—whether he has been able to forego profit for conscience sake—in a word, whether his honesty has stood firm and upright. And let him apply to these inquiries that very just and affecting observation of St. John: “If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.”

But as there are habits of acting, so are there habits of speaking; habits of lying, which is as much a habit as any one thing I can mention; of slander, which is as often habit as it is malice, or (more properly speaking) though it begins in malice, it soon be-

comes so habitual as to be almost involuntary. There are habits of captiousness, ingenious in perverting what others say—of censoriousness, unable to discover or acknowledge a favourable point in any character except those of our own party, or to speak candidly of any thing in any person. These are all the effects of habit, and the point is to perceive when the habit is setting in. Now the circumstance which discovers this, is when any fault of any sort happens to have been committed oftener than before, and when it is each time committed with less and less uneasiness, then is it time to look to this point of our character. But thirdly, as there are habits of acting and speaking, so are there those of thinking. These habits are of all others the hardest to be rectified—for the imagination can draw upon her own fund when she pleases, without waiting for opportunity or assistance. Her wanderings are under no control of other persons, because they cannot be known by them. They do not break forth into outward acts; so we practise them almost without knowing it. They creep upon us insensibly. We think only to indulge a momentary pleasure; till by frequent repetitions it grows into a habit, rendering us incapable of entertaining any other subject whenever the humour sets in for that. The thing is, that vanity, pride, ambition, covetousness, romantic schemes of pleasure, ruinous projects, revenge or lust, take so strong hold upon us, that those operate most powerfully and involuntarily upon our thoughts. One great part, therefore,

of self-examination, is to watch over our thoughts, and the moment we perceive any bad trains of thinking beginning to form in our imagination, to break them off forthwith, by refusing to entertain them—by avoiding such objects as are likely to foment them, and, above all other rules, to occupy our thoughts closely some other way; for, assure yourselves, criminal thoughts sooner or later break out into pernicious and extravagant actions.

The watching of our habits is what I would lay out as the business of self-examination—not perhaps the sole business, but the most important business, because most conducive to a good life.

The last point to be considered is the seasons for this duty. Those of leisure and reflection, of a serious and contemplative turn, may possibly want no directions or no certain occasions for this duty. Their thoughts of themselves naturally and frequently turn to such subjects. But they who are engaged in business, or who mix with the bustle of the world, young persons in high health and spirits, poor persons taken up with daily labours, rich persons occupied in rounds of diversion and company—these all must form to themselves stated seasons for this duty, or they will not perform it at all. It is to be hoped we have many of us our reasons for private prayer. Self-examination will properly accompany our private devotions, if not always, at least sometimes, and at some stated times. Sunday is with all of us a day of cessation from business and from

our ordinary diversions : public worship takes up only a part of the day—there is always time enough to spare for this important concern.

The return of the sacrament is a fit opportunity for such an exercise.

I have only to add, that the business of self-examination, like every business of importance, should be gone about when the mind and spirits are calm, firm, and cheerful. There is great uncertainty in what is done under the impression of some fright, or state of affliction ; when the thoughts are hurried and disturbed, and the spirits sunk and overwhelmed,

Self-examination is a serious, but not a melancholy business. No one need let his spirits sink under it, or enter upon it with terror and dejection ; because, let a man's spiritual condition turn out upon inquiry ever so bad, he has it always in his power to mend it ; and because when the amendment is begun and goes on, every examination of himself affords fresh matter of comfort, hope, and satisfaction.

## XI.

## SACRAMENT.

1 COR. XI. 26.

*As oft as ye eat of this bread and drink of this cup,  
ye do show the Lord's death till he come.*

THERE are some opinions, concerning the Sacrament of the Lord's supper, which are very deserving of consideration, as they are the means either of deterring Christians from coming to it, or making them uneasy in their minds after it; or, lastly, as they sometimes lead men to abuse this institution to the purposes of vice and profligacy, which is by far the worst of all.

There are many errors in religion, which having no bad effect upon a man's life or conduct, it is not necessary to be solicitous in correcting. A man may live in such like errors as these without prejudice, we humbly hope, to his happiness or salvation. But when errors in opinion lead to errors in practice, when our notions affect our behaviour, it then becomes the duty of every Christian, and especially of every teacher of Christianity, to set these notions right, as far as it is in his power.

Many persons entertain a scruple about coming to the sacrament, on account of what they read in the 11th chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, concerning the unworthy receiving of it. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself;" surely, they say, it is better to keep away from the Lord's supper altogether than to incur the risk of so terrible a sentence. And who, they will ask, can know that he is safe from it? Who will be bold enough to say that he eats and drinks worthily—who, however, that is conscious of many defects and imperfections—who that has made so imperfect preparation for it—and what is worse, who is so liable to forget it all, and relapse again into his former course of life? Now there are two sorts of persons who profess this scruple. There are your heartless, indifferent Christians, who are glad of any reason to get rid of their duty, and who, because this seems a sort of excuse from coming to the sacrament, take up with it without farther inquiry, or any sincere concern, indeed, about the matter.

Besides these, there are also many serious and well-meaning Christians who have been much and really affected by this text; and who have been either kept away, as I said before, from the Communion, or much disturbed and distressed in their minds about it. Now none but sincere and pious people have these scruples, and therefore the utmost tenderness and indulgence are due to them; even where there is less

foundation for them than there appears to be in the present case. For the ease, therefore, and satisfaction of all such, I will endeavour, in this discourse, to make out two points. 1st. That the unworthy eating and drinking, meant by St. Paul, is what we, at this time of day, can scarcely possibly be guilty of. 2d. That the *damnation* here spoken of means worldly punishment; or, as we say, judgement upon the offender in this world; and not everlasting perdition in the world to come, as the term *damnation* commonly signifies in our mouths.

First; I maintain that the eating and drinking, meant by St. Paul, is what we, at this time of day, can hardly be guilty of.

St. Paul, you observe, is not writing to all Christians in general, but to the Corinthians—to the Christian converts in that city. Now these converts, it should seem, had been guilty of some disorderly behaviour in the receiving of the Lord's supper, or, at least, at the time of receiving it. "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise ye not; that ye come together, not for the better but for the worse." (x. 17.) The coming together in this verse means the coming to the sacrament, because in the 20th verse he says, "When ye come together into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper." So then they had incurred St. Paul's censure for some misbehaviour about the sacrament; and the next question will be, what that misbehaviour was? And this we find out from what St. Paul says of them, in

the 21st and 22d verses, which two verses are the key, indeed, to the whole chapter. "In eating, every one taketh before other his own supper, and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God and those that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not."

The fact was, then, the Corinthians had perverted the Lord's supper into a common feast, or, at least, accompanied it with a common feast; in which, forgetting entirely the nature and design of this institution, they indulged themselves without moderation in eating and drinking, so as, in some degree, to come away from it surfeited and drunken: "One is hungry, and another is drunken: one goes to indulge in eating, and another in drinking."

It appears, I dare say, to you unaccountable how any people could fall into such a mistake and misbehaviour as this—so gross an abuse of a religious institution; but it appears from St. Paul's words that, in fact, they did so; and one way of accounting for it may be this. These Corinthians, you are to consider, were not like us, bred up to Christianity from their infancy. They had been heathens, and a great part of them were converted to Christianity. Now it had been a practice among them before their conversion, as it was with all the heathens, to make feasts to their gods, in which all sorts of intemperance were practised and allowed of. It is possible, and



probably was the case, that when they became Christians, some of them mistook the Lord's Supper for one of these sorts of feasts which they had been accustomed to hold to their gods, and celebrated it accordingly with the same licentious festivity and intemperance. But whatever was the reason of it, such, in fact, was their mistake and misbehaviour. It is certain, however, that the misbehaviour was that unworthy eating and drinking which St. Paul mentioned, and which he condemned in such severe terms. The fault, which St. Paul reproveth, was the fault which the people he writes to had been guilty of. That is very plain. The fault they had been guilty of was, the indulging themselves to excess in eating and drinking at the time of celebrating this sacrament. That is equally plain, from Saint Paul's account of them: "The one is hungry and another drunken. What! have ye not houses to eat and drink in?" (to make, that is, your entertainments and hold your feasts in?) which shows that they made a common feast and entertainment of the holy communion.

St. Paul proceeds to state to them the history of the institution of the sacrament, which certainly was the proper preservative against the gross abuse of it; and he adds, in order to put an end to so strange proceedings, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily," that is, in this unworthy manner which ye have done, "eateth and drinketh damnation to himself"—"not discerning the Lord's body." That is,

not distinguishing it from a common feast—not at all reflecting that it was a commemoration of the Lord's body.

I am now, therefore, authorized to say, that the unworthy receiving, intended by St. Paul, is what none of us can almost possibly be guilty of; as none of us, I trust, can ever so far forget ourselves as to mistake this institution for a worldly entertainment, or behave at it in that unseemly manner that the Corinthians did.

The next point I undertook to show was, that the damnation denounced in the text did not mean final perdition in the world to come; which is what the word commonly signifies, but only judgements and punishments upon them in this world. It should have been rendered *condemnation*—eateth and drinketh *condemnation* to himself; for the word in the original means any sort of punishment, either temporal or eternal; so that from the expression itself, it would have been dubious which the apostle meant, had he not, in the verse following, added an explanation of the matter, which clears it up sufficiently. “For this cause,” (that is, for their misbehaviour and unworthy receiving), “many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” That is, many are visited by weaknesses and infirmities, and many are cut off by death: which are all, you observe, worldly judgements; and these immediately following the mention of damnation or condemnation, show that worldly punishment and visitations were what St. Paul meant by it.

I allege, therefore, that no Christian at this day has any thing to fear from this text. I do not mean, but that men may come to the sacrament with such a thoughtlessness and levity, as entirely destroys the good effect of it; though I hope and believe that is not much or often the case; but I mean that none of us, the least and worst prepared even, incur the crime against which St. Paul denounced the sentence. And if we do not incur the crime, we have no occasion to fear that the sentence will be applied to us.

Others, again, are kept away from the sacrament by the fear that, after they have received it, they should relapse into their former sins, and so only aggravate their guilt and punishment. To such I shall answer, that all we can do, and even all that is required of us to do, at the sacrament, is to be sincere in our resolutions at the time. Whether these resolutions take effect or not is another question, although a most serious one.

But if they be hearty and sincere at the time, I see no reason to doubt but that a man is a worthy communicant, and will be accepted as such. And our resolutions failing once or twice, or oftener, is no reason why we should not renew them again; nay, that it must be by dint of these resolutions at last, that we are to get rid of our evil courses, if at all: unless we mean to give ourselves up to vice absolutely, and without any resistance, or endeavours to break through it; which is the worst of all possible conditions.

Others again come away discouraged and disappointed, if they do not feel in themselves that elevation of spirit, that glow and warmth of devotion, that sort of rapture and ecstasy which they expected ; and look upon themselves as forsaken of God, and not favoured with that share and influence of his spirit which other Christians are.

Now such people cannot do better than turn to the Scriptures, and expect no more than what is there promised. They will not find it there promised—either that any extraordinary effusions of the Holy Ghost are communicated by the sacrament, or that those effusions show themselves in any great transports, in any visible and extraordinary agitation of the spirits. The truth is, these emotions are in a great measure constitutional. Those who feel them ought not to be elated by them—those who feel them not have no reason to be cast down and made uneasy on that account. If they find religion operating upon their lives, they may always rely upon that test, and be at peace.

But lastly ; the sacrament, it is to be feared, is not seldom abused to the purposes of licentiousness. Men consider it as a sort of expiating, or wiping away their former sins and errors ; and as being at liberty to begin, as it were, again, upon a new account. As I said before, the best and sincerest will sometimes fail ; yet, if they are sincere, they make us worthy partakers of the communion. But when

we at the very time either expressly intend to begin again our evil practices, when the former ones are, as we suppose, cancelled ; or allow such a secret thought to find place without rebuke in our minds, it then becomes a very different case. We cannot, when we relapse, complain that our resolutions fail us. The truth is, we never made any—any, I mean, that were sincere and hearty, which are the only ones to be accounted of. There was duplicity and insincerity at the time—a voluntary deceiving of ourselves ; and an attempt, if one may so speak, to deceive God.

This is mockery and profanation, not devotion ; and let men either discard all such hollow reservations, or come not to that holy table.

But I hope and believe that is seldom the case. I hope and believe that those who frequent the holy communion are sincere. But the danger is—the thing to be provided against—the thing to be warned of, is, that we do not take advantage of any scruples or appearances, either of doubt or difficulty, for the purpose of indulging our disinclination to religious exercises, for the sake of having a pretence for avoiding that which in our hearts we have no real concern or desire to perform.

Scruples that proceed from a good conscience, however weak or groundless, will meet, I doubt not, with indulgence from the Father of mercies ; but when notions are taken up to flatter our vices—to amuse or lay asleep the conscience, or reconcile it to

the practice which we will not quit ; such must not expect to come off as so many speculative errors : for these are errors which no one could have fallen into had it not been for the pernicious influence of vicious habits, and for the sake of that ease to our minds, and encouragement to those sins which they seem to allow.

## XII.

## PUBLIC WORSHIP.

## HEBREWS X. 15.

*Forsake not the assembling yourselves together, as the manner of some is.*

THE first thing recorded of the disciples of Christ after their Lord's ascension was their uniting with one accord in prayer and supplication ; and being with one accord in one place ; continuing stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship ; continuing daily with one accord in the Temple ; and breaking bread, that is, celebrating the Holy Communion, from house to house ; lifting up the voice with one accord ; their coming together the first day of the week to break bread ; coming together in the church into one place to celebrate the Lord's Supper ; meeting and keeping silence in the church ; the whole church being gathered together in prayer, and coming into one place—a rich man and a poor man entering the assembly ; and lastly, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together : so that the practice of assembling together at stated times for the purpose of joint devotion, religious exercises, and religious instruction, stands upon the highest and earliest authority by

which the practice can come recommended to us—the united example of the apostles and immediate followers of Jesus Christ.

These persons acted under the instructions which themselves had received from Christ's own mouth, and under the extraordinary influence of the Holy Spirit : therefore, an institution founded on the common consent and practice of such persons, so circumstanced, is to be deemed a divine institution. Not to mention the words of Christ, as recorded in Saint Matthew's Gospel, which contain the strongest invitation to joint worship and prayer : " Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."—Agreeably herewith, all members and sects of Christianity, let them differ ever so much in the articles of faith or rules of practice, have concurred in this—the appointing stated times and hours for public devotion ; in complying with what they find to have been the usage and institution of the apostles and immediate preachers of Christ's religion, whose authority they all acknowledge. This may be clearly traced up to the very ascension of Jesus Christ ; especially when coupled with plain words, as above stated, in evidence of a divine command ; and upon this command our obligation to attend upon public worship primarily and principally rests. For when we have once good reason to believe that a thing is the command and will of God, there is an end of all other consideration about it ; however, all other considerations are to be



introduced only as auxiliary and subordinate to that. It is to no purpose to say that coming to church is only a ceremony or a custom : were that true, however, which it is not, it would be sufficient to reply, that it is what God is pleased to require. It is his pleasure which ultimately makes any thing a duty ; and where that pleasure is declared or known, it is presumptuous in us to distinguish or to say that one thing must be observed, and another dispensed with ; one institution is of a moral, another of a scriptural nature. They are all instituted by Him who has complete right and authority to direct us. When we add to this, what I believe will not often be found to fail, that one known deviation from the command of God introduces insensibly, yet inevitably, all deviations from duty, we shall see the force of the preceding obligation in its true light.

Having thus stated the first and principal ground of our duty to attend upon public worship, namely, the command and will of God, signified in the concurrent usage and judgement of those with whom God was pleased to carry on a communication of his will, and by whom he imparted it to the rest of mankind, I shall proceed to fortify the argument, by showing the propriety and expediency of the thing itself.

And first of all : the propriety of joint devotion appears, as it respects the object of all devotion—the supreme God himself. His nature is so glorious, so infinitely exalted above ours, that we are not worthy, as it is truly said, to offer him any sacrifice. The

only approach we can make towards him, in my mind, at all suited to his transcendent dignity, is by joining our hearts and voices, by rendering earnest and united adoration to the Author of the universe.

We read that God is worshipped in heaven by the joint praises of hosts and myriads of blessed saints. It is not each solitary angel offering its own thanksgivings to its Creator; but the collection of beings presenting themselves together before the throne, and ascribing glory, and honour, and power to their great Father and Governor, with united and never-ceasing acclamations. Now, the only way in which we can imitate them, or produce the smallest resemblance of celestial devotion, is by coming into one place, with hearts glowing with piety to God, and with charity to one another; and with decency of outward behaviour and expression, accompanied with inward sensations of humble but ardent devotion, falling down before him who is the Parent, the Preserver, the Saviour, and Benefactor, and Guide, and Guardian of the whole human race. A king is pleased by the united addresses of faithful subjects, a parent is moved by the joint supplications of dutiful children. For the same reason that we see a prince or a parent affected by the unanimous praise, humble demeanor, and united voice of their subjects or children, may we conceive the divine Being to accept with complacency the public worship of a devout and serious congregation.

Public worship, as it respects the great object of

all worship, is the best and nearest advance which creatures like ourselves are capable of making towards a homage in anywise adequate to the glory and dignity of the Being whom we address; imperfect at best; if perfect, unworthy of him—but still our all, and our utmost; still it is attempting to hallow the name of God on earth as it is in heaven—that is, by a social and united act of prayer and thanksgiving.

The propriety may relate to the Supreme Being; the expediency must relate to ourselves. And this becomes the next subject of consideration.

The plain way of computing the utility of an institution is to calculate what would be the effect if the institution was altogether laid aside. Now it appears to me not too much to say, that if public worship was discontinued in a country, the very care and thought of God would vanish—not at once, but would insensibly decay and wear out, till it was forgotten and lost from the minds and memory of mankind. The generality of the people would come, in process of time, to know as little of their Creator's institution, and think and care as little about it, as they do of the religion of their forefathers, the ancient Britons: and the effect which any institution, or the omission of it, has upon the generality of mankind, is what ought chiefly to be attended to. It is not what two or three scholars, what a few who give themselves up to meditation and study might do without the assistance of these institutions, but what the general condition of mankind would be without it. Amongst

these, something visible, something external, is absolutely necessary to remind them of religious matters; and the very visible external part of Christianity is its religious assemblies, and its sabbaths, and its sacraments. In any, or in such change of civil polity, where all public worship and observance of the sabbath is obliged to be discontinued, it is wonderful how soon the impression and thought of religion begin to be laid aside. Man is an animal partly rational and partly sensitive. In the eye of cool abstract reasoning, the way to judge of the truth and importance of religion is not perhaps to see whether any outward public act of religion be upheld or not; and where we are under the direction of this and of nothing else, the influence and impression of religion would be neither more nor less for any external observation whatever. But *that* purely rational nature is not the nature of man: he has senses which must be applied to; for by these his conduct, if not his judgement, is guided and drawn, more than by speculation. Therefore if he be not kept up by something visible and obvious to his senses; if a man have not constantly something to see and to join in; some outward public expression of worship, some distinction of times and places, something, in a word, to revive from time to time, and refresh the fading ideas of religion in his imagination, they will by degrees lose all their hold and all their effect. His will, and his sluggish resolutions to will, are then dull and languid. And yet in his

judgement and understanding, religion may have all the evidence of its truth, and must of necessity be equally important as it ever was. But judgement and understanding are not what direct the ways of men, or ever can do, without the assistance of impressions made upon the imagination by means of the senses.

But secondly : I do not find that any are inclined to dispute the point so far as to say that the knowledge of Almighty God, of our relation to him, of our dependence upon him for all that is to come, and the duties which we owe to him, and to our fellow-creatures for his sake, are such in themselves as can do without any kind of religious act and religious worship at all. But why (say they) is it necessary to come to church for this? Is it not equally effectual, equally acceptable to God and useful to myself, when performed in my own chamber or in my own family?

In the first place : I wish it were generally true, that those who seldom frequent church were regular in their devotion at home ; for whatever force and reasonableness there may be in the excuse, it must still depend upon the fact being true, or it cannot stand them in any stead. Men are not less remiss and negligent in their private than their public worship.—But in the second place : May it not be said, that without public worship the greater part would exercise no religious worship at all? It is not every man that is capable of conceiving an address to his Creator ; however, it is not every one that thinks and

feels himself capable. This would be a constant excuse. It is easy to direct men to retire into their hearts and their own closets, there to commune with God and with themselves; and an excellent and spiritual exercise this is: but there are but a few who are qualified for such a task. There are men who would never feel inclination for such a task, through the whole course of their lives. Besides that, nothing is done regularly which is not done at stated times and seasons. When times and seasons are stated and appointed by public authority and common consent, they are always observed, and will be observed, more or less. But is it to be expected from the generality of men, occupied in the constant round of daily business and daily amusements, or interested in the providing a subsistence for themselves and family; or that others, no less eager in raising a fortune, or engaged in spending one; is it, I say, to be expected that men thus conditioned and circumstanced should in general prescribe to themselves regular returns of private or domestic devotion, or should withdraw themselves from all engagements to attend these returns? Therefore if any one, as an apology for absenting himself from public worship, says that public assemblies are not necessary to the men who would and do perform their devotions at home; I answer, that whatever they may be to you, they are necessary for others, or the generality of others: who neither could nor would, without stated returns of public devotion, exercise any religious worship at all.

They would be without that opportunity of religious instruction which Christian assemblies afford. Let no one say, I stay at home because I can hear nothing at church but what I know already; but what I learn at home is learnt better by my own reflection. Be it so: but if this be the case with you, it is not so with all, or with the generality of others; and whatever is for the benefit of the whole is binding upon the whole. For, to let you see how necessary your attendance upon public worship and instruction, if not for yourself, is for others, you need only reflect what would be the consequence if any one was to withdraw himself from religious assemblies who found that he was above receiving any benefit from them. First one would drop, and then another, till none was left but those whose humility and low opinion of themselves disposed them to seek assistance and instruction from any quarter, and who, in fact, were probably nearer the spirit of Christianity than the others. In one word, assemblies for religious purposes would speedily be put out of countenance and out of credit, if what we call the higher class of mankind were to absent themselves from the appointed places, that they might be qualified to exercise their religious duties without them, and every one who pleased was at liberty to rank himself of that class. You must also observe one thing, which you must expect will be quite your own case.—You absent yourself from church to employ your time more, you think, to your edification, in reading or meditation;

and possibly you may, but your ignorant neighbour, who stays from church to spend his day in idleness and drunkenness, and less religious society than any other day in the week, will think he only follows your example, because you both agree in this—in staying from church. Now one is bound to consider, not only what the actions are in themselves, but the effects they are likely to produce by their example: for loving to do good is virtue; loving to do harm is vice; and it matters little whether the good or harm is the immediate consequence of our own conduct, or proceed from the influence which our conduct has upon others.

I forbear to mention at present any subordinate, though important advantages, which result from social worship; because it is enough for one time to understand the direct ground of our obligation. I propose in the foremost place, the command of God, evidenced by the practice and example of all the apostles and first followers of Christ. I propose, in the second place, the propriety of social worship, with respect to the object of worship—the Supreme Being himself, as the only and best advance we are capable of making towards a homage in any way suited to the dignity of his nature and the immensity of our obligation. I propose, in the third place, the utility of public devotion to ourselves; which utility I ground upon three plain propositions: Religious worship, of some kind, is absolutely necessary, to uphold a sense of religion in the world. Without



public worship at stated times and places, a great part of mankind would exercise no religious worship at all. If those who thought themselves needlessly instructed and directed to hear in our religious assemblies unnecessary truths, were for that reason to forsake the assembling themselves together, religious assemblies would soon be put out of countenance and out of credit, and in process of time would be laid aside : for the most ignorant and incapable, provided they were of a presumptuous temper, would take courage from the example of their betters to withdraw themselves as well as others, and convert that time which was intended for the best purposes to idleness, debauchery, and excess.

## XIII.

OUTWARD ACTS OF DEVOTION NO EXCUSE  
FOR NEGLECT OF MORALITY.

MATT. v. 20.

*Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

It will be sufficient at present to observe, that the Pharisees were a religious sect among the Jews, who set up for extraordinary sanctity and strictness, as St. Paul says, "after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." The Scribes were the persons employed to interpret the Jewish law, as our Saviour asks, "How say the Scribes, that Christ is the son of David?" They were appointed to instruct the people, and probably the youth in particular, in that law. Both these descriptions of men were at that time of day of the greatest reputation in the country, for holiness and wisdom; and both valued themselves chiefly upon, and made their righteousness consist in, a most strict and rigid observance of the rites, ceremonies, and outward offices of religion: such, for example, as fasting, making long prayers, avoiding all unclean meat, and unclean persons, according to the

distinction of their law—attending upon the Temple at their great feast, not eating with unwashed hands, and many other such outward acts as were commanded; some very proper and reasonable, others again frivolous and superstitious. It was in the outward observance of these that the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees consisted; and our Saviour tells his disciples, that unless their righteousness was something more and better than this, “unless it exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

If there was one thing which our Saviour laboured more than another—if there was one error against which he inveighed with more than usual earnestness, it was the trusting in the rites and ceremonies, the outward duties and offices of religion, and neglecting in the meantime, or living in the transgression of, the substantial obligations of virtue and morality. And it was with great reason, that he so industriously cautioned his followers against this notion; it being that into which mankind in all ages and countries of the world have been most apt to fall.

We will first take notice of some passages of Scripture, which show our Lord's sentiments upon the subject; and add a few reflections, by way of making them applicable to ourselves.

In the 23d chapter of Matthew, he expresses himself very strongly on this subject, and in a variety of phrases. “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and cummin,

and anise, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy and faith, or rather fidelity: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." The paying tithe of mint and cummin was only put as an instance; the observation is general, that while they were scrupulous to the least tittle about the outward ordinances and observance of the law, they hoped to pass over the more substantial part of it, and what our Saviour calls "the weightier matters of the law;" justice, mercy, and fidelity. This was their conduct; and how does our Saviour treat it? He calls it no better than hypocrisy, and promises it nothing but woe: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites."

But our Saviour goes on: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye make clean the outside of the platter, but within ye are full of extortion and excess." About the outside of the cup, or that part of their conduct which was open and shown to the world, which consisted of specious performances, and acts of outward devotion and piety, they were wonderfully studious and exact; while they were full of excess within, neither careful to observe the rules of honesty or humanity in their dealings with others, nor to moderate and keep within bounds their lusts and passions. "Thou blind Pharisee," proceeds our Saviour—blind as mistaking altogether the true nature and design of religion—"cleanse first that which is within the cup, that the outside of it may be clean also;" begin at the right end, and

bestow the chief and first care in setting to rights thy heart—thy moral principles and practice; and then all thy outward piety will become thee—it will no longer be a hollow treacherous sanctity, but a real and acceptable purity. Much the same with this is what our Saviour goes on with in the next verse: “Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness—even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity;” and then condemning them for their persecution of the prophets, which does not directly belong to this subject, he concludes with an expression, which is so exceeding strong, as he scarcely (only once, I believe,) used on any other occasion, and which shows his absolute dislike and detestation of this pride of character: “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

There is another passage in the same Gospel, which is much to our present purpose. It is in the 15th chapter, and upon this occasion. The Pharisees came to Jesus with a complaint against his disciples for eating bread with unwashed hands—a point they were very exact in, not out of cleanliness, but on a religious account, and because it openly transgressed the tradition of the elders. Our Saviour, after retorting upon this charge of transgressing the tradition of their elders, by showing them that they by their traditions made vain the commandments of

God, makes this remark upon the particular complaint before him : “ Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth ;” and after these words explains himself more fully to his disciples, as follows : “ Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man ;” and specifies what vices they are which proceed out of the heart ; “ evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, blasphemies—these are they that defile a man ; but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.” It appears from hence, that the Pharisees accounted the breach of their religious ceremonies and observances to be the greatest guilt and defilement that a man could incur ; that our Saviour, on the contrary, maintained that these were no defilement in comparison ; that it was immorality and vice which spoil the inward principle ; and that evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, and so forth, were the pollutions most real and most odious to God. So then, whether he met with those who thought all righteousness and religion consisted in forms and observances, or with those who thought there was no vice like the breach of such things ; with both he dealt very freely, and told them that the first and great point to perform towards men was to love mercy and justice, and the first and great care to avoid actual vices ;—that in the sight and esteem of God, their strictness in matters of outward religion was but hypocrisy without

some real virtue, and that the vices they were to fear and guard against were the defilements of sin.

There is one other declaration of our Saviour's to the same effect, and so clear as to need no sort of explanation. We find it in the 12th chapter of St. Mark. A certain Scribe came to our Saviour to ask him which was the first commandment of all. Our Saviour's answer is explicit: "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment, and the second is like unto it—namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. The Scribe replied—Well, master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but he, and to love him with all the heart, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." From this incomparable piece of conversation, which we shall do well to read over to ourselves, it appears that a person who had so far overcome the common prejudices of his countrymen as to acknowledge the superior excellency of the love of God and our neighbour to the most ostentatious acts of outward worship—burnt offerings and sacrifice—that a

person of this turn and temper of mind was not far from the kingdom of God.

From all these texts laid together, we may venture to deliver it positively as our Saviour's doctrine, and, consequently as a matter of absolute certainty to us, that all hopes and attempts to please or pacify God, by outward piety and devotion, so long as we take upon us to transgress the laws of virtue and morality, are vain and groundless; and his repeating this doctrine so often, and on so many different occasions, shows the stress he laid upon it, and how solicitous he was to have it rightly understood.

I will add to these a passage from the Old Testament, and which goes to prove that acts of worship, done in the manner and with the views we are speaking of, that is, to atone or make up for the neglect or breach of moral duties, are so far from being at all pleasing or acceptable to God, that they are regarded by him only as so much mockery of him—are odious and abominable to him. It is in the 1st chapter of Isaiah, and God is himself speaking to the Jews by the mouth of that prophet: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, and of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths,



the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." This passage is very remarkable. Sacrifices, burnt-offerings, oblations, incense, the feast of the new moons, sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, were all what God himself had commanded to the Jews. They were of his own appointing. Yet how does he speak of them in the place before us? "To what purpose is the multitude of sacrifices? I am full of burnt offerings; I delight not in the blood of bullocks; your oblations are vain; incense is an abomination; your new moons and your feasts my soul hateth: I am weary of them." And whence was all this? How came this change, as one may say, in God's esteem and opinion of these ordinances? He tells them, "Your hands are full of blood;" and what were they to do to make God again propitious to their services? How were they then to make their acts of religion again acceptable to him? He tells them this also: "Cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the

oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." So the very acts of worship and devotion which God himself had commanded, when they were made to stand in the place of justice, mercy, humanity, and the like—when they served as an excuse for neglecting or breaking through moral duties, became detestable in his sight.

The point we set out with was, that acts of outward piety and devotion signify nothing unless accompanied with real inward virtue and goodness; that they will in no wise make up for the neglect of moral duties; that they afford in the sight of God, I mean, no sort of reason or excuse for the practice of actual vice; and I think we have proved them to be our Saviour's doctrine to a demonstration, as well as what God himself had declared to the Jews long before our Saviour's time.

## XIV.

## FAST-DAY.

## PSALM XXII. 28.

*The kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor  
among the nations.*

THE doctrine conveyed to us in these words is that of a *national providence*: and it is a doctrine no less agreeable to reason than comfortable to the human mind. It must, therefore, afford us the highest satisfaction to find this truth confirmed by the sacred writers, in the clearest and the strongest terms. The Scriptures are full of the most gracious promises to righteous nations, and of the most dreadful denunciations against wicked and impenitent kingdoms; and it is well known that neither these promises nor these threatenings were vain.

The history of the Jewish people (more especially) is scarce any thing else than the history of God's providential interposition to punish or reward them according as they obeyed or disobeyed his laws. And although we should admit that, on account of the peculiar circumstances of that people, and the unexampled form of their government, this case cannot be fairly compared with that of other nations,

yet there are not wanting some which may. In the ancient world, there were four celebrated empires which rose one after another, and successively filled the age with astonishment and terror; yet these, it appears, were nothing more than mighty instruments in the hand of God, to execute his various dispensations of mercy, or of justice, on the Jewish or other nations; and to prepare the way gradually for the introduction of another kingdom of a very different nature, and superior to them all. Their rise and fall were predicted in the sacred writings (by Daniel most especially, chap. 7, 8,) long before they existed; and some extraordinary characters, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, and others, were, though unknown to themselves, the instruments of the Almighty, raised up at certain appointed times, and furnished with great power, as well as with other qualifications, to perform all his pleasure and fulfil his views: "I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messenger. I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." Thus we see that what is considered as the common vicissitude of human affairs—peace and war—pestilence and famine—political

changes and national revolutions—the passions of the wicked—the virtues of the good—the shining qualities of the great; every thing, in short, that the world calls accident, chance, and fortune, are all, in fact, under the control of an invisible and over-ruling hand; which, without any violation of the laws of nature, or the freedom of human actions, renders them subservient to the gracious purposes of divine wisdom in the government of the world.

We of this kingdom have been most remarkably favoured with the visible protection of Heaven; and there are in our own history so many marks of a divine interference, that if we do not acknowledge it, we are either the blindest or the most ungrateful people on earth. Let me more particularly call your attention to the following very singular circumstances in some of the greatest events that have happened in this country.

Our separation from the church of Rome was begun by the passions of a prince, who meant nothing in the world less than *that* reformation of religion which was the consequence of it. The total dispersion and overthrow of what was profanely called the *invincible* armada was effected almost entirely by winds and tempests. That dreadful popish conspiracy, which seemed guarded by darkness and silence against all possibility of detection, was at last casually discovered by an indiscreet and obscure letter. At a time when there appeared no hope of

ever recovering our ancient form of government, it suddenly rose from the ruins in which the tragedy of those times had involved it, under the direction of a man who had helped to destroy it, and who seemed almost to the last moment undecided whether he should restore or destroy it again.

Our deliverance in the following reign from the attempts of a gloomy tyrant to enslave both body and soul was brought about by the concurrence of the most surprising incidents, co-operating, at the critical moment upon which the whole depended, with the noblest efforts of true patriotism.

These are a few remarkable facts selected from a multitude of others, scarce less extraordinary; and they bear evident traces stamped upon them of a superior power.

Now it may appear to some, that the *calamities* which at various times have befallen our nation were a contradiction to the doctrine here advanced; were a strong and melancholy proof that God's providential care was then at least withdrawn, and the light of his countenance turned away from this island. But it is not, surely, to be expected, that throughout the whole duration of a great empire, any more than throughout the whole life of an individual, there is to be one uninterrupted course of prosperity and success. Admonitions and checks, corrections and punishments, may be, and undoubtedly are, in both cases useful, perhaps essentially necessary; and the

care and even kindness of Providence may be no less visible in these salutary severities than in the distribution of its most valuable blessings.

Both private and public afflictions have a natural tendency to awaken, to alarm, to instruct, and to better the heart of man; and they may be at last attended with other very important and beneficial consequences.

We have then the strongest reason to conclude that there is a power on high which watches over the fate of nations; and which has, in a more especial manner, preserved this kingdom, in the most critical and perilous circumstances. Does not this, then, afford some ground to hope, that, if we endeavour to render ourselves worthy of the divine protection, it will be once more extended to us; and that, by a speedy and effectual reformation of our hearts and lives, we may remove or lighten the judgement which our iniquities have drawn down upon us? We may be allowed to console ourselves with those reviving hopes, which the belief of God's providential government presents to us. We know in whom we trust; we know that this trust rests on a foundation which cannot be shaken. It rests not only on the express declarations and promises of holy writ, but on the many remarkable instances of a divine agency, which occur in the history of mankind, and above all in our own. In every one of the extraordinary national deliverances above-mentioned, the dangers

that threatened this island were of a much greater magnitude, and more formidable aspect, than any which seem at this time to hang over us. Why then may we not indulge ourselves with the same expectations? A series of past favours naturally begets a presumption of their continuance; and it must not be wholly imputed to the partiality which every man entertains for his own country if we give way to a persuasion that God will still vouchsafe his accustomed goodness to his favoured land. We will soothe ourselves with the belief that a nation so distinguished as this hath been, with happier revolutions and greater blessings than any other ever experienced, will not at this time be deserted by its gracious benefactor and protector. Compared with the nations of Europe, it is not too much to say, that it is here that liberty hath fixed her seat. If it can be pretended (after all it is difficult to prove) that any other country possesses more liberty, they do not possess tranquillity along with it. It is here that Protestantism finds its firmest support—it is here that the principle of religious toleration is established—it is here that a public provision is made for the poor—it is here that public institutions for their relief exist in greater numbers and extent than in any other part of the world. It is here, in short, that the laws are equal—that they are, in general, administered both with integrity and with ability; and that the stream of justice flows with a purity unknown in any other age or nation.



Not have we only the happiness of enjoying these unspeakable advantages ourselves; we have been the instruments (and it is an honour to have been so, superior to all conquests) of diffusing them over the remotest regions of the globe. Wherever our discoveries, our commerce, or our arms have penetrated, they have in general carried the laws, the freedom, and the religion of this country along with them. Whatever faults and errors we may be chargeable with in other respects, for these gifts at least, the most invaluable that one country can bestow upon another, it is not improbable that both the eastern and the western world may one day acknowledge that they were originally indebted to this kingdom. Is it then a vain imagination, that, after having been made the instrument of Providence for such beneficial purposes, there is some degree of felicity yet in reserve for us; and that the part we are appointed to act in the world is not yet accomplished? What may be in the councils of the Most High—what mighty changes he may be now meditating in the system of human affairs—he alone can tell. But in the midst of this awful suspense, while the fate of empires hangs on his resolves, of one thing at least we are absolutely certain, that it is better to have him for our friend than our enemy; which of the two he shall be depends entirely upon ourselves. If by our impiety and our licentiousness, we audaciously insult his admonitions and brave his vengeance, what else can we expect but that every thing which ought

naturally to be the means of our stability will be converted into instruments of our destruction? If, on the contrary, by reverencing the judgements of God, and returning to that submission which we owe him, we again put ourselves under his protection, he may still, as he has often done, dispel the clouds that hang over us; or if, for wise reasons, he suffer them to gather and darken upon us; he may make even them, in the final result, conduce to our real welfare.

There is in fact no calamity, private or public, which, under his gracious direction, may not eventually prove a blessing. There are no losses but that of his favour which ought to sink us into despair. There is a spirit in freedom, there is a confidence in religion, which will enable those who possess them, and those only, to rise superior to every disaster. It is not a boundless extent of territory, nor even of commerce, that is essential to public prosperity. They are necessary, indeed, to national greatness, but not to national happiness. The true wealth, the true security of a kingdom, consists in frugality, industry, unanimity, loyalty, and piety. Great difficulties call for great talents and great virtues. It is in times such as these that we look for courage and ability. Let the wise, the good, and the brave, stand forth in the present difficulty as one man, to assist and befriend their country. In the same vessel we are all embarked; if the vessel perish, we must all perish with it. It is, therefore, our common





that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me." When this terrible sentence was denounced by the prophet Jonah, the effect which it appears to have produced very suddenly upon the people was a solid, national penitence. We are not authorized to say that it was a political change (for of that we hear nothing), but a personal reformation, pervading every rank and description of men in that community. "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them even to the least." The king of Nineveh published, we read, a decree for the strict observation of this religious solemnity, concluding with these pious and remarkable words: "Let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands: who can tell if God will repent and turn from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" The effect was what might be hoped for from the sincerity and universality of their penitence and devotion. "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not." Here, therefore, we have a nation saved by penitence and devotion together; and we are assured, by the authority of this history, that if, from negligence, from contempt, from the pride of reasoning, from philosophical objections, from the hardihood and contumacy of sin, or from the ease and levity, and unconcern and indifference, which licentious prosperity

begets, the people had despised the warning of the prophet and the admonition of their king, the event would have been, that Nineveh had sunk and perished for ever.

It is unnecessary to distinguish between devotion and penitence, because one, if sincere, includes or produces the other. From either of them, when insincere, no good can be expected; and if sincere, one includes the other. If devotion be sincere, it must lead to an amendment of life; and if penitence be sincere, it will universally be accompanied with devotion.

Natural religion has its difficulties upon the subject of prayer; and it is one of the benefits which we derive from revelation, that its instructions, its declarations, its examples under this head are plain, full, and positive. The revelations, which we receive as authentic, supply, in this article, the defect of natural religion. They require prayer to God as a duty, and they contain positive assurances of its efficacy and acceptance. The scripture, also, not only affirms the propriety of prayer in general, but furnishes precepts and examples which justify certain subjects and modes of prayer, which the adherents to natural, in opposition to revealed, religion have sometimes represented as dubious or exceptionable: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing," that is, let the subject of your fears be what it will; "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your

requests be made known unto God." "The true disposition under difficulties is described to be—to serve the Lord; serving the Lord to rejoice in hope; thus acting, not to let our souls sink under misfortune, or relinquish the prospect of better things; hoping for better things, yet patient under the present—patient, as it is expressed, under tribulation; and, to close all, continuing instant in prayer: more particularly, under a sense of danger, what is to be done? why, "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass."

Again; although it be granted that prayer is allowable, as far as it expresses a general sense of submission to God, and as far as it casts ourselves upon his mercy or his bounty, yet some have thought that we advanced too far in petitions when we took upon ourselves to pray for particular favours by name. And this ought at least to be admitted, that our prayers, even when the most particular and most urgent, and drawn from us by the most pressing necessity, are to be conceived and uttered under the reflection and sentiment that we are addressing a being who knows infinitely better than we do what is best, not only for the whole world, but even for us; and further also, we may find some advantage in bearing in mind that, if prayer was suffered to disturb the order appointed by God in the universe too much or too apparently, it would introduce a change into human affairs, which, in some important

respects, would be pernicious. Who, for example, would labour, if his necessities could be supplied with equal certainty by prayer? How few would contain within any bounds of moderation those passions or pleasures which at present are checked only by fear of disease, if prayer would infallibly restore health? In short, if the efficacy of prayer, as applicable to this life, were so constant and observable as to be relied on beforehand, and to the exclusion or diminution of our own caution, vigilance, and activity, the conduct of mankind would, in proportion to that reliance, become careless, indolent, and disorderly. However, our prayers may, in many instances, be efficacious, and yet the experience of their efficacy be doubtful and obscure; therefore if the light of nature instruct us, by any arguments, to hope for effect from prayer, still more, if the Scriptures authorize these hopes by precept, by example, or by promises of acceptance, it is not a sufficient reason for calling in question the reality of such effect that we cannot observe this reality, since it appears something more than probable that this doubt about it is necessary to the safety, and order, and happiness of human life.

We have been speaking of praying for particular favours by name, and have remarked that the Scriptures authorize these prayers by example. This they do most explicitly. Hear Saint Paul: "For this thing (some bodily infirmity, which he calls 'a



thorn given him in the flesh,' and the example applies to any other sore grief under which we labour), for this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." Also, for the future success of any honest intention or just undertaking, in which we are engaged, we have the same authority for imploring, and with earnestness, the aid and blessing of God—"Night and day praying exceedingly, that we might see your face."

Nay further, it is to be remarked, that we are not only authorized, and even directed by Scripture example, to pray for particular favours by name, but to do so repeatedly and renewedly, even in cases ultimately unsuccessful. We are to do our duty, by addressing ourselves to God under the several difficulties in which we are placed; and having done this, to resign both ourselves and them to his disposal. "I besought the Lord thrice," saith Saint Paul, "that it might depart from me." But yet it was not departed at the time of his writing, nor have we any information that it ever did. Our Lord himself drank the fatal cup to the dregs: it did not depart from him, though his prayer surely was right, and was urged, and renewed, and reiterated, even in the same words.

But this, viz. the renewal of unsuccessful prayer, is with our Lord not only a point of practice, but of doctrine: he not only authorizes it by his example, but enjoins it by his precepts. "He spake a parable

unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint." He would not have delivered a parable upon it if he had not meant both to authorize, recommend, and enjoin it.

But although our own distresses may both excite and justify our own prayers, yet we seem, it is said, to presume too far, when we take upon us to intercede for others, because it is allowing ourselves to suppose that we possess an interest, as it were, in the divine councils. Turn however to the Scripture, and we find intercession or prayers for others both preached and practised. "Pray for one another, that ye may be healed: the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." "God is my witness," saith Saint Paul, "that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake; and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers for me." "Saint Peter was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." These are strong and decisive examples of intercession, and of one individual interceding for another. The largest and farthest advance in this species of worship is when we take upon us to address the supreme Governor of the universe for public blessings in behalf of our country, or touching the fate of nations and empires. "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes." Surely this humiliating

sentiment belongs to us all. Who feels not, as it were, a check to his prayers when he compares the vileness and insignificance of the petitioner with the magnitude of the favour asked, and with the infinitely exalted nature of the being from whom we ask it? Nevertheless, intercessions for the community, for blessings upon them—for national blessings, both natural and civil—are amongst the conspicuous parts of both Testaments; not only in examples, which is authority, but in precepts, which is obligation. Are we, as all are, concerned that the blessings of nature may be imparted to our land? “Ask yet of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field.” Or are we more especially interested in the continuance of those civil blessings, which give, even to the bounty of nature, no small share of its value and enjoyment? “I exhort that first of all supplication, prayer, intercession, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority;” and this is in order that “we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” The meaning of this passage is clearly—Pray for them, not for their sakes, either alone or principally, but for the common happiness, that under the protection of a regular government we may practise religion and enjoy tranquillity. “This is good,” saith the apostle, “and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.” “O

pray for the peace of Jerusalem; for there is the seat of judgement, even the seat of the house of David; for my brethren and companion's sake I will wish thee prosperity; yea, because of the house of the Lord God, I will seek to do thee good." Jerusalem was to the Psalmist what our country is to us, the seat of his affections, his family, his brethren, and companions, his laws, religion, and his temple. But again, must we look to seasons of calamity and visitation; have we not the father of the faithful interceding face to face with the divine messenger for a devoted land? "O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this time." Or rather, because the piety of the patriarch was unsuccessful, hear the leader and lawgiver of the Jewish nation effectually supplicating for his threatened and offending, but now penitent followers: "Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people? remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants. And the Lord repented of the evil which he had thought to do unto his people." Or, lastly, let us attend him in the most solemn of all devotions, which seem to have been performed in the history of the world, in that sublime prayer which he offered up in behalf of his country: "If they pray towards this place and confess thy name, and turn from their sin when thou afflictest them, then hear thou in heaven, thy dwelling-place; and when thou hearest, forgive: forgive the sin of thy servants and of thy people

Israel, that thou teach them the good way, wherein they should walk. If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the Lord toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house that I have built for thy name, then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.”

## XVI.

## FAST-DAY.

## PROVERBS XIV. 34.

*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*

THERE are many propositions, which, though they be reasonable and true in themselves, and acknowledged to be so, make very little impression upon our minds. They glide through our thoughts without effect, and without leaving a trace behind them. Yet, the self-same propositions, when they are brought back to our reflection by any experience, or by any incident that falls under our observation—especially any in which we ourselves are concerned—shall be found to have a weight, a justice, a significancy in them which they never appeared to possess before. This seems to be the case with the words of Solomon which I have now read to you. That “righteousness exalteth a nation” is one of those moral maxims which no man chooses to contradict. Every hearer assents to it; but it is an assent without meaning—there is no value or importance or application perceived in the words. But when such things happen as have happened; when we have seen, and that at

our doors, a mighty empire falling from the summit of what the world calls grandeur to the very abyss and bottom, not of external weakness, but of internal misery and distress, and that for want of virtue and of religion in the inhabitants, on one side probably as well as on the other, we begin to discover that there is not only truth, but momentous instruction in the text, when it teaches us that it is “righteousness which exalteth a nation.” It is virtue, and virtue alone, which can make either nations happy or governments secure.

France wanted nothing but virtue; and by that want she fell. If the fairest region of Europe, if a numerous population, if the nominal wealth which arises from the money of a country, if large foreign possessions, if armies and fleets, if a splendid court and nobility, could have given firmness to a state, these were all possessed by her to a degree which hardly, I believe, any other nation could pretend to. Her fate, therefore, is, and ought to be, a standing lesson to the world that something more than external prosperity is necessary; and that something is—internal goodness and virtue.

I know not how I can employ the present solemn occasion, and the still more solemn admonition which the transactions that have lately gone on, and are still going on in the world, ought to convey to us, better than by illustrating the assertion of the text—that it is by the people being good, and by that alone, that any country can be happy, or any government safe.

And first of all, I would observe to you, that whatever new opinions have sprung up in France—and of some of which they have learnt the effects by sore experience—the wisest men of the last age, in that very country—men also firmly and boldly attached to public liberty—have said this: that the principles of Christianity are more favourable to good government than any principles of any philosopher or politician can be. For the celebrated French writer to whom I allude, after stating exactly what sort of a principle was suited to a monarchy, what to an aristocracy, and what to a republic, concludes by declaring—that although there be principles proper to each form of government, the principles of the Christian religion, so far as it prevailed, are better, more useful, and more effectual than them all.

And in my judgement our author, in saying that, has said no more than what reason will bear him out in.

The true Christian must be a good subject; because having been accustomed to fix his eyes and hopes upon another world, a future state of existence, “a more abiding city,” “a tabernacle not of this building,” his first care concerning the present state of things is to pass quietly and peaceably and innocently through it. Now this is the very disposition to be desired in human society; it is the disposition which keeps each man in his station, and what is more, keeps him contented with it. A man upon whom Christianity hath shed this temper can



never wish for disturbance, because he cannot wish to have that calm and even course of life broken up, by going on soberly and peaceably in which, he feels himself doing his duty, and feels from thence the highest of human satisfaction—that he is gradually making himself ready for, and advancing towards, his reward in heaven. He will not have his progress stopped, his journey interrupted. I will not say that no case of public provocation can happen which would move him ; but it must be a case clear and strong—it must be a species of necessity. He will not stir until he see a great and good end to be attained ; and not indeed a certain, because nothing in human life is so, but a rational and practicable way of attaining it. Nothing extravagant, nothing chimerical, nothing in any considerable degree doubtful, will be deemed a sufficient reason with him for hazarding the loss of that tranquillity for which he earnestly, for himself at least, desires to pass the days of his sojourning here upon earth. Then as to all ambitious, aspiring views, which are the great annoyance of public peace and order, they are killed and excluded in the heart of a Christian. If he have any ambition, it is the silent ambition of pleasing his Maker : if he aspire to any thing, it is the hope—and yet even that a humble and subdued hope—of salvation after his death. That religion, therefore, by its proper nature generates in the heart a disposition, though never adverse, but always friendly to public order and to good government, inasmuch as public order cannot be maintained

in the world without it, is, I think, a general and plain truth, and is confirmed by experience, as well as dictated by reason: for although the name and pretence of religion have at divers times been made the name and pretence of sedition and of unjustifiable insurrection against established authority, religion itself never was.

But secondly: religion is not only a source and support of national happiness, but the only source and support to be relied on. I mean, that there arise such vicissitudes and revolutions in human affairs, that nothing but this can be expected to remain, or is adapted to the changes which the course of this world is sure to bring along with it. To expect always to continue in health would be a most unreasonable expectation in any man living; and to possess a temper of mind which would be pleased and easy whilst we were well, but which could bear neither pain nor sickness, would be a very unsuitable temper, a very poor provision of spirits to go through the world with. It is just so in civil life. To be quiet whilst all things go on well; to be pleased in prosperity; not to complain when we thrive; not to murmur or accuse amidst affluence and plenty, is a state of mind insufficient to meet the exigencies of human affairs. Great varieties and alterations, both of personal and natural condition, will inevitably take place: rich men will become poor, and the poor will become distressed, and this whatever course of prosperity a nation seeks. If a people go into trade and

manufactures, innumerable accidents will fall out in the circumstances either of the country itself, or of other countries with which it is connected (for it depends upon *them* also), that must check and interrupt the progress and extent of its commerce. No wisdom hath ever yet been able to prevent these changes, or ever can. If the cultivation of the soil be more followed, and trade less so; still, though the public security be greater, the security of individuals is not greater. A harsh season, a storm, a flood, a week or even a day of unfavourable weather, may spoil the hopes and profits of a year. Disappointments therefore, and losses, and those to a very great extent, will happen to many. Now there is but one temper which can prepare the mind for changes in our worldly affairs, and that is the temper which Christianity inspires. The Christian regards prosperity at all times, not only as subject to constant peril and uncertainty, but even at the best, and in its securest state (if any state of prosperity can be called secure), regards it as an inferior object of his solicitude; inferior to a quiet conscience, inferior to the most humble endeavours to please God, and infinitely inferior to the prospect of future salvation. The consequence of viewing worldly prosperity in this light—which is the safest and truest light in which it can be seen—is that the Christian uses it when it falls to his lot with moderation; considers it as a trust, as a talent committed to him; as adding to his anxiety, and increasing his obligation to do good, and thereby

bringing with it a burden and accountableness which almost overbalances its value. And for the same reason that he uses the good things of life temperately and cautiously whilst they are his, he parts from them, or sees the diminution of them, with equanimity. When he had them, he was far from making or considering them as instruments of luxury, indulgence, or ostentation ; least of all, of intemperance and excess. Now therefore that he has them not, he has none of those pernicious gratifications to resign. Whatever be a man's worldly estate, a true Christian sees in it a state of probation, of trial, of preparation, of passage. If it be a state of wealth and plenty, it is only that ; if it be a state of adversity, it is still the same : the only difference is, whether he come at last "out of the fire," tried by the temptations of prosperity or by the strokes of misfortune and the visitations of want ; and he who acquits himself as he ought in one condition will be equally accepted and equally approved, as he who acquits himself as he ought in the other. We are wont to admire the rich man who conducts himself with humility and liberality, studying to spread and diffuse happiness and goodness around him ;—and he is deserving of praise and admiration : but I must be allowed to say, that the poor man, who, in trying circumstances, in times of hardship and difficulty, carries himself through with patience, sobriety, and industry, and, so far as he can, with contentment and cheerfulness, is a character not at all beneath the other in real merit ; not

less entitled to the esteem of good men—but whether he receive that or otherwise, not less entitled to hope for the final favour of God.

Having seen, therefore, how beneficially religion acts upon personal characters and personal happiness, it only remains to point out how, through the medium of personal character, it influences public welfare.

Disputes may and have been carried on, both with good and with evil intentions, about forms and constitutions of government; but one thing in the controversy appears clear—that no constitution can suit bad men, men without virtue and without religion; because, let such men live under what government they will, the case with them must ever be this,—if they be born to, or happen to meet with greatness and riches, they fall into dissipation, dissoluteness, and debauchery; and then, if either the experience of vice, or any accident of fortune, deprives them of the means of continuing their courses, they become desperately miserable, and being so, are ready to promote any mischief or any confusion. On the contrary, let power and authority be granted to honest and religious men, they exercise that power without hurting any one, without breaking in upon any reasonable enjoyment, or any reasonable freedom; without either plundering the rich, or grinding the poor; by affording a protection to one as well as the other equally strong and equally prompt, and, so far as human means can do it, or as civil institutions can do it, by rendering both happy in their stations.

## XVII.

## ON THE NEW YEAR.

## ROM. 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.*

I HAVE made choice of this text, both because I always thought it a solemn and affecting piece of Scripture, and because it appears well calculated to raise in us a train of reflections suitable to the beginning of a new year. The Apostle, we observe, is speaking to converts—that is, to those who were converted from heathenism to Christianity, after they were come to years of discretion. Some of these, it is probable, did not at once change their course of life with their religion, but continued in that state of sin and sensuality,—of insensibility to the calls of conscience and duty, which Saint Paul frequently terms a state of sleep, of night, and of darkness.

The Apostle, in the text, tells them if they did not when they first believed—when they first took up the profession of Christianity—awaken out of their former sleep, out of their negligence and security about their conduct, it is now, at least, high time that

they should ; “ for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” A length of time has elapsed ; we are drawing considerably nearer to the term and period which is to fix our everlasting destiny than when we first embraced the faith of Christ. It has been supposed, and with probability, that Saint Paul expected the coming of Christ to be not far off, and this expression, “ now is our salvation nearer,” alluded to that coming ; which being, as they thought, to happen soon, now drew sensibly nearer every day. These two particularities, the computing the date from the time that they became converts, and their expecting the coming of Christ to take place soon, though they clear up the meaning of the words, do not make them so strictly and precisely applicable to us ; but the general doctrine, the great and solemn admonition contained in them, is still as much for us to lay to heart, as suitable to our circumstances and religious condition, as it was to theirs to whom the letter was written. The time of any man’s death is to him the time of his salvation ; that is, the time when his destiny in another life is fixed : and we are taught by the text to reflect that we are hastening very fast to that period ; that every year draws us sensibly and considerably nearer to it. Then for this reason it is high time, if we have not already done it, to awake out of sleep ; to shake off that dullness and insensibility to religious matters which cleaves to our souls ; to rouse ourselves to virtue and to action ; to have done with these wild and distem-

pered dreams of worldly pleasures and pursuits, which have hitherto influenced us, and to open our eyes as one just awake from a sleep to views of heaven and of hell ; to a sight of our real business in this world, to making sure of a favourable sentence at the day of judgement. This meditation I think extremely suitable to the beginning of a new year. One year more, my brethren, has brought us nearer to our salvation—nearer to the term that is to fix us for ever. We now enter upon another year, and it surely is a proper opportunity to pause—to consider for a while whence we came, where we are, whither we are going, what we are about, what we have to look for. And first, they who suffer year after year to pass over their heads without any serious thoughts, or any serious endeavours after their immortal interests, know or consider little what a year is. A year is a very material portion of the whole time we have for our work. We talk of seventy or eighty years, but how few ever reach that number! The youngest, the strongest, the healthiest man living cannot be allowed to reckon upon more than thirteen or fourteen years : I mean, in worldly transactions. The very best life, and one in the very bloom and vigour of age, is not expected to be much more than that : for the generality of us, that is, for five out of six of all who are not the youngest, not half that. Let it then sink into our thoughts that a year is probably the sixth or the seventh part of all the term we have before us ; that a year neglected is one step lost or



gone backward in the business of salvation, and that such steps are but few. And it may show us the value and the consequence of a single year to look back upon the last, to recollect what changes it has made, what alterations it has produced in our neighbourhood, or amongst our acquaintance: that of those with whom we have met together, sat, and conversed, several are gone down into the grave: that the time of trial is over with them—the opportunity of salvation closed and finished for ever: that death is abroad and amongst us; that our turn is near, that it cannot be distant; that when we see what one year has produced around us, we cannot but reflect in many ways what another may bring to ourselves. Is this a time to sleep? is this a proper situation to be dreaming about gains and pleasures, and advantages, which will all cease and perish with us; whilst death and judgment, and the sentence of God Almighty at the last day, are unthought of and neglected? It is a practice with many, in the arrangement of their worldly concerns, to settle at every year's end their accounts, to inquire how their affairs stand, to see what improvement they have made, as well as what faults and mistakes they have committed; to know whether they go backwards or forwards—wherein they chiefly fail, what they are to set to rights, and how they may proceed with more safety and advantage the next year.

This is a general thing, and a good thing; inso-much as they who do not use something of this sort

seldom, I think, thrive or succeed well. Now I would earnestly recommend a similar proceeding in our religious concerns. I am sure there is infinitely greater reason for it; because our being saved or perishing everlastingly is of infinitely greater consequence to every one of us than any other thing we can possibly gain or lose here.

Now this being the case, I cannot employ the remainder of this discourse better than by suggesting such topics for this annual self-examination as may appear most necessary and most important to be inquired into. And first, I would speak to those who are sunk in habits of sottishness and sensuality—who have given themselves up to a life of drunkenness, debauchery, riot, and disorder; which, if the Bible can be depended upon, must, without a sincere repentance and reformation, bring your souls to final destruction. We adjure, we warn, and admonish you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, trust not to another year. You may not live through this. Amuse not yourselves with false calculations of long life. Old age is the lot of few, of very few indeed—not of one in a thousand who addict themselves to these things—to vice and unlawful courses. You suppose you shall be alive at the beginning of next year. You will have the same work to do as at this. You will have less ability, less inclination, more confirmed habits, more tyrannical propensities to conquer. To repent to any purpose you will have greater difficulty, greater pain, greater struggles. What ground

is there to expect that if your resolutions yield now, they should be able to stand steadfast then?

In the second place, let me address a word to such as have spent the last year, and their past life, in a total neglect and forgetfulness of all religious concerns; who may be truly said to sleep in darkness and insensibility. Consider the time. Another year is gone: a sixth or a seventh part of the whole, you can reckon your lives worth, is just departed. Open your eyes to the light. Awaken to a sense of your situation—to a knowledge of what you are, and whither you are going. It is your own affair—your own interest. Your own welfare and salvation are at stake. Things, you find, do come to pass. The silent but irresistible progress of time brings events home, which you have been accustomed to regard as at a vast distance. Perhaps one, certainly a few, of such years as that which is gone, will bring you to death and to judgement, whether you have thought of these things or not.

The exhortation to other Christians I would found upon the principle, that the true Christian's life is a state of continual progress—a constant growing in grace; a gradual amendment of ourselves, either by shaking off bad qualities or acquiring good ones, or most commonly and most naturally, by both together. Now in this view, what has the last year done for us? What virtues have we planted in our hearts? What vices have we exterminated? Have we gone backwards or forwards? Is our moral character better or

worse? Have we fought a good fight? Have we practised a steady opposition to the enemies of our salvation, to the allurements of the world, the flesh, and the devil? If we have gained one point, if we have advanced one step, if we perceive the smallest improvement in our principles and conduct, it is a high encouragement to quicken our speed, to redouble our endeavours. The hill which we climb is steepest at the bottom. The first advances in the way of virtue are most slow and most laborious. Let us not faint or desist. We shall soon add virtue to virtue—cut down one vice after another. We shall, ere long, begin to taste and to relish the satisfaction, the joys, the hopes of religion.

On the other hand, if we find that we are sinking more and more under temptation—our good principles daily giving way—our old sins grown more confirmed and irresistible, and new ones making their appearance in us, it is time to take the alarm. Another such year may ruin us for everlasting. Our case will bear no delay. We must set about it immediately, if we intend it at all, with firmness—with resolution—with perseverance. Let us then search out our condition to the bottom. Have we the last year managed our earthly affairs with scrupulous honesty, and truth, and fair dealing, or have we, in any instance, for the sake of any advantage to ourselves, taken in, overreached, or gone beyond any man? Have our transgressions and trespasses, as to sobriety and purity, been more or less frequent this last year than

heretofore? Are we growing better in this respect, or worse? How shall we better withstand temptation for the future?—or what course shall we take to avoid it? Do we feel, more or less frequently, fits of anger, rage, and passion? Have we striven against them? Have we striven to any purpose? In what degree have we conquered or corrected them; or how shall we set about to do it? Are peevishness, envy, discontent, strife, malice, hatred, covetousness, more or less rife and strong in our hearts of late than they used to be? What evil actions, what evil speakings have they of late put us upon? what quarrels, what contentions have they drawn us into? Have we endeavoured to get the better of these evil passions? Have our endeavours been successful? Have they been sincere and continued? Do we feel peace, and quietness, and humility, and good-nature, and goodwill? Have any impressive and lively lessons been spreading and gaining ground on our hearts? In a word, has the past year been distinguished by any virtuous acts and virtuous endeavours—any bad habits broken and got the better of—any good rule of living begun?

I trust, and I believe, that many of us will find in the review of the past, enough to comfort and encourage us. Many, no doubt, will find much to mortify, much to abase, much to humble them; but we shall all find enough to be done for the future.

Let us then awake out of sleep. Let us set about the reformation of our lives immediately. Let a new

year begin a new course. Let us reflect that a year more is now gone—that the time is far spent—that now is our salvation drawing nearer—that a single year brings us nearer to the awful trial when our destiny will be fixed : nearer, not by a small and inconsiderable degree, but by a very serious and substantial portion of the whole term which we, any of us, reasonably expect to live.

## XVIII.

## SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

## 2 CHRONICLES XX. 13.

*And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.*

IN a great and solemn act of national devotion, which was held during the pious reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, upon the occasion of a public danger which then threatened their country, we read that Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord; even out of all the cities of Judah, they came to seek the Lord.

Had we read no more than that Judah was gathered together, we should have been led perhaps to conclude that the assembly was made up of the king, the magistrates, and the priesthood; the heads of tribes, the masters of families, the principal persons, the aged, or at the lowest, the adult inhabitants of the country. But the words of the text which have been read to you convey a more circumstantial, and, I think, very observable account of this great religious concourse. By them we are distinctly told, that not only those whom we have before enumerated formed the con-

gregation which stood before the Lord, but that, together with the great body of the Jewish nation, were present also their little ones, their wives, and their children. This is a direct and decisive example for the proof of the following points; namely, the propriety and the duty of bringing children to the public worship of God, as an act of piety and devotion on the part of those who bring them. It is an example also of very high authority, and of an authority which is strengthened by every circumstance in the history. The assembly appears to have been held in pursuance of the prayer of Solomon many ages before—that when any distress should overtake the nation, they should find their refuge in the protection of their God, when they sought it in his Temple. This prayer was accepted; and it was particularly remembered upon the occasion of which we are now discoursing. “If when evil cometh upon us,” say they, “as the sword, judgement, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house and thy presence—for thy name is in this house—and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.”

Afterwards it is related, as we have remarked, who they were that stood before that house and in God's presence; “even all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.” Now the little ones and the children were there, not probably for any knowledge they could be supposed to have of the nature or extremity of the public danger, nor consequently for any part they could immediately and



personally take in the subject or the devotion of the meeting, but as a proof and expression, an act and testimony of the public piety, and of the particular piety of those who brought them thither.

The service was accepted by that being to whom it was addressed. The manner of it, therefore, was such as he approved. "Thou wilt hear," they said, "and help." God did hear and help them most effectually: their enemies were smitten and overthrown; the very people who had thus assembled in terror and supplication returned soon after to Jerusalem to bless the Lord who had delivered them.

Whether, therefore, we regard the solemnity or the effect of this religious act, we see in it a pattern for our imitation, because we see in it that which, it is evident from the consequence, was favourably received by the God of Israel—who is our God, as he is of the whole human race. And indeed, what act of piety can be more natural or more becoming than to draw out in the presence of God, and to bring forward in his service, the youth of the country, whom his providence has given and committed to our care? It is an act, as hath already been observed, which doth not simply respect them, but us; it is our piety, rather than theirs. It is but little that the best can do towards testifying their gratitude to the supreme Benefactor, their love, their zeal, their reverence: I mean, that it is very little when compared with the immensity of the obligation, the dignity of his nature, the sense of our dependence. What

therefore we can, we ought. What, however imperfect, he has been pleased to approve; what, however unworthy of him, he has condescended to accept, we surely should be willing to imitate—we should rejoice to pay. When their parents brought young children to Christ that he should touch them, the action was very graciously received by him: he showed manifestly, as well by his behaviour, as by his discourse upon the occasion, that he approved of what was done; but it was not the children's piety—they were ignorant and unconscious of what was passing; yet did not this hinder our Lord from being pleased with the service. It was the service, thought, and piety of those who brought the children, and not the children's own, to which he had respect; it was their motive, their affection, which he viewed. Even the bringing of children to baptism, beside the nature of the ordinance as an instituted right for the initiation of the infants themselves, is an act of worship, an expression of homage and devotion on the part of the parents. This, I take it, is a just and scriptural way of considering the subject, and we hope it will be so accepted. Upon the same principle, the bringing of children to church, beside the use of it to themselves, is an office of piety in those who do it. It is an office which springs from piety as its motive; which hath God, his pleasure, his worship, his honour, in view. There neither is, nor ever was, a parent touched with the love of God, or with any serious apprehensions upon religious subjects, who was content

with attending public worship himself, without endeavouring to bring along with him his household and his children. No doubt, it is primarily and properly the duty of parents to undertake this charge : but so it is, that many parents want the attention, the thought, the care, the inclination necessary to this work ; want, perhaps, a sense and knowledge of its importance, and of their own duty with relation to it ; want sobriety, seriousness, and regularity of behaviour too much themselves, to inculcate these qualities, or any thing which belongs to these qualities, into the minds of their children ; and some, we are ready to allow, want opportunities. To make provision for these cases, and that children under such circumstances may stand before the Lord, as the language of the Old Testament so often and well expresses it, the benevolence of others must be exerted ; and in whatever degree it is the duty of the parents, when they have in all respects the power and the opportunity to bring their children to church, in the same degree it is an act of rational and acceptable piety to supply the power and the opportunity where they are not, as well as to furnish inducement and encouragement where there is want of will.

I contend therefore, and I conceive that I am authorized by Scripture to contend, that the bringing of children to the public worship of God is an act of public worship in us, and such a one as we have good reason to believe will be well pleasing to him. This is a distinct and original reason for the beneficence

we now solicit : but no doubt, one great consideration upon the subject is the advantage to the children themselves.

Were man a purely rational creature, that is, was he directed in all things by unprejudiced reason alone, or could any plan or system of management make him so, it might be argued very forcibly, that in religious and moral subjects he ought to be left to the free and unbiassed opinion which he might form when he came of sufficient age ; and that no influence whatever should be exerted upon the tender and unripe understandings of youth. But neither this proposal, nor any proposal which proceeds upon the supposition of mankind being guided solely by their reason,<sup>10</sup> accords with the actual condition of human life. Man is made up of habits and prejudices—it is the constitution of his nature ; and being so, the only choice which is left us is, whether we will have good prejudices or bad ones ; salutary habits, or habits which are pernicious : for the one or the other will infallibly gain possession of the character.

To which must be added another powerful consideration—that the tendency, not of human nature, but of human nature placed in the midst of vicious and corrupt examples, is almost always to the worse. Instances are but too numerous, where well-educated children as they grow up fall off, decline as they come into the world from their early principles, grievously disappoint the hopes that have been entertained of them : but the cases are very rare in which

the man or woman turn out good where the child was bad ; where uncurbed, neglected, impious youth ends in any thing better than profligate life. Therefore, to give to men even the chance of becoming virtuous, and by being virtuous happy, all endeavours are requisite to impress good habits, as the only possible means of excluding bad ones.

To apply these general considerations to the particular subject of Sunday Schools.—Without entering into any question, which is by no means necessary here, concerning the degree of strictness with which the Sabbath ought to be kept, it is confessed by all who bear or wish to bear the name of Christians, that it ought to be a day of rest, yet of quietness, order, and sobriety; of some exercise, at least, of religious worship, and at least of some attention to religious concerns. How will it be believed, or can it be expected, that youth, who spend their Sundays in a total contempt of these things, and in the company of those who contemn them; in rude play, in stupid sloth, in riotous and barbarous sports, in noisy and profane society; hearers, though they themselves do not share in them, of almost every species of bad discourse: is it, I say, likely that children who have been accustomed to spend their Sundays in this manner, when they become men will spend them as they ought to do? And perhaps there are few situations to which these remarks are more applicable than those of frequented sea-ports. In the tranquillity of a country village, children who are not at church may

be harmlessly engaged; but where dangerous examples, where loose conversation, and bad companions, the means, the opportunities, the incentives to vice, abound so much as they do in crowded places and in places connected with a seafaring life, it is greatly to be feared that if children and young persons be not engaged in what is good, they will be engaged in wickedness; that they are not merely absent from the duty and the place where they ought to be, but they are present at scenes which must go near to destroy all the seeds and elements of virtue within them. It may be true, that of those who by their parents or the public are brought to church in their youth, some show very little proofs of being affected or benefited by it. But this is nothing more than what may be said of every plan of education. The best oftentimes fails. As concerning education, therefore, the proper question is—Do those who have no education succeed? and not Does every one that has it make a right use of it? So in this article of bringing children to church, the first inquiry is, whether those who never come to church in their youth will do so when they are grown up; and whether this might not have been the case with multitudes, if they had not been beholden to these institutions.

Then as to another objection—that children just perhaps rising out of infancy are incapable of understanding much of what is going on at church. The objection, in the first place, does not belong to the

children who are brought to church by this institution, more than it did to the little ones, and the children, whom Jehoshaphat assembled in the congregation of Judah, or to the children who were presented to Christ: and we know that in neither of these two cases did the reason hinder its being an accepted service, in their view who brought them. In the next place, the objection is alleged without a sufficient knowledge of human life. It is not only possible, but it is in the ordinary course of things, that men retain from reason and principle what they at first acquired by habit, and under the influence of authority; which yet, if it had not been so acquired, this reason might never have attended to, nor their principles have been excited towards it. Every art and science is at first learnt by rote. Children do not at first know the reason of the rules of grammar or arithmetic; nor is it probable they would ever become grammarians or arithmeticians if they put off learning the practice till they comprehended the proofs. It is afterwards, when they come to employ their own thoughts and their own reflections; when they come to work themselves upon the materials which have previously been laid in by rote, that men of science and learning are formed. A good deal of this observation is true of religion. The principles of Christian knowledge and rules of Christian duty, like all first rules and principles, must be learnt by example and authority. And this is necessary, in order that when men begin to reflect, they may be

provided with something to reflect upon; and we trust and believe, that the principles of Christianity are so well founded, that the more men's reason opens and operates, the more they will be inclined to hold fast by their own judgement what they at first received from the instruction of others. Whereas if a man knew nothing of divine worship in his youth, it would be such a strangeness to him afterwards, that if he should happen to enter a church, it would be with a stupid gaze and wonder at what was passing, rather than with any disposition or any capacity to join in it. This would be a defect not to be overcome by reason; because it is not probable that men's reasoning faculties would be exerted upon a subject from which they were absolutely estranged; it probably therefore would not be overcome at all during the course of the man's life.

I recur to an observation which hath already been stated—that all we can do for the honour of God, the utmost return we can any of us make to him for his unceasing, ill-deserved, and unspeakable mercies, is poor and inadequate to the obligation; yet we are not to sink under the sense of our unworthiness, of the feebleness of our endeavours, of their frequent want of efficacy and success; but on the contrary; just in proportion as they are such, we are to use and exert them to the extent of our power; we are to do our all and our utmost. One mode of testifying our piety toward God is by bringing young persons and children to his worship: it is a mode founded in



rational considerations as it respects the children; and as it respects God, it is what we have authority from his Word to say, he himself is pleased to accept and to approve.

I am given to understand that the liberality of the neighbourhood, together with the prudent and praiseworthy attention of those who conduct this charity, afford a prospect of extending its usefulness to some other objects, particularly the establishment of a Day School. I shall only say, that it must be an additional motive to the contributors to know that nothing will be lost; that what can be spared from one good purpose will be applied to another; that if they cast, as the Scripture expresses it, their bread upon the waters, they will, by one channel or another, though after many days, find it again—find it in its effect upon the good and happiness of some one; find it in its reward to themselves.

## XIX.

## THE PARABLE OF THE SAMARITAN.

LUKE X, 36, 37.

*Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.*

THE parable of the good Samaritan was calculated to ascertain who are the proper objects of our love and kindness: for in the conversation which precedes, it seems to have been agreed between our Lord and the person with whom he conversed (who is called by Saint Luke a lawyer, but which name amongst the Jews rather signified a divine), that the great rules of the law were, to “love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself.” But then a doubt is suddenly started, “who was that neighbour?” who was to be accounted a neighbour within the sense and construction of the precept? To this doubt our Saviour applies this excellent parable. And the whole frame and texture of the parable is contrived to set forth this lesson,—that the persons best entitled to our help and kindness are those who stand in the most urgent need of it; that we are to help

those who are most helpless ; that our healing, friendly hand is to be held out to all who are cast in our way in circumstances of misery and distress, let their relation to us in other respects be ever so remote, or even ever so adverse ; and be the case which hath brought them under our observation, and within the reach of our assistance, what it will. This is the lesson to be gathered from this beautiful and affecting piece of Scripture ; and almost every circumstance introduced into it has a reference and application to that moral. It forms the very point of the narrative. The wounded traveller was a stranger to the man who relieved him. He was more ; he was a national enemy. And the very force of the parable turns upon this circumstance. Do you think it was without design that our blessed Saviour made choice of a Samaritan and a Jew as the persons of his story ? It was far otherwise : it was with a settled intention of inculcating this benevolent truth—that no difference, no opposition of political, national, or even religious sentiments, ought to check the offices of humanity, where situations of calamity and misfortune called for them ; and no two characters in the world could more perfectly answer our Lord's purpose than those of a Samaritan and a Jew ; for every one who knows any thing of the history of those times and those countries, or even who has read the New Testament with care, knows this : that the most bitter and rancorous hostility subsisted between these two descriptions of men ; and that it was an hostility

founded, not only in a difference of nation, but also in a difference of religion. What is, perhaps, still more apt to inflame dislike and enmity, is a difference of doctrines and opinions upon the same religion. On the part of the Samaritans, you meet with an instance of enmity and dislike, in refusing at one of their villages the common rights of hospitality to our Lord and his followers, because he was going up, it seems, to join in the public worship of the festival to be celebrated at Jerusalem, whereas they thought "Mount Gerizim was the place where men ought to worship." Another instance of the complete alienation and studied distance at which the Jews and Samaritans kept each other is seen in our Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well; for the woman could not forbear expressing her surprise that our Lord, whom she perceived to be a Jew, asked even for a cup of water at her hand: "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria?" The same thing that had surprised the woman surprised also the disciples: for when they came up to the place, they marvelled, you read, that he talked with the woman; and the cause of surprise in both cases is explained by the Evangelist, who tells us "that the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." In the foul and most undeserved abuse, which some of the Pharisees bestowed upon our Saviour, one of the harshest and bitterest things they could say was, "Thou art a Samaritan." This shows the temper of the men and of the times.

Such was a Jew, and such was a Samaritan ; yet, in the beautiful parable before us, when a Samaritan found a Jew stripped, wounded, and left half naked, he thought no more of their public hostility, their national quarrel, their religious controversies ; still less did he reflect that the Jews and Samaritans had no dealings with each other ; that a Jew was not to speak to a Samaritan, nor a Samaritan to a Jew. None of these reflections were entertained by him. He yielded at once to the impulse of his compassion, and to the extremity of the case. Had the Samaritan gone about to seek excuses for passing by the poor traveller, specious excuses were not wanting. The traveller's character was quite unknown to him. He was ignorant what sort of person he was, or how far deserving of his bounty. He had many at home whom he did know, Samaritans like himself, of the same country and the same faith ; and many, no doubt, suffering under every species of distress. The person before him was one of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who were all the old and bitter enemies of his country. He had no reason to think that if a Jew had found him in such a situation, he would have thought it his duty to afford him any succour at all : and no reflection is more common and natural than to do to others, not what we would that others should do to us, but what we believe that others would do to us, if our situations were theirs. The accident also, which had thrown the traveller in his way, was an accident in which he had no concern. He had not

robbed or beaten him. It was not owing to him, or to any fault of his, that the road was infested with thieves, and that the mischief had happened. These excuses were at hand; but the Samaritan sought none. It cannot be doubted, in truth it never was doubted, but that our Saviour, in describing the conduct and character of the Samaritan, pointed out a conduct which he approved, and a character which he loved. This is evident, not only from the occasion and general instruction of the parable, but from the words with which our Lord concludes it; "Go, and do thou likewise." The story was so framed, that it extorted a commendation from the Jewish lawyer, though the commendation was bestowed upon a person whom he hated,—upon the enemy of his name and religion,—a Samaritan. And the reply our Saviour made was surely the right and true one—Imitate thou the conduct which thou canst not help approving; "Go, and do thou likewise." It is most evident, therefore, that when, under similar circumstances, we act as the Samaritan acted, we act according to our Saviour's command.

Now besides the general instruction which there may be gathered from the parable, besides the general impression which it can hardly fail of making upon minds capable of receiving any moral or religious impression at all; besides, I say, its main purpose and general use, there are particular circumstances in it, calculated to excite salutary reflections.

First of all, it was by no means a good disposition

in the lawyer, which put him upon asking the question, "Who is my neighbour?" It was seeking a needless difficulty in a plain duty, which always, I take it, springs from a backwardness and lukewarmth, to say the least, towards the duty itself. When men are hearty and in earnest in any duty, they are not apt to multiply questions about it. The lawyer would not love his neighbour as himself till he knew precisely who was to be reckoned his neighbour. Now had his charity been strong, been real, he could have felt no want of any such information : his own heart would have informed him. As occasions arose, as misery and distress came in his way, as the powerful help and succour was possessed by him, he would have been ready to stretch out his hand, to have given way to his compassion, without nicely deliberating whether the object before him wanting his aid, was, or was not, the neighbour whom he was commanded to love.

Secondly ; whatever difficulties and distinctions we are perplexed with in our own cases, we can generally determine, both readily and rightly, in the cases that apply to others. When this beautiful narrative was related to the lawyer, and the question upon it pointed home to his conscience, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour to him that fell among the thieves?" the lawyer had no doubt at all about the answer—"He that showed mercy on him." When another man was concerned, the case was clear. When the precept of loving his

neighbour was to be obeyed by himself, and at his own expense, he was then at a loss to know who his neighbour was ; to ascertain, that is, the limits, the extent, the measure, the objects of the obligation.

Thirdly, and lastly, we have here, as upon many other occasions, great reason to admire the wisdom with which our blessed Lord spake ; the manner and the excellency of his teaching. It is extremely material to observe, that this parable was not merely made by our Lord, or prepared beforehand in the manner of a set discourse, but, from the nature of the case, was conceived at the moment. The occasion was sudden and unexpected : a certain lawyer stood up, and started the question. It was, therefore, our Lord's divine promptness and presence of mind that enabled him, without study, without notice, to deliver a wiser, and more exquisite, and more complete solution of the question, than any study or learning could have produced. This was agreeable to his constant method : he gave to every incident, every discourse, to what happened before his eyes, to what passed in his conversation, a turn so as to draw from it a lesson of perpetual use. Not merely the lawyer was to go away answered, but his disciples instructed—his disciples in all ages of the world. As much, therefore, are we who read this beautiful passage in his Scriptures as they who heard the word from his lips obliged to attend to it in our minds and thoughts, and to observe it in our lives and practice.



## XX.

## THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

MATTHEW XXV. 19.

*After a long time, the lord of those servants cometh,  
and reckoneth with them.*

You cannot but know that these words are the conclusion of the parable of the talents ; in which parable God's final dealings with mankind are set forth under the similitude of a master, who, setting out upon a distant journey, delivered talents, to some more, and to some fewer, to his several servants, and, upon his return required from each a separate account of his management ; that upon those who had managed what was committed to them with diligence and success he bestowed high, yet proportionable rewards ; that one who, though he had not spent or wasted, yet had hidden and totally neglected his talent, and had made no use of it whatever, he not only dismissed without reward, but sentenced him for his neglect to a grievous punishment. Now every thing in the New Testament which discloses the rules and principles according to which God will be pleased to judge us at the last is of extreme importance, because they are what we must stand or fall by, and

because they are what we ought to regulate our choice and behaviour by, whilst we have the matter in our power. Therefore this parable, as well as those others concerning the delivery of the talents (for it is given by the Evangelists, and was repeated by our Saviour in two or three different forms), is amongst the passages of Scripture deserving our most serious attention. The points to be well considered are—what is meant by talents ; and what is meant by improving, and by neglecting, and by abusing them : for these points being understood, the application of the parable to our respective cases and conditions will be sufficiently plain.

By *talents*, then, are meant any powers or faculties by which we can do good. Every such power or faculty which we find ourselves possessed of is a talent delivered to us by God ; and therefore a talent, for the use, the abuse, the neglect of which, as the parable expresses it, our Lord will reckon with us.

One principal thing, and the most difficult thing to be comprehended on the subject, is, that every man, the most common and ordinary person, hath his talent, for the exercise of which he will have to account. I say this is less easy of comprehension, because, whenever we talk of talents, we are in the habit of considering only great talents, or extraordinary endowments and advantages. We are very ready to allow, and we think that is what the parable means, that those who have superior gifts—those who are blessed with quick abilities, or with favours

of fortune above the common lot of mankind—ought to employ these rightly ; and that if they do not so, they are highly and justly censurable : but we do not see how this relates to us, who make no pretensions to uncommon endowments of any kind ; who are not in stations to possess much power of doing either good or evil. This way of thinking makes nine out of ten regard the parable of the talents as what does not at all concern them. I will endeavour therefore, as I proceed, to show you, that when the proper and true notion of moral talents is entertained, they are such things as, in a great degree, are given to every one, and what therefore every one will in the same degree be responsible for.

I have said, and I repeat it, that every power and faculty by which, according as we use it, we may do good, and by which, according as we misuse it, we may do harm, is a talent within the sense and rule of the parable. This definition extends the parable to all, notwithstanding there may be, and there is, much diversity, both in kind and degree, of the powers and faculties of different men ; yet I believe that there are some of every station in whom their talents do not subsist in a sufficient degree to make the possessors responsible.

To see this satisfactorily, as well indeed as the full drift and extent of the parable, we may reflect, that the gifts which we are to account for, and which, according as we employ them, may be instruments of good or of evil, are either the faculties of the body,

the faculties of the mind, or the advantages of situation.

With respect to the body, it is a great fault that few set such value as they ought upon the blessings of health, strength, soundness, and activity: those who possess them are, for the most part, those who never knew the want of them; or else they would be sensible how graciously they were dealt with by their Maker, when he formed them with a vigorous constitution of body. A healthy constitution is a talent, and a talent from God. Now this talent is used as it ought to be when we employ it, and get our own living, in that station of life into which it hath pleased God to call us; when we labour honestly and faithfully, according to our portion of strength and activity, for the maintenance of our families. This is the natural and intended use of the talent; therefore it may and ought to be an encouraging reflection to the industrious husbandman at his plough, the industrious weaver at his loom, the artificer at his work, the tradesman in his shop, that he is then and there using the precious gift of bodily health and strength in the way in which his Maker intended they should be used, and that when his Master comes to reckon for the gift he can render his account. Health, strength, and activity are talents: lawful industry is the use of those talents. There will be occasions for using them still more meritoriously, when we can put forth our exertion to help a neighbour, to do a good or a kind turn by means of our bodily

activity, without desiring or hoping to be paid for it. I do allow that such exertions can only be occasional; but the readiness and the disposition to lend our assistance when the occasions do arise is both a duty and a virtue. To save, for instance, a man from a shipwreck can happen but seldom—but that disposition which would make a man exert or endanger himself when it did happen may be constant—the disposition resides in a good man constantly, though the occasions which call it forth arise only incidentally. The talent is neglected, when men suffer their bodily strength and activity to rust in sloth and idleness, and thereby become a useless burden to society; when men have not taught themselves any useful art, or do not exercise what they profess, with such regularity as to be faithful to the expectations of those who employ them, and so manage to throw themselves out of employment, and then make that a pretence for leading an idle life. Such men find poverty, unpitied poverty, the common consequence of their conduct; or if they be preserved from that, they find the uncomfortableness of an insignificant existence: but what I wish them to find is, that they are laying up a precious talent in a napkin; that their Lord will come and reckon with them; that they will have no sufficient account to render of their talent—none of its improvement, none of its application. But this talent of bodily health and strength may be worse than neglected—it may be abused; and this is the case when it is employed to carry men into lewd, drunken, or vicious courses.

To see a young man, blessed by his Maker with the gifts of health, strength, and activity—blessings which no money can purchase—blessings, which, if they could be purchased, thousands would lay down their fortunes as the price; to see him using the strength and goodness of his constitution, and at a time of life when both are in perfection, only in pursuit of debauchery and intemperance, and making the firmness of his health only a reason for plunging deeper and continuing longer in these courses—is to witness a most wicked abuse of the Creator's kindness. It is the height and extremity of ingratitude. It is not simply neglecting a precious talent, but it is wilfully consuming and destroying it. Besides every other aggravation that attends this course of life, it is chargeable with the guilt of throwing away the bounty of Providence. What has not such an one to fear, when his Lord shall demand an account of his gifts?

But, secondly, we have other faculties than those of the body—we have endowments of mind to account for. And by endowments of mind I do not mean great parts, great abilities; because, if the parable related to these alone, it would concern very few: though it be true, no doubt, that such parts and such abilities, when they do occur, cast upon the owner of them corresponding obligation to exert and exercise them properly. They are given, not to outshine others with, but to do good to others. I here rather intend that which, thanks be to God, is conferred

upon most of us—a right and sound mind ; and I desire it may never be forgotten that this is a gift, properly so called ; and moreover, that it is not less a gift because it is bestowed upon others as well as upon us ; and being likewise a gift, by the use of which we can do good, it is a talent in the sense of the parable. The capacity of learning is a talent : they therefore who, with sufficient capacity, learn nothing—no useful art, occupation, or knowledge, from being either too idle to take the necessary pains, or too dissipated to give the necessary attention, or submit to the necessary confinement—grievously neglect their talent. They who, being masters of some useful art, do not exercise it to the benefit of mankind, also grievously neglect their talent. They who feel in themselves a particular turn to some one art or science, a peculiar facility in acquiring it, and a prospect of attaining to eminence and excellence, do very well to cultivate their talent in that way in which they can hope to be most serviceable ; not, however, imagining that their parts place them above their regular calling, at least, till they have provided themselves with something better. But faculties of mind are abused when our whole ingenuity is turned to contrive and execute mischief, or compass unlawful ends, with more subtlety and success than the generality of men could do ; and it is lamentable to see men of good parts, not only make this bad use of their parts, but boast of so doing ; and value them-

selves upon the extraordinary skill and address which they have shown in carrying some point they never ought to have attempted.

Another talent committed to men, that is, another quality by which they may do either much good or much harm, is the power and influence that result from station. I very well know, you will say, that this talent is not intrusted to us who occupy honest, but certainly very private stations in life: what power have we to use? what influence can we exert? If this be a talent, it is one for which we cannot have to account. Now this is the very point I wish you to see—that private as the situations of most of us undoubtedly are, there is, nevertheless, a species and degree of influence belonging to all of them which we may either apply or misapply, and for which we are equally accountable with those who possess higher stations. For instance: no man has a family of children and servants, but in that very relation of a parent and master of a family he has a great deal of power and influence. The subjects of his power may not be numerous, but the power itself is very great. Here therefore is influence, for the due use of which we shall have to account as much as a prince will have to account for the authority of his station. The parent, therefore, who uses his authority over his children for the purpose of pouring into their minds principles of godliness and religion, of training them up in the habits of piety and obedience to their great Creator, and of qualifying them for being useful to



man, discharges his trust, and employs his talent. A parent who is careless about his children altogether, or who, though he takes some care of their education, as far as respects means of succeeding in the world, yet takes none of their morals, and dispositions, and religion, neglects his trust, and suffers a great opportunity of doing good to pass by him unimproved. Again : a parent who by his countenance and example and conversation leads his children to vice, as much as a good man would lead his children to virtue, not perhaps designedly (for that must be a strange case), but very effectually abuses the ascendancy which God and nature have given him over the minds and persons of his offspring ; which ascendancy is full as great in a poor man's family as in a rich man's. The same thing appertains in a considerable, though not in the same degree, to those who have servants within their families, and also, though in a degree less strict, to those who have workmen in their employment. You see, therefore, that the most private station is not without its measure of influence ; which influence is a thing committed to us, and for the due use and employment of which we shall be called to account ; for the neglect alone, we shall be punished ; for the abuse, most severely.

The true way of treating the subject is, not to go about to excuse ourselves by the humility or poverty of our station, the common and ordinary nature of our faculties and occupations, and so leave the instruction contained in the parable of the talents to

the concern of those who feel themselves in possession of great abilities, great wealth, and great stations to do good in, as if these alone were intended to be admonished by it: but the way is, first, to regard every means and every opportunity of doing good to any as a talent in the meaning of the parable; and then to inquire what means, what opportunities are given to ourselves, either in our bodily health and vigour, or in our mental soundness and understanding, or in our place and relation as parents and children, as masters of servants, as members of a neighbourhood; and whereinsoever we find the means and opportunities (and no man who inquires fairly but will find many, and sometimes more than he had believed or thought of) to consider them as what he shall have to account for at last, and the use, or neglect, or abuse of which will form one principal subject of inquiry at the last day, and one principal ground of God's judgement; ever bearing in mind, what the parable very expressly avers—that the neglect simply will be imputed to us as a crime.

## XXI.

## PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

LUKE XVIII. 9—14.

*And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. Two men went up into the Temple to pray ; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself— God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other : for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased ; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

VANITY, which can mix itself with the best actions, is apt to steal into our religion as much as any one thing in the world ; nor is it to be wondered at. Religion is what every man can pretend to ; and religion being of so much greater importance

than any thing else, gives to some either real or even imagined superiority the highest value and excellence. Besides, when we have bestowed extraordinary pains and attention upon any subject whatever, it is very natural to value ourselves upon it; if this subject, then, be of an high nature and consequence, this value that we put upon our attainment of it will be high in proportion. Nor are men to be blamed for *overvaluing religion*—that is impossible; but for overvaluing their own proficiency in it—that is very possible; and for making religious excellence, whether real or supposed, a reason for despising others.

But hitherto we have only been observing that spiritual pride is very natural, is what men easily glide into. We will venture to say, that of all prides spiritual pride is the worst: the pride of riches, the pride of dress, the pride of family, the pride of beauty, though very absurd and offensive, are neither singly, nor all together, so bad as religious or spiritual pride. When I say so bad, I mean, it does so much harm to the man himself or to others.

The effect it has upon the man himself is no other than spoiling entirely his religion, by placing it all upon wrong motives. The pure and proper motive of religion is the desire of pleasing and obeying God. This simply and solely should be our motive; and this motive alone makes it like religion to any purpose. Now the man whose heart is touched or tinctured with spiritual pride performs whatever he

has to perform in religion, not so much to please God—which may or may not be in his thoughts—but to vie with or surpass his neighbour; that he may indulge the pleasing contemplation of his advantages and superiority over him. This is no longer religion; it is not, from that time forth, assumed with the intention of aiming at final salvation: it is in reality envy and hatred, pride and ill-will, showing itself in the outward acts and forms of religion and piety; and it is pride, envy, and hatred still—for to the great Judge of all men, who knows well the heart and the secrets of it, and who judges not by appearance but principles, it makes no difference what cloke or colour our passions put on. Religion is that which must save us. How exceedingly pernicious, therefore, must any bad passions of our nature, that turn of temper be, which places all religion upon this wrong foundation; and so, by making it spring from a motive that is not right, makes it offensive and displeasing to God, instead of being an acceptable service to him!

This is the ground on which I choose at present to fix the pernicious nature of spiritual pride; namely, that it makes all religion proceed from wrong motives, though it might at the same time be accused of making men morose, censorious, unforgiving, and disdainful.

But this domineering opinion of our own proficiency in concerns of religion is pernicious in its effects upon others as well as upon the man himself

who is influenced by it. It raises in others a disgust and dislike of religion. When they see that religion only makes a man contemptuous and austere, they naturally enough begin to entertain a prejudice against such religion as an insult upon themselves. No man can bear to be despised in his religion any more than in other things; so that when they find any one so proudly and ostentatiously displaying his abundance of piety; when he seems by his carriage and conversation to let them know how much he is their superior in the most important thing in the world; it is not to be wondered at if they take an aversion to religion, which only tends, in this instance (and it is but few that will look beyond it), to engender superciliousness and self-conceit. I do not say that they argue *rightly*, but it is sure enough that many do argue so: it is enough to render those justly chargeable with doing much mischief in the world who thus create an aversion to religion. We are to *win* our brethren, and bring them over to the service of holiness; and there is sufficient impiety in the world to make it altogether unnecessary to offend by a fastidious pride of godliness.

Such, then, is the nature and effect of religious pride; and I think I may say that no other sort of pride is so dangerous; and such were the effects which were too obvious to escape the censure of our Saviour—particularly as he had constantly before him examples of it in the Pharisees. The little parable which forms the text is calculated exactly to

reprove this vice, and is most admirably contrived for that purpose, as well as to show the general temper and character of Christ's religion, which upon this, as upon all other occasions, abounds in quietness, humility, and peace.

What little is necessary to be explained in this parable I will now proceed to observe, though my discourse will answer a good purpose if it be the means only of making you mark and call to mind the parable itself, whenever any sentiment of self-sufficiency in religion rises in your minds; whenever you are tempted, that is, whenever you are tempted to be religious merely out of competition, or to view your own supposed state with vanity, and look upon that of others with disdain.

A Pharisee and Publican went up into the Temple to pray. The Pharisees were a religious sect who pretended to extraordinary strictness, and were of high repute amongst their countrymen for their supposed sanctity. A Publican was a tax-gatherer, employed by the Romans, who had the Jews in subjection, to collect taxes among them. They were, as you may suppose, extremely odious and ill-thought of, partly because the Jews, who were weary under their subjection, hated their profession, and partly because the persons themselves deserved it. Now it was not without design that our Saviour in this parable made choice of a Pharisee and Publican; as he thereby intimated that in people and professions of the highest repute you will often meet only pride

and hypocrisy—while in others, the meanest, and most despised or disliked, you shall find sincere piety and virtue; that with God, who seeth not as we see, who regardeth not names, or persons, or professions, the service of one shall be accepted, the other rejected. “The Pharisee prayed thus with himself—God, I thank thee, I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican.” This might be all true; indeed, we ought to suppose it was true: but was it his business to *remind*, as it were, his God of it, or even to bear it in his own mind whilst he was addressing God? It showed that his reflections were employed, not upon the purity and glory of his Creator, but upon himself. Had his thoughts been at all fixed upon his God; had he considered his own infinite remoteness from him; the adorable and astonishing perfections of the being he was addressing; and his own weakness, infirmity, and vileness—he would rather have trembled under the thoughts of addressing him at all, than have come to him with a proud recital of his imaginary virtues. Nothing, if you reflect upon it, could be more out of season. The Pharisee’s prayer was, in truth, no devotion at all; for it was not God, the object of all devotion, that was in his thoughts, but his own good qualities. Though we must suppose, to give the parable its proper force, that the Pharisee was, what he pretended to be, guiltless of extortion and adultery; that he was, com-



paratively with this Publican, and generally speaking, virtuous; yet we must suppose also that he had his failings and his faults, of which we are to hear nothing. He seems to have no remembrance, to make no acknowledgement of his sins and frailties—these had no place in the worship of the Pharisee, if it can be called worship; and this was one reason that made it unacceptable to God.

But another part of the Pharisee's behaviour on this occasion is very strongly to be censured; that part is the *uncharitableness* of it. The Publican stood with him in the Temple, though afar off. This Pharisee could not pass by the opportunity of indulging his vanity, and declaring his superiority; he could not even there refrain from that contempt and hatred with which this order of men was treated. What had this poor Publican done to him? What right had he to insult him? Whatever this Publican was, he was not then, nor at any time, a subject of triumph or contempt to the Pharisee. Most men would have been softened down by such an occasion, and have considered that they, as fellow-creatures and brethren, were kneeling down before their common Parent, imploring the same mercy, in need of the same bounty and protection. The Pharisee, on the contrary, did not only look upon this supposed sinner to cherish his own pride and complacency, but he must even turn intercessor with God against him, and presume to carry his arrogance and invective to

the footstool of divine mercy itself. No wonder that God should turn away his ears from prayers which are mingled with malice and presumption.

In our poor Publican we have a model, I take it, of true Christian devotion. He comes with a deep and afflicting sense of his sins, and an earnest concern and contrition for them : he makes no comparisons, he draws no parallel betwixt himself and others ; nor does he fly to those wild and superstitious modes of appeasing an angry God, which grief or dismay is wont to suggest ; but with that true and unaffected simplicity which comes pure from the heart, he casts himself on the compassion of his Maker ; “ he would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner !”

We can never sufficiently admire the meekness and humility, the simplicity and earnestness, of this prayer. I do not mean an affected humility, which is put on for the purpose ; but that which is real and undesigned, flowing from a just sense of our own vileness and offences.

The Publican's prayer was agreeable to God ; and the more our prayers resemble it in spirit—the more unmixed they come from the heart—the more simple they are in expression—the more we have reason, from this parable, to hope that they will be accepted. “ I tell you,” says our Saviour, “ this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.” Our Saviour does not directly say that either was

justified, nor was it likely that the Saviour would give countenance to such a doctrine; but so far as depended upon the act of devotion, the Publican was more acceptable to God than the Pharisee.

The application of this parable to ourselves is easy. Do we secretly allow ourselves to say or think we are not so bad as other men are, or even as this or that particular person? Let us remember the parable. Do we profess a strictness in our religion, with a view, not only of pleasing and obeying God, but with a notion that we are surpassing our neighbour, and with a view of triumphing over him? Let us remember the parable. Does the pleasure and satisfaction we take in performing the duties of our religion arise merely from the thought of obtaining God's approbation, or are we counting upon the applause of the world; feeding and flattering our own consequence? Does our notion of piety lead us to survey others, even bad men, with complacency and compassion, and to behave towards them accordingly? Does it cool or diminish our good-will and benevolence towards our neighbours? Does it make us more curious to find out their faults; more willing to stick to their failings than to seek for virtues; more liberal of our censure; less inclined to forgive; more disposed to hate; more ready to throw others at a distance, in order to indulge our own spleen, and swell out our own importance? then must we remember the parable. Do we bring this conceit of ourselves and contempt of others

to church? does it mix with and steal upon our devotions in private? Whenever we find this temper growing upon us, we may be sure that our religion is taking a wrong turn; it does not proceed from a growth of Christianity within us; it is the religion of the Pharisee, and not that which will make us full of gentleness, meek, humble, affectionate, and compassionate; tending to exercise and improve the love of our neighbour, instead of inclining us towards contempt and hatred.

## -XXII.

## ANALOGY BETWEEN OUR NATURAL AND RELIGIOUS PROGRESS.

1 COR. XIII. 11, 12.

*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

SAINT PAUL in these words means to describe the imperfect state of our knowledge now, with respect to any of these mysterious parts of both natural and revealed religion, especially with respect to what shall take place after this life, compared with that clear and complete knowledge of these subjects which we shall be endowed with then; and the similitude he makes use of—that of the thoughts and understanding of a child, compared with the thoughts and understanding of the same person when become a man—always appeared to me to convey the justest conception of this matter, and the most likely to satisfy us in the darkness, and confusion, and un-

certainty under which we labour, of any that could have been devised for the purpose. Saint Paul's words might be briefly explained thus : Let a grown person look back upon the notions and views of things which he had when a child—let him remark how much these notions are altered, and improved, and corrected since—how vain, and wild, and simple, and short of the truth they then were ;—and how sensible soever such a person must be of the feebleness of his early understanding, of the errors and extravagance of his childish conceits, equally sensible shall we, in another life, become of the imperfection, and weakness, and fallaciousness of our present judgment and our present apprehension of many subjects. This is what Saint Paul says of himself ; and whatever he confessed of his own understanding in these matters, surely we need not be loth to acknowledge of ours. But to do Saint Paul's observation justice, it will be fitting to point out distinctly, and more at length, every particular in which his comparison holds ; for I think the more we turn it in our minds, the more truth, impressiveness, and good sense we shall discover in it.

First, then, it must strike every one who will please to review the ideas and imaginations of his youth, of what was then his notion of many things which he now looks at, and has long looked at, as so many vain and foolish baubles—how eager he was in the pursuit of them, how impatient of being disappointed. He is at a loss now to conceive where or in what

the value or pleasure of them could consist, so much to engage his affections, to agitate his passions, to give him such anxiety in the pursuit, and pain in the loss. Now something very like this will probably take place in the judgement we shall hereafter form of many of the articles which at present compose the objects of our care and solicitude. When we come, in the new state of our existence, to look back upon riches, and honours, and fortune, and pre-eminence, and prosperity—how like the play and pursuits of children, their little strifes, and contests, and disturbances, will these things appear? When the curtain is drawn aside, and the great scene of our future existence let in upon our view, how shall we regard the most serious of our present engagements and successes, as the toys and trifles of our childhood—the sport and pastime of this infancy of our existence!

A second particular, in which we cannot but remark the fault of our youthful minds, and how we have been gradually amending and altering as we grow up, is the impetuosity with which we seized upon every pleasure that was at hand, whatever it cost us afterwards, and how unconcerned and unaffected we were by what lay at any distance. The amusement of the next hour, the sport of the next day, was all we thought of. What was to become of us, how we were to be provided for, or what was to be our destiny when we grew up, or even the next year, never interested our attention, or entered

our thoughts. I say, we find this earnestness, as we advance in years and experience, by degrees wear off. We have learned to a certain distance to look before us—to forego a small advantage in hand for the sake of a greater in reversion—to deny ourselves, in some cases, a present pleasure, rather than incur a future pain, or lose a more important satisfaction which we have in view : but still the infirmity is but worn away in part ; much of it yet remains. We have learned to look before us, but it may be indistinctly ; and the imperfection, which still cleaves to us in this respect, we shall hereafter be as sensible of, as we seem now to be of the same imperfection in the thoughts and passions of our early years. Thus we are able to part with a present supply for a treasure in prospect, in order to secure to ourselves, and for ourselves, the means of acquiring a good estate some time hence ; and this is getting a great way beyond the hasty thoughts and improvidence of children—of many who continue children all their lives : but can we reconcile ourselves to the sacrifice of a substantial interest, of any part of our profit or fortune, of considerable advantage or advancement in the world, for the sake of securing, or at least making more sure of, our reward in heaven ? We are not accustomed to look so far. The business of the world we manage with prudence, because we prefer the greater advantage at a distance to the less advantage near at hand ; but the world closes in our prospect, terminates our management. Again, it



may be, that when we find particular indulgences hurt our health, and lay the foundation for painful distempers ; and find also that we shall hereafter, though not now, suffer for our pleasures ; we can be content to abstain from them : and this is more than many can do ; and is certainly a great advance in the exercise of our judgement when it is so : but do we apply the same way of thinking to our immortal interests ? When we find reason to believe that such and such indulgence or ways of living are likely to prove fatal to our happiness in the next world, do we give them up ? Do we resign our darling habits and gratifications ? Do we quit the broad and smooth road of our sins or follies, when we find whither it leads ? Now I say, though we can blame the impatience of a child, which will not wait a few short days, a few hours ; or the folly of a headstrong youth, who is so occupied with some favourite delight, that he can scarcely see beyond it, though certain misery follow close behind ;—though we can blame them ; yet there are few of us who are sensible at present of what we shall all be made sensible of when we arrive at our future country—that we have been and are equally perverse, headstrong, and impatient in the conduct of our greatest concerns—that the time which we thought too long to wait for reward was but a moment—that the misery we have brought upon ourselves did, in truth, come close behind our crimes, though it appeared removed to a great distance ; for such will be the judgement we shall form of this

little portion of our existence, which we shall hereafter look back upon, compared with the immortality that lies before us.

Thirdly, we can seldom review what passed in our minds when we were children, without being surprised with the odd and extravagant notions which we took up and entertained—how wildly we accounted for some things, and what strange forms we assigned to many other things—what improbable resemblances we supposed, what unlikely effects we expected, what consequences we feared. I can easily believe that many of the opinions and notions we now erroneously entertain, especially concerning the place, condition, nature, occupation, and happiness of departed saints, may hereafter appear to us as wild, as odd, as unlikely and ill founded, as our childish fancies appear to us now. Like the child, we take our ideas from what we see, and transfer them to what we do not see: like him, we look upon, and judge of things above our understanding, by comparing them with things which we do understand; and they bear afterwards as little resemblance, as little foundation for comparison, as the most chimerical and fantastic visions of a childish imagination. And this I judge to be what Saint Paul had particularly in his thoughts when he wrote the words of the text. “Now we know in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away,” even as “when I was a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but

when I became a man, I put away childish things." Our apprehension of futurity may, it is true, be in many respects childish; but still they may be innocent, so long as we are not over anxious nor over positive to insist upon others receiving them, and too much inclined to make difficulties, or start at those which we meet with, from an opinion that we are able to guess and find out the whole of such subjects.

Fourthly, a child meets with perpetual difficulties, which appear to its then comprehension unconquerable, which yet, when it becomes a man, clear up, and vanish of themselves. It cannot be made to understand the reason or the meaning of half the things which its parents and its masters make it do or suffer. Why so much restraint and confinement? wherefore these grievous tasks, that difficult lesson, these strict rules? It is made to feel pain and uneasiness, of which it sees neither end nor use. "How is this to be reconciled," a child will naturally ask, "with that kindness, and love, and goodness which it is told to expect from its parents?" Now as the child advances in reason and observation, all these difficulties solve themselves. He remembers with gratitude what he suffered with complaint: he sees care and love, when at the time he could only perceive arbitrary severity and churlish cruelty; he discovers the end aimed at, the importance of that end, how the means made use of conduced to it, how requisite they were, how beneficial they have turned

out. Now all this bears, in my mind, a considerable analogy to the difficulties we labour under, as to the dispensations of divine Providence. Look to the whole of our existence, and the wisest and oldest of us are but yet in our infancy—as much strangers to the exigencies and condition of our future state as a child is to that of a man. Can it be wondered at that we should meet with embarrassments, and inconsistency, and seeming disorder and confusion, and yet it may in truth be all a regular plan, answering a good end by wise means? We know in part—a certain portion of our nature, existence, and destiny we do see; but it is a portion bounded by narrow limits—a term out of eternity. Now all such partial knowledge must be encumbered with many difficulties: it is like viewing the map of a district or small tract of territory by itself, and separated from the adjacent country: we see rivers marked out without any source to flow from, and running where there is nothing to receive them. In like manner, we observe events in the world, of which we trace not either cause or origin, and tending to no design or purpose that we can discover. If the child have patience to wait, many of these its difficulties will in due time be explained. And this is our case. It was not necessary to the child's happiness and well-being, that it should have from the first the understanding of a man; nor is it to ours, that we should possess the faculties of angels, or those which are in reversion for us in a higher and more advanced state of

existence. The child is in the hands of its parent, and so are we. The wisdom of the parent will supply the ignorance of the child, his prudence guide its folly, his strength protect its weakness, his care conduct it to happiness. How much does this representation agree with what we believe and hope of our Almighty and Universal Father! We are the works of the creation, and produced by his great kindness; and while we study to please and obey him, the objects of his love—safe under his wings, secure under his protection, assisted by his succours, directed by his holy influence, enlightened by his word and spirit, relying upon his love, and finally conducted by his care from perfection to perfection, from our present degree of happiness to a better world—we attain the fulness of joy in the presence of God, and the pleasures at his right hand for evermore.

## XXIII.

## THE ADVANTAGES OF OLD AGE.

JOB XXXII. 7.

*I said, days should speak, and multitude of years  
should teach wisdom.*

EVERY age of life has its advantages and disadvantages, not only in respect of strength, activity, and pleasure on one side ; of judgement, experience, and wisdom on the other ; and as these qualities relate to the success or the happiness of our present existence ; but there is in the different periods of life a system also of advantages and disadvantages respecting religion itself.

The work of salvation is before us at all ages. Youth can bring to the task sensibility, usefulness, innocency, activity—a mind yet unoccupied, and yet unenslaved by vicious habits—a strength capable of doing much good—a conscience quick and sensible—a heart warm, and susceptible of benevolent affections—a vigour of principle, and a glow of devotion, which no other season of life can pretend to. God grant that the young may use and exert these faculties and these advantages as they ought to do ! But what are the advantages, or are there any, which the cold-

ness and weakness of age can set against these? What is there applicable to religious improvement which the natural condition of advanced years brings with it? Those it is my purpose to set forth, as well for consolation as instruction; because if any one can feel that he is capable of making himself more and more ready for the great change which is approaching, it is, and ought to be, a support and comfort to him, under either the consciousness of decay, or the weight of infirmities; and also, if there be properties, of which advanced life, and advanced life alone is capable, and which tend to make us holier and happier, God forbid that we should not know them, and exercise them, and use them!

Now first, I do say, that older men are naturally more sensible of the mercies of God. I do not say that they have greater reason to be sensible of the mercies of God, but that they are more sensible of them. Young people regard their health and strength, their vigour, spirits, and enjoyments, as natural to their time of life, and what other young people possess as well as themselves. They look upon them as things of course. These blessings often fail of exciting any adequate sense of gratitude in their hearts. They do not, strictly speaking, perceive that they are blessings at all. They scarcely know the want—they have felt little of the interruption of them. They do not reflect upon the goodness of their Maker in giving them, because they see them to be general, and almost universal. Yet, how wrong is this for-

getfulness! Is the goodness of God less, because he is constantly giving these blessings? Is it less, because he has given them to so many, that it is singular not to receive them? yet you find this very constancy of his bounty, this very extent of his beneficence, becomes the reason why it is not felt and thought of as it ought to be. Was there but here and there a person in the full enjoyment of health, in the perfect possession and exercise of his faculties; that person, it may be supposed, would be filled with thankfulness to his Creator for his kindness towards him. But is he less to be thanked, because, in truth, he is more kind? because his bounty flows and spreads around to others as well as to us—to the general condition of life at certain periods? It is a sad thing that we are not touched with the goodness of God, at the time when we ought to be so most highly; that is, when we are receiving the strongest proofs and effects of it. It is a sad thing not to know or estimate the gifts and blessings of our state till we experience the loss, and interruption, and decay of them. Yet it is so. Who are the heedless, the careless, the despisers of religion, the contemners of their Creator, but the very persons who are in the fullest enjoyment of his gifts?

Now it is a most blessed, as it is a natural effect of age, to cure *this inattention*, the greatest of all other inattentions. Most things, when men grow older, take a different appearance. When they are to feel



pain and sickness, frequent or long interruptions of health, they begin to understand what a blessing health is—they begin to wonder that they accounted so little of it when they had it—that they were so ungrateful to God Almighty for it. Who, that is advanced in life, does not make these reflections? Who can avoid making them? In like manner, when their senses and faculties begin to fail, they then begin to learn their value: when their sight grows dim, they are taught by its decay to know, what, if they *knew*, they probably seldom thought of before—how inestimable a gift the use of their eyes was. They begin to understand the Creator's care and mercy and bounty in our wonderful formation; most particularly in the use we have found, and perhaps unthankfully enjoyed, of this small but astonishing organ. As their faculty of hearing grows dull, or difficult, or imperfect; and whilst they lament its incurable decline, or strive a little longer to preserve it, they at the same time are made to comprehend how unworthily they judged of this matter, when all the reflection that passed in their mind upon it was, that they heard sounds as others heard them—that if they conversed and were entertained, it was only as others conversed and were entertained. They did not perceive it, or think it to be a blessing coming immediately from God, in the same manner as they now perceive it to be. Fast and good and salutary reflections are forced upon them by infirmities, which

had very little place in their minds, when, in fact, they ought to have had the most—in the midst of health and strength.

Amongst other point of instruction which are gained from years, this may be one ; that they bring men to see *how much the gifts of nature excel the gifts of fortune*—how much, as our Saviour expresses it, the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment—how much health, for instance, is above riches ; strength and activity of our own above the help and attendance of others ; nature in all things above art ; beauty above dress ; the use of our eyesight more precious, by a thousand degrees, than treasures of gold and silver ; of hearing, than all the titles and honours and distinctions in the world. I do not say that in youth men do not *believe* this assertion, but they do not *reflect* upon it. It is a thought which does not readily come into their minds ; when, if ever they live to find the declension or departure of these blessings, then they will know, that the things which they receive immediately, as it were, from the hands of our Creator, and which the poor receive equally at least, and perhaps more than equally, with the rich, are, beyond all price and calculation and comparison, superior to what they receive by any thing that proceeds from civil or social intercourse. They are then convinced how poor and contemptible, how misplaced and miscalculated, is not only the indulgence of their bad propensities, but the objects for which they indulge them ; when they are

taught that riches and honours are what they have been used to envy and covet ; the gifts of their Maker are what they have neglected, passed over, and abused —what they have never thought of in relation to the Benefactor who gave them, or with a feeling of everlasting gratitude which is due to him for so great and gracious a blessing.

Again ; old age brings us to know the value of the blessings which we have enjoyed ; and it brings us also to a very thankful perception of those which yet remain. Is a man advanced in life ? The ease of a single day, the rest of a single night, are gifts which may be subjects of gratitude to God. He is sensible of the gift. The gifts of God are not more or greater to one state of life than another ; but a great many very important circumstances belonging to their states, which by the young and strong are regarded as no advantages, are felt by the old as very great blessings, and felt with great satisfaction and thankfulness. *Ease* to the young is insipid ; and, if continued, wearisome—to the old it is sufficient to constitute enjoyment. It has been said of these two periods of life, that young men are never happy but when they are in the pursuit or enjoyment of pleasure—that old men are happy when they are at ease. The young are fretful, and restless, and impatient, under the mere absence of pain ; the old, on the contrary, draw actual enjoyment from this state. I think this is a true account, and that it was intended so to be. The young were intended for activity ; and

they were, therefore, to be stimulated and spurred on to exertion. It would not have agreed with the intention of an all-wise Providence to have made them content with ease. The old, on the other hand, were designed for repose; which design is indicated, not only by the gradual declension of their active powers, but by the increasing satisfaction which they find in repose. Herein old age has the advantage over youth. Ease is more readily attainable than pleasure. The time of life and state of constitution which may be made happy by ease may be blessed with a portion of happiness, which its more flourishing periods may never yet have obtained. The truth seems to be, that God has provided for each season of life its own satisfactions. A well-ordered mind not only perceives this in general, but makes the very interruption and decay and loss of former faculties a reason for being more exceedingly thankful for those which are left. If his strength fail, he draws more happiness from the use of that which is left.

Now every thing which is of a nature to turn the thoughts to God in religion, or rather may be, and ought to be, a source of religion; and whatever has a tendency to make us look upon God as the father of all these benefits—see him in his gifts—refer to him all our comforts—understand our close and intimate dependence upon him both in body and soul, for our bodily ease as well as mental tranquillity—every thing, in a word, which stirs and excites our affection towards him, may produce in us a near ap-

plication to religion ; may carry us to it in the best way. And we may, therefore, say, that advanced years ought to dispose men to their religion on this very account—that they make them more sensible of the gifts and graces and blessings of our Creator than youth usually is : I do not mean to say, than youth ought to be—the contrary is the truth ; but than youth usually is.

Again ; it is scarcely possible that any man can have lived to sixty or seventy years without having experienced many special blessings : I do not mean that general providence, by which his life has been for so long time preserved and continued to him, but many *special* favours and mercies in the course of it. Recollections of this kind, so long as God is pleased to grant the powers of recollection, ought to employ the minds of those in particular who are advanced in years, and raise their thoughts to God. Either they have been critically perhaps preserved from sin, which, though they did not think so at the time, they now acknowledge to have been the very greatest of all possible mercies ; or though they have fallen, or perhaps rushed headlong into sin, they were not ruined by it, as they might have been ruined ; they escaped many of the consequences of it, which might have destroyed them. They were spared in order to repent. They were saved and snatched as a brand out of the fire. These are truly spiritual blessings. These are points and marks of Providence which ought to be peculiarly grateful to aged

men, and which they should delight to meditate upon, both because they are immediately and intimately connected with that salvation in which they now ought to be more peculiarly interested, and leading their contemplation into that eternity they do certainly border upon ; and also, because the chief and natural satisfaction of old age is mental rather than bodily. But even here many recollections crowd upon a mind even less sensible to the gratifications of thought and serious meditation. They may have been recovered and rescued in times of great bodily danger. Their lives and limbs have been preserved to them through some great perils, some extraordinary accidents, some severe sickness. They have often been drawn near to the edge and brink of their mortal fate. They have stood upon the precipice of death and confines of eternity ; and what makes such preservation a mercy indeed is that which I fear too many of us but too well remember—that if they had been cut off when they were in so much danger, they had been cut off in their sins. Is not then our preservation from such dangers, both ghostly and bodily—both of soul and body—a mercy to be acknowledged with the deepest sense of thankfulness and obligation ? Still more shall we acknowledge it, if we have used the mercy and forbearance of our Maker as we ought to do ; that is, if we have grown better since : if danger has alarmed and roused us ; if our escape has taught us fear and caution—fear of God, and caution in offending him : if these

beginnings have gone on, and have had the effect of generating seriousness of temper, holiness and purity of heart, more spirituality than was formerly felt, stronger faith and livelier hopes, a gradual rising above the follies of the world; what may we not attribute to this multitude of years—to this language, which nature and age so forcibly speak? A mature age, well instructed by experience, well versed in the changes and chances of this mortal life, ought to be expected to have where at last to fix its views—whither to point and direct all its endeavours—from whence to look for any steadfast ground of consolation, any firm security, any rational object of pursuit and confidence.

## XXIV.

DIFFERENT DEGREES OF FUTURE REWARDS  
AND PUNISHMENTS.

JOHN v. 29.

*They that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.*

THERE is a difference introduced into religion of this sort. From the text—from the mention made of separation merely, and placing one sort on the right hand and the other on the left—from the familiar notions and method of speaking of heaven and hell, of salvation and perdition, we are led to imagine that the human species at the day of judgement will be divided into two kinds—that the one will be advanced in heaven to supreme happiness; that the other will be consigned in hell to extreme misery. This is a way of thinking we may easily and naturally fall into; but when we come to consider it further, there are two or three principal difficulties attending this opinion on the subject.

First; it seems a defect in the Christian religion, that it nowhere points out the precise quantity of



innocence or virtue sufficient for our salvation, or necessary to entitle us to admission into heaven.

Secondly ; that there is no encouragement, according to this account, to go beyond, or strive after a superior degree of holiness.

Thirdly ; that we cannot easily comprehend how it should be a just dispensation of Providence to advance one part of mankind to supreme happiness, and commit the other to extreme misery, when there cannot be much to choose between the worst of the one sort, and the best of the other—between the best who are excluded from heaven, and the worst who are received into it.

Now for the satisfaction of these several doubts and difficulties, I shall endeavour to show, that it is most agreeable to our conception of divine justice, and also consonant to the language of Scripture, to suppose that there are prepared for us rewards and punishments of all possible degrees and varieties, from the most exalted happiness down to extreme misery ; upon which plan satisfactory answers may be given to all the difficulties just now stated.

First ; that it is in its nature impossible, and upon this plan needless, to ascertain the precise quantity of virtue necessary to salvation.

Secondly ; that upon this plan our labour is never in vain—that we have encouragement to proceed from virtue to virtue, from one degree of goodness to another, till we attain the utmost which our ability and opportunity admit of.

Thirdly ; that this plan totally subverts all objection to the divine economy, in not adapting the degrees of reward and punishment, to the degrees of virtue and vice.

These points I shall speak to distinctly, and in their order. It is most agreeable to our natural conceptions of justice to suppose that there are prepared for us rewards and punishments of every possible degree. It is hardly necessary to contend that there exists an almost infinite variety of virtue and vice, of merit and demerit, in different persons. The conduct of any great number of persons is seldom alike, or the same, though they may be all virtuous, or all innocent, or all vicious ; but that is not the whole. The same conduct is capable of very different degrees of virtue or guilt, according to the abilities, the opportunities, and the temptations. In acts of goodness, the merit will be proportionably increased, as the abilities to perform them are less, and as greater acts of self-denial and exertion are requisite. The opportunities, which happen to different men of doing good, are also very various, and constitute a proportionable variety in the character ; for every opportunity neglected becomes a vice. In estimating the guilt of criminal actions, it would be extremely unfair to have no consideration by which the criminal was urged. A man who steals for want is wrong, but it would be hard to place the crime upon a level with his who steals to support his vices, to indulge his vanity, to supply his pleasures. Now the actual

conduct of different persons being different, and the same conduct differing in merit and demerit, according to the daily opportunity and temptation which the agent experienced, all which circumstances are subject to a multiplied variety ; it must follow, that guilt and virtue in different individuals differ in every possible degree—that whatever reason there is to expect from the Divine Being that he will reward virtue and punish vice at all, we have the same reason to expect, as far as the light of nature goes, that he will adapt his rewards and punishments in exact proportion to the virtue or guilt of those who stand at his judgement seat. Very true it is not thus in human judicature. The same punishment is inflicted upon crimes of very different colour and malignancy ; and crimes of the same denomination have very different guilt in different persons and different circumstances. But this is a defect in human laws, and proceeds from a defect of power. We have no knowledge of each other's motives and circumstances, to be able to ascertain with precision our mutual merit or guilt ; or, if we could, there exists not within the compass of human treatment that precise gradation of punishment which is necessary to a perfect retribution of so much pain for so much guilt ; but no such defect either of knowledge or power can be imputed to the Deity. He knows the secrets of our hearts, the true motive and the exact value of every virtue, all the circumstances of aggravation and mitigation which attend every crime ; and he can form

and mould his creatures, so as to make them susceptible of every degree of happiness, and of every degree of misery. But in truth, this part of the subject, the consistency of the plan with natural reason and justice, admits of little doubt : the only doubt, if any, is whether it be sufficiently consonant with the several declarations of Scripture.

I propose to show but three passages of Scripture, which expressly affirm this difference and gradation of rewards and punishments, and that there are none inconsistent with it. Passages to this effect are, first, Luke xii. 47. The servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes ; but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. Here different degrees of punishment are plainly asserted. Both were evil doers, but in a different degree. Accordingly both were to be punished, but with a proportionable difference—both were to be beaten, but one with many stripes, the other with few. A diversity of rewards is also to be collected from the parable of the ten pieces of money, as recorded in the 19th chapter of Saint Luke. “ And he called his ten servants, and delivered unto them ten pounds ; and when he returned, the first came, saying, Thy pound hath gained ten pounds ; and he said unto him, Well done, thou good servant ; because thou hast been faithful over a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying,

Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds; and he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities." Here you observe, both were virtuous, both were rewarded; but the virtue and diligence of the one was double that of the other, and his reward was double. When our Saviour speaks of the last in the kingdom of heaven, it shows that there are greater and less in that kingdom. When he says that it shall be more tolerable in the day of judgement for Tyre and Sidon than for Chorazin and Bethsaida, by reason of the different warnings they had received, it shows that of the punishment to be denounced at that awful day, some will be more tolerable and some more severe. These are our Saviour's own declarations: Saint Paul supposes different degrees of punishment in the 10th chapter of Hebrews, 28, 29th verses: "He that despised Moses's law died without mercy; of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" And still more positively he notices the difference, in the rewards we are to expect, proportioned to our different merit, 2 Cor. ix. 6: "This I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." These words are directly to our purpose; we are authorised to say, therefore, that there are passages of Scripture which plainly suppose a distinction of rewards, and a distinction of punishments.

And we further say, that there are none which

contradict it. It is true there are various passages of Scripture which speak of a place of happiness, and a place of misery, of being received into, and sitting down in the kingdom of heaven, and of being thrust out into outer darkness where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched—of the children of God, and the children of the devil—of saving the soul and losing it: these, at first sight, and strictly taken, seem to intimate that there are two, and only two states, one of great happiness, and the other of great misery; and that one or other of these two conditions is to be the destiny of every man. But if you come to consider these expressions, what is there in them after all? Do not we ourselves perpetually speak of the good and the bad, of the righteous and the wicked, of virtue and vice, of well doers and evil doers? Yet do these expressions imply, or are the persons who use them understood to assert, that all the good are equally good, and all the bad equally bad? that because we mention only two distinctions of actions—of virtue and vice—that there are only two—that there are not also degrees and distinctions in different virtues and betwixt different vices? In like manner we speak of happiness and misery, and of many men as either enjoying the one or suffering the other; but do these terms exclude all degrees of difference in happiness and misery? Do they import that the happy are equally blessed, or the miserable equally wretched? If, therefore, no such construction is to be put on the

terms and phrases we are every day using, is it to be insisted on, or supposed to be intended, in similar terms and phrases when they occur in Scripture?

Having then shown that it is both reasonable and scriptural to believe that there are prepared for us rewards and punishments of every possible degree, from the highest happiness down to extreme misery; I proceed to consider the uses to be made of the doctrine, for the purpose of resolving the difficulties and objections before stated. And first, as to the objection that is made to the Scriptures, that they have not defined with exactness the precise quantity of virtue necessary to salvation. We conceive that this, so far as we can judge, was impracticable, and upon the plan we have explained unnecessary. It is impracticable,—for however a revelation be imparted originally to the prophet or apostle, who receives the inspiration from God, it must be communicated from him to others, by the ordinary and natural vehicle of language. It behoves those who make the objection to show that any form of words could be devised, which might express this quantity, or that it is possible to constitute such a standard of moral attainments, accommodated to the almost infinite diversities which subsist in the capacities and opportunities of different men. Would it be equitable, according to our conceptions of equity, to exact the same from an unbelieving Indian, that might reasonably be required of a well-informed Christian? and if you attempt to compute the degrees that exist

between these two extremes, they will soon be found too numerous and too various to be ascertained by any description which words can convey. Secondly; it is unnecessary—for upon the plan of a gradation of rewards and punishments, whatever advancement we make in virtue, we procure a proportionable accession of future happiness; as on the other hand, any accumulation of vice is the treasuring up so much wrath against the day of wrath; which is all that is needful for us to know or to act upon. And this contains an answer to the objection, that there is no encouragement to strive after superior attainments in virtue and holiness. According to this account there is the greatest. In our Father's house are many mansions, of different capacities for happiness; and it is our business, as it is in our power, to promote and advance our good hereafter, by suitable endeavours and exertions here. Again, we are thus enabled to reply to the difficulty that has been started, that this distribution of rewards and punishments into heaven and hell, into a state of happiness and a state of misery, cannot easily be reconciled to practice, because there must be little to choose between the worst who are received into the kingdom of heaven, and the best who are excluded; for how know we but that there may be little to choose in these conditions? It will be so upon the supposition (which appears so agreeable to reason and Scripture), that the various conditions of our future life will descend by insensible steps from extreme happiness to extreme misery.



Lastly ; the whole doctrine, and these several observations upon it, all meet in one point, tending to establish that one magnificent conclusion—that be our endeavours after virtue ever so vigorous, continued or well directed, our labour is not in vain. We know in whom we trust,—that from his righteous judgement we may look for a full and complete reward—for a crown of glory and bliss, not only proportioned to, but exceeding, all we may, as well as can, either conceive or desire.

## XXV.

THE BEING OF GOD DEMONSTRATED IN THE  
WORKS OF CREATION\*.

(PART I.)

## HEBREWS XI. 3.

*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

THE belief of a God is the corner stone of all religion. Whatever a man's persuasion, whether he be Christian, Jew, Mahometan, or Pagan, this is the point assented to by all; because, without this, if there be in truth no God, all religions are equally vain. It is said that there neither is, nor ever was, a country or nation in the whole world that did not believe a God in some way, how much soever disguised and corrupted; whatever senseless opinions and absurd and barbarous rites were mixed up with it; whatever superstructure of superstition and idolatry had been built upon it, still there was a belief

\* The few following Sermons may seem placed out of their order; but they are added as Protographs of the Natural Theology and the Evidences of Christianity. They appear to have been written between 1780 and 1790.

of God at the bottom. Whether this be exactly true or not, I do not know; but it is undoubtedly true that, if there be any tribe of men without the notion of a God, it is some tribe so stupid and savage, so destitute of all heed and consideration, as to be, in the concerns of religion, precisely in the condition of a child of two or three years old: there may be, perhaps, some few who are taken up entirely with things present, with sensual and animal gratifications, without any more idea of religion, or of what is to become of them after death, or of a God ruling and existing above them, than an infant has among us—possibly there may be a very few such: but of all others, of all the civilized, of all the rational, of all the cultivated parts of the world, it may be affirmed with certainty, that the belief in a God is universal. Now, undoubtedly, there must be some strong plain reason for this opinion, that would strike the understanding of mankind in all ages and countries so forcibly as to produce such a universal agreement amongst them: distant regions and distant ages could never all hit upon the same conclusion, if there was not some evident proof that led them to it—some argument comprehended, that carried irresistibly to the same truth. Which argument is no other than simply this: marks of contrivance in nature abound every where about us; therefore there must have been a contriver: proofs of design and intention are to be seen on all hands; therefore there must have been some one to have designed and intended. But

this we are clear in ; that no human being, no being we see upon the face of the earth, could be the author of these contrivances : therefore it must be some other being, whom we do not see. This is the upshot of the argument : and it is not an argument for scholars only, for men of study and learning ; it is an argument open and level to every capacity in the world—a sensible husbandman, and a sensible mechanic, who think at all, will see thus far as perfectly as the best scholar in the world. Does any one doubt that vegetation was a thing designed ? The seed, the blade, the stem, the flower, the ear ; the whole process, from the first budding to final decay, was a process planned and laid down. I say, that proofs of contrivance, and design, and intent abound. Does any man doubt but that the eyes in our head were designed, intended, and contrived to see with ; that the tongue was designed to speak, the teeth to eat, the hands and fingers to handle and touch, the feet to walk with ? If there be a man breathing who doubts of this, that man can be convinced of nothing. Well then, if they were so designed, they must have been designed by some one ; if they were contrived for these purposes, there must have been a contriver. Surely, this is plain. But we are very certain that no being which we see did make or contrive these things. Who could make or contrive them ? No man in the world, not all the men in the world, could make the eyes of a single insect, the limb of a fly, the feather of a bird, the

scale of a fish, a grain of corn, or even a leaf of the vilest weed that grows upon the road-side. This, I think, will be allowed. Seeing these things were contrived and designed for the various uses which they serve, by some being or other; and since they certainly were not contrived or designed by men, or by any body that we see upon the face of the earth, there must necessarily be some other being, whom we do not see, that was the maker, author, and contriver of all these wonderful effects. I have said that this argument is intelligible to the simplest man living; it is no other than briefly this.—Suppose, in walking upon a wide common, we should trip upon a stone lying upon the ground: if we were asked how the stone came there, possibly we might answer, that, for any thing we knew, it had lain there for ever; and it might not be very easy to show that there was any absurdity in this answer. But suppose we had met with a watch lying on the ground, and you should ask how it came to pass that a watch was in that place, we should never think of the answer we gave to the same question before—that, for any thing that appeared to us, it might have lain there for ever. And why might not this answer serve for the watch, as it did for the stone; why was it not as reasonable in the one case as the other?—on this plain account—because, when we examine the watch, we perceive that its several parts are planned, contrived, and put together with design, and for a purpose; that they are so constructed as

to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day: from whence we are perfectly certain that it must have had a maker; that there must have been some one, at some time, and in some place, who planned, and intended, and fashioned it, in the manner and for the purpose for which we see it planned and fashioned; who governed, constructed, and designed its use. Now, if there was no artist that we knew or had seen who was capable of making such an instrument, that surely would be no objection to the certainty of what we had concluded—that it was made by art. It would only prove that the artist, whoever he was, that fabricated this machine, existed in some other country, or at some former time. The brief statement of the case is this:—Whatever reason we have to believe that every house must have had a builder, that a watch must have had a maker, that a book must have had an author; that very same reason we have to know that the world must have had a Creator: the one is just as certain as the other; the proof is the same in both. There is, indeed, a difference in the two cases, which is this; that whereas, in the works of men's hands, every individual piece of art is made by its artist, every individual house has its builder, every single watch has its maker, every particular book has its author and printer; whereas, I say, this is the case with works of art, the works of nature, on the contrary, produce one another. Plants produce plants of the same kind—animals beget and bring

forth other animals of the same species ; and thus the race and succession is kept up for ever. We must be all sensible of this difference between nature and art. One watch never produces another watch, as one animal does another animal. Now this difference, I say, greatly magnifies the contrivance on the part of nature, above all the attempts of art, and makes the proof of contrivance proportionably stronger. Suppose a watch could be so wonderfully made, as not only to go with perfect exactness itself, but so constructed within as to produce in the course of its motion other machines of the same kind ; to contain within itself such mould and machinery as to cast and frame individuals like itself ; would not this add exceedingly to the curiosity and art of the contrivance ? As this required a mechanism vastly more intricate, vastly more complete, so would it proportionably raise our admiration of the maker's skill and ingenuity : and if the simple machine, of itself, proved undeniably, by the very examination of it, that it must have had a contriver, and a contriver too of great skill and art—much more, with this improvement, with this new and additional property, would it demonstrate the same thing. Now what we should so much wonder at in a piece of machinery or clock-work, namely, the power of producing its like, and which never has been compassed in any piece of machinery yet, is the very fact in the works of nature, and is as much a part of the contrivance, and surely as admirable and astonishing a part of the

contrivance, as any other. We will not, therefore, be so absurd as to say that an animal or plant, for instance, without this property, would be exactly like a watch or a clock, in respect to its being contrived, and would equally prove that it must have had a contriver—but that with this property, which is indeed a prodigious improvement, it does not prove the same thing. We cannot, I say, be so absurd as to argue thus. And yet, in fact, the circumstance of animals and plants being produced from parent animals and parent plants takes off greatly our notice from the original maker and contriver of them all; because we do not see the artist, as it were, at work, as if he delivered each individual from his own hand, or produced each plant and animal by an immediate act of creation. We say the parent bird produces its young: yet it is no more the parent animal that makes the young animal, than it is the husbandman who sows the seed that makes the young plant grow out of it;—it is not he that makes the corn spring up; first the blade, then the stem, then the ear, then the seed in the ear; nor do we ever imagine it. Therefore I wish to have this well impressed and understood; that if the formation of a plant or animal proves a maker and contriver, as much, at least, as the mechanism of a watch or clock proves a maker and contriver; not less certainly, but much more so, does it prove it, when there is added to the plant or animal this new and surprising power, which excels all the rest, namely, that of producing another.



We conclude then, with most undoubting assurance, that all things about us had a maker; because we have precisely the same ground for our opinion that we have for saying every house must have had a builder, or every watch. The plain mark of contrivance is the proof in both cases. But the force and impression of the proof will, in a great measure, depend upon the observation we make of these contrivances ourselves. A few instances that we discover, or even take notice of, of our own accord, will strike us more powerfully than a hundred that are related by others, and more powerfully a great deal than any general argumentation upon the subject. And this brings me to what I would most earnestly recommend to any one who hears me, namely, a way and habit of remarking and contemplating the works and mysteries of nature. It is a delightful and reasonable and pious exercise of our thoughts—it is oftentimes the very first thing that leads to a religious disposition. The best, and greatest, and wisest men in all ages were they who made this use of their understandings, and this application of their studies. But what is more—it is in a sufficient degree open to the level of every capacity. We are not to excuse ourselves, by saying such things are above our comprehension: this is not above any man's comprehension. The very herbage which he walks upon in his fields, the grass he uses for his cattle, the lambs of his flock, and the herds grazing around him; the birds of the air, and the

very insects on the wing, may discover evident marks of design, and undeniable tokens of intention and contrivance: and it must and ought to be a great consolation to us all, that this point at least is certain; that whatever difficulties or disputes there be in religion, one thing, however, is clear; that in this world of darkness, sorrow, and confusion, we have this firm foundation to rest our foot upon—that there is a God above—that there is a king, whom we do not see, who is the artificer and framer, the author, cause, and contriver, of every thing which we do see.

## XXVI.

THE BEING OF GOD DEMONSTRATED IN THE  
WORKS OF CREATION.

(PART II.)

HEBREWS XI. 3.

*Through faith we understand that the worlds were formed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

IN a former discourse upon this text, I undertook to show that we have as much reason to know that the world had a creator as we have for knowing that every house had a builder, or every watch a maker; and that as we are very sure that no being, whom we see or are acquainted with, could make the world, we rightly conclude that it must be some being whom we do not see. This reasoning seems as short and plain as any thing can be, yet the impression and force of it is not always felt by us so strongly as might be expected. I will therefore, in the following discourse, point out some of the causes which shut out this argument, in some measure, from our thoughts, or rather take off our observation from the proofs and evidences of God's agency and existence, which on every hand surround us.

Now one thing which diminishes greatly man's conviction of the being and power of God, especially with persons who do not bestow much thought upon the subject, is, that they do not see him : "No man hath seen God at any time ;" and the want of this, of actually perceiving him with our senses, has a very considerable effect upon the persuasion of all who are not accustomed to reflection. The evidence of our senses, or the testimony of other men's, is the strong and natural proof of the reality and existence of most things, and with many, the only proof they will attend to. To believe any thing to exist and act, which yet cannot be seen or felt, and which no man hath seen or felt, requires a reach of thought which many, from want of habits of seriousness and meditation, do not attain to. We see and hear one another, and therefore doubt not of one another's existence. We do not see God and hear him, and therefore it is to reason and argument we must appeal, to be satisfied of his existence. There are, I am confident, reasons and arguments, so strong and plain, that no man can well withstand them, or not have his judgement convinced by them ; yet still the fact of never seeing this great being, or perceiving him with our senses, brings upon the subject a kind of suspense and hesitation. The most natural way of delivering our thoughts from any doubts on this account is, to consider that there are many other things besides the Deity, of the existence and reality of which we have no doubt, nor can have any doubt,

which nevertheless we do not see, nor can see, nor ever were seen. A stone drops to the ground : something must draw it thither—something must influence and act upon it, to cause it to fall down rather than fly upwards—to urge it constantly to seek and press towards the lowest place rather than any other part, or in any other direction ; yet no eye can see what it is that thus acts upon the stone. Shall we therefore say that nothing acts upon it ? That this constant and powerful effect has no cause to produce it, because we perceive none with our senses ? This is one plain instance. Here is something of vast efficacy and activity, which is spread and diffused through every part of space that we are acquainted with. Go where we will, we meet with it—in ourselves—in every thing about us. Whatever has weight (and all bodies have it more or less) feels and suffers the influence of this universal agent ; yet nothing is to be seen all the while—no visible stream or fluid driving or carrying all bodies to the centre—no discernible pull or hold which drags them to it. Another similar example may be taken from the loadstone. It draws a needle towards it. Something or other must pass between it and the needle to produce this effect, yet nothing is seen. This property in the loadstone necessarily depends upon some body communicating between it and the needle, yet no communication is in the smallest degree perceptible. We cannot divide the existence of this communicating substance, because we see effects which cannot be ac-

counted for without it ; yet it is a substance as impossible to be found out by sight or touch as the essence of the Deity. The same needle, which is touched with the loadstone, immediately turns to the north and south—if it has liberty to move, it will rest in no other position. Now it must have received something from the loadstone to give it this new and strange property—but what? Nothing that we can discover by our senses. Examine the needle as you will, you will find nothing in it different from what it had before—no change, no addition is to be perceived—yet a great change is wrought—a great addition is made to the former properties of the needle. What is said of the loadstone is true also of another surprising quality of bodies—electricity. By the mere rubbing of a glass or plate, a metal may be made to gather from it a quantity of something or other, so strong and violent in its effects as to kill the person who touches it ; yet nothing is seen to be collected by the glass, or given to the metal—nothing is perceived to cover the surface of either, or to rest upon it, till the dreadful shock we receive from it informs us that there is something present which cannot be seen, and which, though unseen, possesses irresistible strength and efficacy. Certainly, therefore, there are in nature—near us also, and about us, pervading and filling, likewise, every part of space we are acquainted with—powerful and active substances which yet are totally invisible to human eyes. What difficulty, then, in conceiving that the great and mighty

cause of all things should exist, and perceive, and act, and be present through all nature, and all regions of nature, and yet remain imperceptible to our senses otherwise than by his effects—should see all things, yet himself be unseen—should be about our path and about our bed, not far from every one of us, and yet invisible—should know what passes both around us and within us, and yet himself be concealed from our eyes? We see not our own souls—what it is within us which thinks; nor can we find it out by dissecting or scrutinizing human bodies ever so exactly; much less are our senses capable of piercing that infinite spirit which fills and governs the universe.

Another cause, that hides the operations of God from our thoughts, is a certain manner of speaking into which we have fallen. We are accustomed to say that *nature* does this, and *nature* does that—that nature makes the earth to shoot forth its vegetation in the spring, and to ripen its grains and fruits in the autumn. If a person appear surprised at the way a bird builds its nest, broods over its eggs, hatches its young, and trains up its offspring, we think we satisfy him by telling him it is all nature's work and nature's doing—it is the law and ordinance of nature. Or do we happen to admire the growth of a plant, to see the seed appear, the blade spring out, the leaves and flowers one after another open and unfold themselves, the new grain or fruit gradually formed, fed, and matured by the parent stem, all proceeding through their several changes in due and constant order? Or are

we surprised to see the same plot of ground, the same lump of earth, at once producing and supporting a hundred different kinds of plants, which, though so various and unlike, all draw nourishment and subsistence from the same heap of mould? We are told that these things indeed are very curious, but it is nothing more than *natural*; it is the *nature* of such seeds to germinate and grow, and it is the *nature* of the earth or the soil to yield and bring forth herbs and plants of all variety and distinctions of colour, form, and fragrance; and this is an answer that lays asleep our curiosity and stops our inquiry. Now what all the while does this same *nature* mean? What does it amount to? If, when we call a thing the work of nature, we mean only to say that it is not the work of art, that it is not a man's doing, we speak rationally and truly: but if we carry the matter farther, and by talking of or considering the works of nature, we begin to suppose there is such a thing in reality as nature, which actually performs and produces the works and effects we ascribe to it, we lead our inquiries into the same error; for take any of the expressions we commonly make use of, such as that nature teaches the parent bird to build its nest, what else does *nature* in this sentence mean? If it means that God, the author and framer of all things—of the least as well as the largest parts of the creation—that God, I say, teaches, or prompts, or impels the bird to this office, or that he used a train of causes to do this, it means what is very true; but



then we had better say so at once, or at least carry this signification in our thoughts, though we clothe it in some different form of words. So, in like manner, when we assert that it is nature, or that it is the force of nature, that covers the earth with verdure, makes trees and plants push out their leaves with renewed vigour as the season of every year returns, we should say that it is God who does this—that it is the power of God which causes these effects; for if the word Nature, in these expressions, does not mean God himself, what does it mean? What other different sense can be given it, to be intelligible? To say that God does one thing or causes another, is speaking what we can understand; because God is an actual efficient being. There is a real agent for the operation, a real cause for a real effect. But when we talk of *nature* as the cause or doer of any thing, when, in truth, there is no such being as nature at all, distinct and separate from God himself, it is to set up a new word or name, or at least a mere imaginary existence, as the actual worker and performer of natural productions. In some other expressions, the absurdity, when the expressions come to be examined, is more flagrant. By way of accounting for any beautiful or curious appearance, which we observe amongst the varieties with which the earth is covered, we say it is the nature of the plant, or the nature of the soil? What nature? The nature of the plant. What is this? If it stands for any thing, it stands for the law, and order, and power of God, according to which

he carries on the increase and restitution of the plant : so that we should in truth and propriety say, when we would give a reason (if it can be called a reason) for the curious construction and beautiful formation of a plant or animal, instead of saying it belongs to the nature of such a plant or animal, that it is the method in which God has contrived, and according to which he made and still preserves it. Nature is nothing—is no real being—has no reality or existence. It is God who is all in all. The word nature, when we use it, unless it means the power of God, means nothing. We should therefore accustom ourselves to say nothing but what is the plain truth, that God does make or produce all things, instead of saying that nature does either the one or the other. Or if we conform to customary and established ways of speaking, we should carefully bear in mind that what we call nature is in truth God—that it is he whom we mean—that he alone is the agent in all these things—and that nature is only the method by which he chooses to act and operate amongst us.

But, lastly, another circumstance, which takes off our attention from the works of God, is their regularity. All these, we see, proceed in a regular manner : day and night succeed one another—the sun rises and sets at its own stated time and place—the sea ebbs and flows as it has done before—the seasons, and the changes which belong to them, come round in their stated order ; this, I say, takes off the mind from remarking that they are effected at all,

or that there must be necessarily some great being at work to bring them to pass. Should we see a miracle, the sun, for instance, to stand still, or the tide cease to flow, we should not doubt but that there was a power and cause from which to produce it; but it does not strike us, what yet is very certain, that there is an equal necessity for a power and a cause for carrying on the course of things. “Since the fathers fell asleep, all things (we are apt, as Saint Peter observes, to say) continue the same from the beginning of the world;” but does this less prove the hand of a master, because they go on truly and exactly? Because God is pleased, in his general operations, to act regularly, shall we think that he does not act at all? especially when that very regularity is one great perfection of his works. How would husbandry be carried on, if the seasons were not regular, and to be depended upon beforehand? How could the navigation of the sea be managed if its tides were not constant? This circumstance shows, therefore, infinite wisdom; but it does not show the less power, or any less certainty of that power having been exerted. Without a cause, without a contriver, without a maker, without a power to produce these things, they could no more come to pass regularly than they could irregularly. The sun could no more rise or set in a certain course than in an uncertain one.

To sum up the whole. There cannot be a more sure proof that a house must have had a builder, or a watch a maker, than there is that the world had a

Creator ; and this proof is neither more nor less valid, because that Creator, like many of the great powers of the universe, of whose existence we are nevertheless convinced, is invisible to our eyes ; nor yet because we have fallen into a way of attributing things to nature which, at the best, means nothing, instead of regarding things as the operations of God ; nor, lastly, because the general works of the Deity, instead of surprising us by strange and unnatural appearances, for the most part proceed in a constant and regular order.

## XXVII.

## UNITY OF GOD.

MARK XII. 29.

*Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is one Lord.*

WE have been so much accustomed to think and speak of one God, as the maker and governor of the universe, and to hear all use the same language, and express the same persuasion about the matter, that we are not easily brought to suspect that the notions of mankind upon the subject were ever different from what they are : whereas in truth, before the reception of Christianity in the world, the people of almost every country, the Jews excepted, maintained that there existed a great number and variety of gods, dwelling together in heaven, and governing the world amongst them ; endowed with different powers and dispositions ; exercising different offices, and presiding over different events ; sometimes carrying on the affairs of the universe, as it were, in conjunction, and sometimes striving and contending with one another about them. This was the ancient belief of a great part of the world ; and although many are now brought to the same opinion upon the subject, namely—that

there is one, and only one God in the universe—yet the case we find was not always so.

In pursuing this subject, of what is called the unity of God, I shall first lay before you the ground of our assurance that there is one only God, the author and cause of all things; and then I shall add some reflections upon the doctrine of one God, as applicable to the Jewish and Christian dispensations. Now the argument which proves that there is but one Creator, is the uniformity of council and design observable in the creation; by which is meant this—that in every part of the world that we are acquainted with, the same laws and constitution of nature obtains, and that one part is subservient and essential to another part, so as to form together one plan, scheme, and system: and if it appears that one plan, scheme, and system runs through the whole of the creation, it affords clear and certain inference that the whole is the conception, contrivance, and design of one being—for had different beings formed different parts of the universe, we should undoubtedly have seen throughout different parts different laws of nature, a different order of things, never perhaps independent of one another, which is not by any means the fact. Take, for instance, our globe, the earth on which we tread, and compare the different regions of it with one another. A stone falls to the ground in China just as it does in England; water runs to a level in both. The same sun rises and sets in the most distant region of the globe as here; a grain of wheat springs up in the

same manner in one quarter of the globe that it does in another ; a bird builds its nest in the same way in whatever country it is found. The same laws of nature hold in all. In general, the very same species of plants and animals are to be met with in the several parts of the globe : men, for instance, inhabit any part. When a new plant or new animal is found, the formation of it bears an evident similitude and analogy to that of the plants and animals with which we are acquainted. Every plant, for instance, has its root, its fibres, its sap, its flowers, and seed ; every animal has much the same senses of sight, touch, taste, hearing, and smelling ; every animal is male and female ; every animal has blood, and is sustained by food ; every one has a heart and lungs, brain and limbs—and this much similar prevails in all creatures : though new creatures be continually discovered, new laws of nature never are. The rain descends, the winds blow, the thunder is heard, the lightning seen ; fire and water, earth and air, possess the same powers, hold the same place, produce the same effects, act upon one another in the same manner in the most remote and hidden, the hottest and coldest tracts of the earth, that they do and always have done with us at home. Now what is the plain inference from hence, but that the same being is the author of those effects in all these places ; that they have all come from the same hand, have all had one origin, and one Creator? No one can doubt, but that the being who founded and established the laws of nature here was the same

being who founded and established the laws of nature in America; because the laws are throughout the same. The Creator, who gave to the sparrow that instinct by which it builds its nest in this country, undoubtedly was he who gave to the bird its instinct in the most distant parts of the earth; because the bird, left to itself, in all countries would build its nest the same. This is only a trifling and particular instance; it is only one example out of many thousands: throughout the whole order and economy of nature, in every part of the world that has been travelled over or found out, there exists a manifest sameness of plan, and scheme, and design. Then, if we ascend from our globe, which undoubtedly owes its formation to one hand, to the globes which occupy the firmament—the sun, moon, and planets in particular—we find amongst them a relation, a subserviency to one another, which demonstrate that they are different parts of one system. For instance: together with our earth, there revolve round the sun five, or perhaps six, other planets, all receiving light and heat from the sun, in like manner as we do; and so influencing and acting upon our earth, and upon one another, that if it, or any one of them, was destroyed, the motions of all the rest would be so disturbed that they would all fall into ruin and confusion. This shows a system. He that made one made all; for they all mutually depend upon each—the rest could not go on without that one, nor it without them: consequently they were produced to-



gether, and produced in pursuance of a common plan ; which plan must have existed in the same divine mind, and, as far as the same plan continues, as far we are sure one and the same Creator was concerned. To the very extremest limits to which our knowledge or observation reaches, we find one and the same God ; because we find a uniformity of council and design, a connexion of parts, a relation of things one to another, which could not be expected to take place amongst the works and productions of different, independent beings.

And what is a further and undeniable proof that the doctrine of one God is the genuine dictate of reason is, that all the reasoning part of mankind are now agreed upon it. Whatever disputes or differences of opinion there may be among thinking and learned men concerning other points, there is none upon this : which shows, that however erroneous notions had formerly crept in amongst mankind concerning a multitude of gods, the thing itself is sufficiently certain ; for as reason and knowledge have made advances and gained ground in the world, men have gradually come to a pacific agreement about the matter. “ The Lord our God is one Lord : ” there is none other besides him ; one and the same ; who made the heavens and the earth, ourselves, all that is around us, all we see, all we know of.

We now proceed to observe from this doctrine, in regard to the two great revelations under which we now live—the Jewish and the Christian, the Old

and the New Testaments. Now with regard to the Old Testament, there is this remarkable undisputed fact—that at the time when every other nation and every other religion in the world held that there were many gods, the Jews alone, in the religion of Moses, taught that there was but one: so that upon this, the greatest and most important point in the world—that which is now found out, and allowed, and agreed upon to be the truth, was contained and delivered in the Bible, at a time when no such opinion was to be met with among any other persons, or in any other book; but contrary opinions. How is it to be accounted for, that the people of the Jews should hit upon the truth, when every other nation mistook it; that their nation alone should maintain that there was one, and only one God, who first produced, and still governs all things, when the various nations which surrounded them all fell into an opposite persuasion; that Moses should be the first, and, as far as we find, the *only* person who delivered a doctrine which many ages afterwards, and *not until* many ages afterwards, the whole world, in a manner, was to be convinced was the truth—how, I say, shall we account for this, but by believing, what the Scriptures teach us to believe, that Moses and the fathers of the Jewish nation received it from God; that it was upon self-evidence that God, in the Old Testament, expressly taught his peculiar people, and enjoined them to maintain it; nay more, this was that great truth which it was the very end and purpose

of this institution to keep in the world? For although it may appear to some to be indifferent whether a man hold one God or many; besides that nothing can be *indifferent* which relates to Almighty God, the fact is, and always has been, that the opinion of a diversity of gods leads directly to gross corruption in religion, and, in consequence of this, to gross immoralities in practice: so that the knowledge of the one God, and the preservation of this knowledge, has always been essential to the preservation of virtue. In the Old Testament it was preserved, when it was nowhere else to be found. By the Jewish account it was not only preserved, but on many occasions communicated to the rest of the world; for as many countries as at any time became acquainted with this wonderful history, and with it their law, learned from it that the gods of the heathens were nothing—that in truth, there was but one God, and he the God of Israel.

But next and lastly, it comes to be considered how the matter stands in the New Testament, in the Christian dispensation, under which we live now. I say, that the Christian dispensation entirely confirms and repeats what the Jewish Scripture of the Old Testament had before delivered: “Hear, O Israel!” saith our Saviour himself, “the Lord our God is one Lord.” “We know,” saith Saint Paul to the Corinthians, “that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one; that, though there be many that are called gods in heaven and in

earth, to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ." And again : " There is one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and in you all." These passages are very clear and express, and can never be mistaken, to us Christians ; that is, " There is one God, blessed for evermore." We hear, nevertheless, of three divine persons—we speak of the Trinity. We read of the " Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Now concerning these, it is to be observed, that they must all be understood in such a manner as to be consistent with the above positive declarations, that there is " one only supreme God." What is that union which subsists in the divine nature ; of what kind is that relation by which the divine persons of the Trinity are connected, we know little—perhaps it is not possible that we should know more : but this we seem to know, first, that neither man nor angel bears the same relation to God the Father as that which is attributed to his only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ ; and secondly, that very thing does not break in upon the fundamental truth of religion, that there is " one only supreme God," who reigneth and dwelleth in heaven and on earth ; who is All in All, the same Spirit always, unchangeable ; " who only hath immortality—dwelling in light which cannot be approached ; whom no man hath seen, nor can see ; to whom be glory and dominion for ever. Amen."

## XXVIII.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD PROVED FROM THE  
LIGHT OF NATURE AND REVELATION.

(PART I.)

PSALM XXXIII. 5.

*The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.*

OF all the great and glorious attributes of the being whom we worship, whose we are, and on whom we depend, none is so endearing or so important to us as his goodness; that magnificent power which laid the foundation of the earth, which spread abroad the heavens as a curtain, which assigned for the sea its channels and its bounds, saying it should not pass them; who hath brought into being ten thousand worlds like our own, rolling in the firmament, all of which are put in motion and sustained in their orbs by his Almighty hand; that consummate wisdom which created universal nature, which drew such regularity as this out of chaos and confusion; which contrives, with such exquisite skill, the largest as well as the least part of creation, from globes of immeasurable magnitude down to the limbs of insects too small for our eyes to perceive.

Although such are a just and never-to-be-ex-

hausted subject of astonishment and adoration, yet neither of them is of that immediate concern and consequence to ourselves as the benevolence, and kindness, and goodness of his disposition; because, if we ever find that these illustrious qualities are under the direction of a good and gracious will, then, but not till then, they become a solid ground of love, and confidence, and resignation to all who are to depend upon them besides. If God be not good, what reason have we to believe that by doing good we please him? So that the subject of the divine goodness lies at the root of all morality and religion —of all our rules of conduct, and all our hopes of happiness. Now no man hath seen God at any time; we can know him only by his works and his word: his works are to be taken into consideration, both from this being the natural order, and because it is from his works we collect that his word is to be relied upon. We will therefore state, as briefly as we can, the argument by which is made out the divine goodness and benevolence to his creatures: for the main thing wanted, in an argument of this sort, is, that it be short and intelligible, that every one may retain and revert to it in his own thoughts. When God created the human species, either he wished their happiness, or he wished their misery, or he was indifferent and unconcerned about either: no other supposition is to be made. If he had wished our misery, he might have made sure of his purpose by framing our senses to be so many sores and pains to

us, as they are now instruments of gratification and enjoyment, or by placing us amidst objects as ill suited to our perceptions as to have continually offended us, instead of ministering to our refreshment and delight. He might, for example, if he had pleased, have made every thing we tasted bitter, every thing we saw loathsome, every thing we touched a sting, every smell a stench, and every sound a discord.

If he had been indifferent about our happiness or misery, we must impute to our good fortunes (as all design by this supposition is excluded), both the capacity of our senses to receive pleasure, and the supply of external objects fitted to excite it; but either of these, and still more both of them, being too much to be attributed to accident, nothing is left for it but the first supposition, that God, when he created the human species, wished their happiness, and made for them the provision he has made, with that view and for that purpose.

This is the argument in brief; but it deserves to be displayed somewhat more at large; for, I trust, the more it is considered, the more satisfactory it will be found. The world about us was certainly made, and made by God; and there are three suppositions, and only three possible suppositions, as to the disposition and design with which he made it—either from a delight in the misery and torment of his creatures, or with a total unconcern what became of them one way or the other, or with the good and gracious will and wish that they should enjoy and

be happy in the existence which he was giving them. If these are the only three possible suppositions, and the first two can be made out incredible, it will follow that the third is the true one. Now the supposition of a malicious purpose, like what we sometimes hear of in eastern tyrants, a pleasure in the sufferings of others, may, without any conceivable end and advantage to be answered to themselves, though it be possible he can do such a thing, is actual mischief—is the perverseness and corruption of the human heart. Yet it is absolutely excluded from being the case here; because the same power which framed and contrived our several faculties, and made us susceptible of so many pleasures, and placed so many pleasing objects within our reach, could, if he had been so minded, have converted any one of these into instruments of torment and disgust. The power cannot be questioned, because he who could do one could do the other—he who could make a creature happy, or capable of happiness, could make it miserable and destined to inevitable misery. The first supposition, therefore, I think, is clearly out of the question. Some may think that there is more probability in the second, namely, that our Creator was unconcerned and indifferent about either our happiness or misery. I believe, upon inquiry, it will be found that there is not much more likelihood in this than in the other; for suppose the divine Being to have had no regard, or affection, or solicitude for the happiness of the creatures he was producing, there was nothing but



chance for it, or good fortune as I may say, that we are so well as we are ; for, as to design in our favour, you say there was none. Now reflect for a moment how the chances stand : what likelihood was there that such an organ as the eye, for instance, fitted and contrived for so many valuable purposes both of convenience and pleasure, should have been the effect of chance ? That is, can we imagine that the Author of all things, when he planned and fabricated the useful and exquisite mechanism of this precious sense, did not foresee and contemplate the uses it was to serve, and did not mean and intend that the creature to whom he gave it should receive happiness and enjoyment from it ? Was there but this instance in the world, it would be sufficient to confute the notion that God meant and intended nothing about our happiness and enjoyment at all. But the eye is but one sense of five—seeing is but one faculty out of many : our hearing, speech, hands, feet, together with the several endowments of our minds and understandings, all admit of the same observation. If this alone was so small that we could accidentally receive one such important faculty, how out of all proportion and calculation is it, that we should thus find ourselves in possession of so many ? Nor is this all. Suppose we had the several senses, still they had stood us in little stead, if we had not been placed amidst objects precisely suited to them ; our eyesight, for instance, might as well have been denied us, if the objects which constantly surround us had been too great or

too small, too near or too distant to be perceived—our taste and smell had better have been out of the composition, if the meats that had generally been presented to the one had been nauseous or insipid, and the odours which exhaled from objects had continually offended us. It is only particular things that can, from their nature, please and gratify our senses ; and out of the infinite variety which the capacity of nature allowed us, how extraordinary is it (suppose intention and design to have us happy to be laid out of the case), that the particular things should have been created, and still more that we should find ourselves in the midst of them. These instances appertain to the human species, because it is the disposition of the Deity towards his rational creatures which we are inquiring after, and precisely concerned in : but all nature speaks the same language. Every animal may, to the lowest reptile, possess some faculty or other, some means of gratification, which would not have been given it by a malevolent being, who delighted in misery, and which it would not have received without a degree of good fortune, of which we see no example, from a being who produced it without any concern about its happiness or misery at all. By the goodness of God, we see his kindness to his creatures ; and as the world, which we see now, could not have been constituted at first, either with an evil design, or without design at all, what other conclusion is left, but that our Creator intended and wished our happiness when he made us ; and that the same will

and wish continue, so long as the same creation and order of things is upheld by him; for any change in his councils and character, were it possible, would be immediately followed by a corresponding alteration in the laws and order of nature.

But after all is said, evil, and pain, and misery exist among us still; diseases, and sickness, and maladies, and misfortunes, are not done away by reasoning about them, or by any opinion we entertain of the divine goodness: how are these to be reconciled with the beneficence which we attribute to the divine character? Now I think there is one observation which will go a great way to take off the edge of the objection, namely, that evil is never the object of contrivance. We can never trace out a train of contrivances to bring about an evil purpose. The world abounds with contrivances of nature; and all the contrivances we are acquainted with, will conduce to beneficial purposes. As this is a distinction of great consequence, I will endeavour to illustrate it.

If you had occasion to describe the instruments of husbandry, you would hardly say, this is to cut or wound the labourer's hand, this to bruise his limbs, this to break his bones; though, from the construction of several implements of husbandry, and the manner of using them, these misfortunes commonly happen: the mischief that it does, however, is not the object of the contrivance. Whereas, if it was necessary to describe engines of torture, you would say of one, this is to extend the sinews, this to dislocate the joints;

this to search the flesh. Here pain and misery is the very object of the contrivance, which is a different case from the former one, though the same result may actually follow it. Now nothing of this kind is to be found in the works of nature—nothing where there appears contrivance to bring about mischief. Of the beneficial faculties, the contrivance is often evident. Ask after our eyesight, the anatomist will show you the structure of the eye, its coats, humours, nerves, and muscles, all fabricated and put together for the purpose of vision, as plainly as a telescope or microscope for assisting it, and in the very same way. Ask after the hearing, the same skill will teach you how sound is propagated through the air, how the outward ear collects it, how the drum of the ear receives the stroke, how the auditory passage carries it to the brain. There can be no doubt either of the contrivance or object of it. The same of our smelling, tasting, speech, hands and feet, and all our beneficial faculties. But now ask after any disease, or pain, or infirmity, and I defy any man to show you the train of contrivance to bring about, or contribute to that end. Ask after the gout, the stone; no anatomy could ever show you a system of vessels or organization calculated to produce these. Can any say, this gland is to secrete the humour which forms the gout?—this bag is to contain, this duct is to convey and disperse it round the body? And the like holds of any maladies of the human body. Teeth are contrived to eat, not to ache their aching

may be incidental to the contrivance, perhaps inseparable from it ; or let it be called a defect in the contrivance, it is not the object of it. And this observation extends to many evils which are beside our subject : it is true of earthquakes, volcanos ; they all show the effect of a visible train of contrivances. Now contrivance proves design, and the predominant tendency of the contrivance indicates the disposition of the designer. The disposition of the designer is to be judged of, not from the accidental effects of the contrivance, not from the inseparable consequences of the contrivance, nor from any other defect where it may be supposed liable to any, but from the end, aim, and object of the contrivance, which, in the works of nature, or, in other words, in the works of God, are always beneficial.

What I would add, by way of a concluding remark, is this : that if there be other evils, which do not fall within the above observation, if there be the unmerited misery of the good and pious, and the still more unaccountable prosperity of the wicked, is it not more than probable that there will come a time when God will, as he certainly can, rectify the irregularity ? Are not the thousand and ten thousand proofs of bounty and benevolence, which we see about us, enough to found a persuasion that the few examples which seem of a contrary cast will hereafter be cleared up, and contemplated so as to reduce the whole to one entire and uniform plan of love, and kindness, and good-will, to the work of his Almighty hand ?

## XXIX.

## THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

(PART II.)

PSALM XXXIII. 5.

*The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.*

HAVING explained the argument by which the goodness of our Almighty Governor is proved from the light of nature ; or, in other words, from those specimens of his intentions which we are able to observe, connect, and comprehend, in the world around us ; I shall now proceed to state some of the many declarations of Revelation, in which the same divine attributes, though under various forms, names, and modifications, are repeated and described :—and these are material to be known and stated ; for whatever intimation and reasonable evidence of God's goodness the order of the universe may furnish to a contemplative mind, it must be acknowledged that pointed proofs of the same kind are to be found in the revealed word of God ; and the fidelity and certainty of that word is, in return, also proved by the light of nature ; for it is not conceivable, nor contended indeed by any, that a being who, in such remarkable

instances, had testified his love to his rational creatures, and care for their happiness, should go about, by mysterious attempts, to mislead and deceive them in accounts of that which most nearly concerns them, and in which it is impossible for them to detect the deceit.

Now the divine goodness, as it is excited towards the human species, parts itself into six great branches—justice, bounty, fidelity, patience, placability, mercy; these all spring from the same root, the divine desire and provision for the happiness of his creatures; in other words, the love of God. We will now see what the Scriptures have to tell us of each of them.

The justice of the deity is the foundation of all religion; yet this was a point in which the apprehensions of many in ancient times laboured under some uncertainty; many of the vulgar, and some of the wise men, conceived of the deity as not regulating the treatment of his creatures by any steady rules of justice, but as bestowing his favours capriciously, and actuated entirely by partial affections, such as we feel and conceive towards one another. The Scriptures, however, of the Old Testament strenuously combat this error, and describe him as a God of perfect righteousness, equity, and justice. The song of Moses, as recorded in the 32d chapter of Deuteronomy, and which some men have called the dying words of that illustrious lawgiver, begins with the subject: "I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the rock, his work is perfect;

for all his ways are judgement: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and righteous is he." The book of Job was written expressly to vindicate the justice of God in those trying circumstances in which the impatience and infirmity of human nature is most apt to question it—in the calamity and affliction with which he is pleased to visit us. Certain expressions of that book are full to our purpose: "Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity; for the works of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea surely, God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgement."

"Justice and judgement," saith David, "are the habitation of thy throne." The Jews had been led to suspect what may be called the personal justice of God, in that he visited upon the children the iniquity of the fathers, or as the proverb expresses it: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The prophet Ezekiel, in the 18th chapter of that book, is authorized in the name of Almighty God so far to repel the charges, as to show that the final destiny, the ultimate happiness or misery, of each individual was to depend upon his own conduct and behaviour, and nothing else: "Behold, all souls are mine—as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die. Yet, saith the house



of Israel, the ways of the Lord are unequal. Are not my ways equal, are not your ways unequal?"

The New Testament I shall quote for the two fundamental articles of divine justice—the future punishment of vice without respect of persons or station, and the future reward of virtue. “Thou treasurest up wrath,” saith Saint Paul, “against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds—to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, and honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God.” Again, in another place, “God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love which ye have shown.” These are satisfactory accounts of the divine justice: and it may be observed, that there is no foundation, in these accounts, for the opinion that justice is one thing in God, and another thing in man; and though we understand what justice means between man and man, we can argue nothing from that concerning the divine justice. This may be exceedingly different, though the expression describes the same quality in

God, which we call justice in man ; for suppose you were describing a just judge, or a just king, what else would you say of him, but that he rendered to every man according to his labour ; that he forgot no man's work and labour ; that he conferred glory, honour, and peace upon them that did good, tribulation and anguish upon them that worked evil, and this without respect or distinction of persons. This is the way you would describe justice in a man, and this is what the Scripture says of God.

Next to the justice of God is his bounty, which is ascending one degree higher in the scale of goodness ; for it is possible to be strictly just without generosity ; and generosity built upon justice is an advance in moral excellence. But here I admit that it is not in the word of God we are disposed to seek for evidence of the divine bounty ; for no assurance, from however high authority, can persuade us that God is bountiful to his creatures, till we actually realize and feel this bounty : nor need we look far ; our bodies, our limbs and senses, our reason and faculties, the field, the air, the ocean, every flower, every animal ; the lilies clothed with his vesture, the young raven fed by his hand, the young of every animal delighted with its existence, sporting amidst the gratification which God has provided for them all ; provided by his power, contrived by his wisdom, fostered by his continual protection ; such unmerited and unasked-for instances of beautiful intention require no additional amplification or authority from

Scripture. The Scriptures, however, though they cannot add to the evidence of nature, agree with it. He is there a God abundant in goodness, of great kindness, who will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly, who exerciseth loving-kindness in the earth, who giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not. One great addition, indeed, the Scriptures make to the appearance of nature; one instance they unfold of divine bounty; one gift they tell us of which nature knows not: "in that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in him should have everlasting life;" upon which Saint Paul remarks very reasonably and justly, that "if he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not also freely give us all things?" Another mark of the divine goodness, of infinite importance to us, is the divine fidelity in performing his promises, and bringing about what he has declared and threatened. This is a branch of benevolence, for true benevolence will not deceive. The divine constancy and veracity is finely expressed in that exclamation of the prophet Balaam: "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it; or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Moses was careful to represent the God of Israel to that people, as a being in whose truth and faith they might implicitly depend: "Know, therefore, that the Lord thy God he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with

them that love him." This was before they entered into the land of Canaan, and the arduous undertaking of subduing the inhabitants. Afterwards, when that business was accomplished, by a train of surprising miracles and assistances, Joshua, in his exhortation before his death, reminds them how signally and circumstantially the word of God had been fulfilled, and his truth maintained through all the awful scenes to which they had been witnesses: "You know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not any thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God hath spoken among you; all things are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed." "A God of truth," "a God of faithfulness," are titles perpetually ascribed to the deity in the psalms and prophets: "He will ever be mindful of his covenant;" "he will not suffer his faithfulness to fail, and his truth endureth to all generations." The New Testament speaks in the same strain, with this difference, that it applies the faithfulness of God to our spiritual concerns; whereas the Old Testament has chiefly natural and temporal blessings and curses in view. "God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord—God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able." But above all, that divine consolation to all whose sufferings and needs tempt them to mistrust God: "Let them that suffer according to the will of God"

commit the keeping of their souls unto him as unto a willing and faithful creator."

Another quality of the divine goodness to which the best are indebted, and by which alone the bad are permitted to continue in existence, is his patience and long-suffering. In that awful conference upon the Mount Sinai, between the Lord and Moses, when the commandments were delivered, God is pleased to introduce himself with a description of his own nature, which comprises this and many of the particulars we are now explaining: "And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed: The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." "Thou, O Lord," says the holy David, "art a God full of compassion and gracious—long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." After the building of the second temple, in the time of Zechariah, the nation of the Jews made solemn confession and thanksgiving to Almighty God, in which they acknowledged, as well they might, his exceeding bounty, forbearance, and long-suffering with that people. "Our fathers," say they, "dealt proudly, and hardened themselves, and hearkened not to thy commandments; but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsakedst them not." But is he a God of the

Jews only? are not all mankind the objects of his charity? The Lord is long-suffering towards all; namely, to all his human creatures, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Again; "Despisest thou," says Saint Paul to the impenitent Jews, "the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering?"

Another propitious circumstance in the divine goodness is his placability and readiness to forgive the offences which are committed against him; but this must always be considered as subject to one condition, the repentance of the offender; for otherwise this attribute would undo and defeat all the rest; for a perfect facility of unconditional forgiveness would prove such an excuse for great wickedness, as would fill the world with misery and disorder. But placability, such as is consistent with the order of a moral governor studious for the happiness of the whole, is ascribed to God in both Testaments. It was not unknown to the Old, and the New is full of it; the 18th chapter of Ezekiel is direct as to the first: "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die; all his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him—in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure that the wicked should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways and live?" The New Testament is

full of it : Christ came to preach repentance and remission of sins, to seek and to save that which was lost—his baptism was the baptism of repentance—the great offer that both Christ and his apostles held out to the converts was forgiveness of the sins which were past, and faith and amendment. The 5th chapter of Saint Luke sets forth the complacency with which God receives returning sinners in a variety of forms ; it is with the satisfaction with which a father receives a miserable and repenting child—“ Verily I say unto you, there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.”

The last branch of divine goodness we consider is his mercy—mercy, in the common and general sense of the text, comprehends all those benevolent qualities which we have noticed. It is another name for his goodness. But there is one particular instance and exercise of mercy which is all I need name ; and this is his tenderness and compassion to our infirmities, and the disadvantages of our state and condition : “ Like as a father pitieth his own children,” saith the psalmist, “ so the Lord pitieth them that fear him ; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust.” Saint Paul, in the 2d chapter of the Ephesians, describes the future condition, both of himself, and of those whom he wrote to before their call and conversion to Christianity. “ Among whom we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ; but God, who is rich in mercy,

for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.”

Upon the whole, therefore, here is Almighty God described in the words which he himself, and his holy Spirit, dictate and authorise. He is described as supremely good; and if any one asks what his goodness consists in, we answer that the Scripture teaches us to place it in justice to his rational creatures, in dealing with every one according to his deserts, punishing the impenitent and unrighteous, remembering and rewarding our works and labours of love—in loving the whole creation (for, throughout the whole world, there is not a corner in which some instance of kind contrivance and provision for their happiness is not found)—in fidelity to his word, his promises and threats—in patience and long-suffering with our sins and provocation—in placability, or a disposition to pardon, whenever pardon is consistent with the end and support of his moral government; and lastly, in compassion and mercy to our infirmities and feelings, in condescension to the difficulties and defects under which we labour—in accepting and remembering our struggles with temptation, our feeble endeavours, if they are sincere, after amendment—our progress, though but very imperfect, in obedience and reformation.



## XXX.

THE ILLS OF LIFE DO NOT CONTRADICT THE  
GOODNESS OF GOD.

ROM. x. 23.

*And we know that all things work together for good  
to them that love God.*

A CHILD, if it reflect, will often be at a loss to account for the behaviour of its parents towards it; and a peevish and perverse child will often murmur and complain; yet the same child, when it becomes a man, and looks back upon its youth and infancy, will see nothing in its parents' treatment of it but the greatest prudence and affection—will then discover the reason and the justice of what it once complained of, and discern the end and meaning of many things which at that time appeared so intricate and unaccountable. This hereafter may be our case, and probably will be so. We must wait for the great day of Christ's coming again, for the further enlargement of our understandings and more perfect comprehension of these subjects. In the mean time, nevertheless, many considerations which may conduce to set us at ease, and inspire us with trust and confidence in God's providence and goodness, are fit to be known

and attended to. To proceed, therefore : many of the complaints which we make against Providence are of such a nature as, one may say, can never be satisfied, and are therefore manifestly unreasonable ; as, for instance, when we complain of the want of greater strength than we have, or of superior knowledge, or longer life, or immortality, or that we cannot move ourselves with greater speed, or get through our work in less time or with less trouble—what is this but, in other words, to wish that we had been created angels ; which is all one as if a brute, a horse, for instance, or a dog, should murmur that it was not born a man. The absurdity of this we see immediately. In like manner, a superior being, or an angel, might as well complain that it was not formed an archangel ; and the archangel itself would have the same reason to complain that it was inferior to the supreme Being who made it. Now all these complaints are of a kind, as I said before, never to be satisfied : for so long as there is any thing above us, which there always must be ; any perfection we do not possess—any, however, that we can form a notion of—there would be the same reason for these complaints. Suppose a brute to complain that it has not the faculties or reason of a man—in other words, that it is not a man : suppose its own complaint gratified, suppose it to succeed, and the brute to become a man—would it cease to complain ? might it not still answer that it was without the properties and perfections of an angel ?—at least, it would have the

same reason for its murmuring that we have. The evils then, complained of, are called by divines the evils of imperfection; and it is agreed, I think, by all, that they are to be laid out of the case, as conveying no possible imputation upon the divine wisdom or goodness: for a complaint which cannot be satisfied, and which you must go on for ever with, must evidently be groundless and unreasonable in its principle. So then, the defects and imperfections of our nature are what Providence, so far as we can judge, must permit, and should never be repined at, nor any of the consequences of them; which will take in a great part of our complaints, for many of them may be traced up to this.

The next consideration I shall propose, which makes a very material part of the subject, is this—that God thinks fit, and very wisely too, as we can in some measure understand, to govern the world by general rules and laws, which however, like all general rules, must sometimes press hard upon individuals, and produce particular inconveniences. I will explain, as well as I can, what I mean by these general rules. There are, first, what we call laws of nature, which are in general observed to take place without interruption or regard to each particular effect that they may produce. Thus, by the law of nature, the sun rises and shines, though he shine perhaps on the fields of the wicked as well as the good. By the same law, a certain state of the air, which also is brought on by other regular causes, produces rain;

rain, when it falls, swells the rivers ; the rivers, when they swell, may overflow and damage or lay waste the neighbouring fields ; and this falls equally on the virtuous and the sinner. All this comes to pass in consequence of the regular course of nature being suffered to take place ; and God does not see fit to interrupt or suspend this course for the particular prejudice that it may occasion to individuals. In like manner the tide ebbs and flows according to the constant order of its nature, though it may thereby obstruct, it may happen, the ships of the good and virtuous merchant, or carry safe into port the wealth and property of those who little deserve it. We perceive then reason in such things as are constant and regular ; as the flowing of the tides, the return of the seasons, and the like ; but do not see resemblances of it in the more varied parts of nature, as winds and storms, hail and thunder and lightning ; though there is the same reason for it, because these as much depend upon their causes, and are as much governed by a law, though unknown to us, as the other. Now although great particular inconveniences may sometimes arise from these general laws of nature, yet I think it will be found to be for the common benefit of the world that they should be permitted to prevail ; and for this reason amongst others, that it is upon their prevailing, that is, upon the course of nature going regularly on, that all the foresight we have, of future events depends. We act, and determine, we prepare, we provide, in the expectation of

those laws of nature going on as they have done ; nor is it conceivable how we could act, prepare, or provide, if it was otherwise. How would the mariner, for instance, order his navigation, or settle his voyage, if the flowing of the tide or blowing of the wind was to depend upon the convenience of the good and virtuous ? How would the husbandman sow or plough either in hope or safety, if the rain must fall and sun shine only when it suited the grounds of the righteous and good ? It is easy to imagine what confusion must arise from so much irregularity and uncertainty. It is evidently to the advantage of the whole, that such a general order of things should be appointed and maintained in the world—that in what concerns our conduct and subsistence, we may look forward to, and form a judgement of, futurity. Though here we must speak with caution—we intend not to say but that God can control and suspend the ordinary course of nature, direct the winds and storms, give or withhold the rain when he pleases, and as he pleases ; nor do we dispute but that he often does so—sometimes openly, oftener when we do not know it. We may say, that he has appointed general rules and regular courses of things, and permits it to a certain degree, so as to answer some beneficial purpose at least ; thus enabling us to form a judgement of the future. There may be other, and perhaps stronger, reasons for God's adhering, if we may say so, to general rules ; and who can say how far general rules extend ? May we not refer to them, for example,

diseases of body and weakness of mind? for these have their causes, and follow their causes as much as the tide does the moon. God can, no doubt, remove these causes, or hinder them from operating; but it is by the same power that he can hinder the tide from flowing, or the moon from drawing it: a power which, in this latter instance, we do not expect he should exert often, nor perhaps without good cause, in either case. Upon the whole, even a single person—one out of many millions—an atom, compared with the universe—can he wonder that he should be suffered to labour under difficulties and inconveniences, rather than break in upon those general rules, upon the operation of which the happiness of the rest, of the whole, may in a great degree depend? Thus it appears to be in the natural world: and the same respect to regularity in the effects and consequences of things may hold probably in the moral world; that is, the actions and behaviour of men to one another. Thus one man, by luxury or extravagance, reduces himself to beggary; his poverty involves others in distress who are connected with him; and yet it is still both fitting and necessary that luxury and extravagance should be followed by poverty, and that there should subsist those intercourses and communications between one man and another that make their fortunes dependent upon one another. This is the natural constitution of the world; and is not to be departed from, because it will now and then produce inconveniences to those who do not deserve

to suffer them. In short, what we call the course of nature, that is, the ordinary train of cause and effect, is all we have to direct us in the conduct of life ; and though the upholding it often presses hard upon innocent individuals, yet it is necessary for the good of the whole, and therefore perfectly consistent with divine wisdom and goodness, that it should, *in general*, however, be maintained and upheld.

But thirdly: part of our difficulties are owing to this—to our expecting too much ; more than we have any reason or authority to expect.

If we find in ourselves any merit or virtue more than in others, we instantly count upon being rewarded by Providence with riches, and grandeur, and honour, and high station. Now this is nowhere promised. Our Saviour indeed says, “ If ye seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, these things shall be added unto you.” But what things? Not wealth, or power, or advancement, or such like, but food and raiment ; what Christ had been speaking of, and “ what your Father,” he says, “ knoweth that you have need of.” The Scripture nowhere bids us look for such things as riches or honours, or to pray for them. We are directed to the right use of them, when we have them, and to moderation in the pursuit of them ; and that is all that is said about them. Certainly those received them not who were most in God’s favour—the apostles and true followers of Jesus Christ—but quite the contrary. The truth is, the Scriptures seem to consider them as hardly

of any account or importance; hardly deserving attention; in comparison with the great and glorious objects it sets before us. Or the case may have been this: riches, and grandeur, &c. may be a blessing or a curse, and are as often one as the other; therefore for the Scriptures to have proposed them absolutely as either would not have been just or proper. The established course of the world, and the overruling hand of Providence, are both, we trust, in favour of the virtuous and good; but neither seems to promise or even permit that riches and honour should always be their portion. Riches, for example, are generally the earnings of industry, activity, or ingenuity; and should be so: for how else should there be any encouragement for these qualities? Who, if it were not so, would be industrious, active, or ingenious?—thus the world, and the business of it, might stand still. But though industry, activity, and ingenuity are sometimes accompanied with virtue, and sometimes not, the persons who possess these qualities will obtain (and from what has been said, it seems proper they should do so), those worldly advantages which the good and pious would engross to themselves.

But fourthly and lastly: a principal key to this subject of providence, and the difficulties we are under about it, is contained, in my opinion, in the words of the text, which you will now observe. “We know,” says Saint Paul, “that all things work together for good to them that love God;” which I understand to be indirectly telling us, that even the best of us are not to look for each event separately and singly



considered, being either pleasant or useful to us; but that, be they what they will in themselves, or for the present, they will work together for good; they will so fall in with, and qualify one another, as that together the amount and issue of them at last will promote our happiness and interest.

This, in the nature of things, is just as possible as that a bitter medicine should mend our health, or a severe discipline or tedious education should be upon the whole beneficial or even necessary. So that it is possible enough, and Saint Paul, you hear, speaks confidently, that it would be so: "We know," says he, "that all things work together for good."

Thus it was of old with the good and virtuous. They were taught to expect and endure the chastisement of the Lord; for, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth;" and consequently for their good and happiness at last. They suffered afflictions—many that we should think grievous—but what then? "Their light afflictions, which were but for a moment, worked a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Such is the sound and solid consolation the Holy Scriptures administer.

Now what is the conclusion from all these things? The works of God prove his kindness as demonstrably as his word assures us of his care and protection. Difficulties and disorders in the world there are; but they do not, when thoroughly considered, at all contradict these arguments and assurances: so that they should not shake either our hope or our trust in him.

## XXXI.

## PROPHECIES.

(PART I.)

## ACTS XXVIII. 23.

*And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God; persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.*

THERE is one proof of Christianity as strong now as it ever was, and which may be made in a good degree intelligible to every capacity—I mean the proof from prophecy. Now, therefore, that we are assembled to commemorate the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, I know not how to engage your attention better than by laying before you, and explaining, some of the principal places of the Old Testament where that event is foretold, that you may be able to give one reason, at least, of the faith that is in you, and carry home one considerable argument of the truth and certainty of the religion we profess.

I shall confine myself, as the occasion points out,

to the coming of Christ. There are other parts of this evidence, and one in particular, much the most explicit of all ; but which, as they relate to the sufferings rather than the early history of our Saviour, I cannot so properly produce at this time. This I mention, that you may not think that what I now offer contains the whole argument, or the proof complete. I will also omit all such prophecies as are either of a more doubtful application, or more difficult to be interpreted.

Before I proceed to exhibit any particular passages, I must direct your attention to one very essential observation which belongs to them all—which is this ; that we are absolutely certain that the prophecies were written many hundred years before the event. I say we are absolutely certain of this, because the prophecies have always been, and are at this day, received and acknowledged by the Jews as genuine parts of the Old Testament. They are found in their bible as well as ours.

The Jews, we all know, are, and ever have been, the declared enemies of Christ and his religion ; we may, therefore, be sure they never forge themselves, nor suffer others to foist in their books, any thing that may favour a cause which they so much hated. Had the books of the Old Testament been in the hands of Christians, it might be suspected that they had found means, after the event, to insert into them descriptions that suited with it, in order to impose their prophecies upon the world ; but as the case

stands, this was morally impossible, for the copies of these books being always in the hands of the Jews, any attempt to corrupt them must have been immediately detected and defeated by their enemies, as evidently, and unexceptionably, as things which come out of the custody of an enemy.

Now this being settled with certainty, viz. that the several places to be quoted by us were actually written long before the coming of Christ; the only question to be tried, and of which, as hinted above, any plain understanding can judge, is, whether these prophecies, thus compared with the events, do not suit and fall in with them, and prove that they must have been something more than the effect of guess-work. If, when you have the places read to you, and applied to the event, you think the application so distant or obscure, that these things might have happened by accident; then such passages must go for nothing—if, on the contrary, you think there is in any, or all of them put together, more than could reasonably be expected from random conjecture and accidental concurrence; then it will follow, that the persons who delivered these prophecies had some way of knowing they were then operated upon—that is, were imbued and inspired—by the spirit of God; and if it be once allowed that God in any way dictated the prophecies of Christ's coming, the consequence is plain that Christ came from him, and that the religion he established in the world must be true.

In quoting the prophecies, I think it best to pursue the order of time in which they were written. The first, because the most ancient, that I shall mention, is that famous promise which God made to Abraham, in the 22d chapter of Genesis, and the 18th verse: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Now it has never yet been shown in what manner all the nations of the earth have been blessed in the seed of Abraham, except it be by the means of Jesus Christ, who was one of that seed: the seed of Abraham were the Jews, and few I suppose will allow that the Jews have been a public or universal blessing to nations. Suppose then this prophecy to belong to Jesus Christ, it is true that in him, and consequently in the seed of Abraham (as he was one of them), all the nations of the earth have been blessed. The blessing of his religion has been held out to most of them. Many have accepted it. The rest, in God's due time, we trust, will. The prophecy speaks thus much, that "in the seed of Abraham," that is, that through some one or other of his posterity, some blessing should be procured in which the rest of mankind, as well as his posterity, might partake. This may be applied with truth to Christ and his religion; and it does not appear to what else it can be applied at all.

The second prophecy I would propose to your consideration is to be found in the 8th chapter of Genesis, and the 10th verse. We have an account in this chapter of Jacob, upon his death-bed, calling his

twelve sons about him, and solemnly declaring to each what should befall them, in their respective tribes and families, in future times : when he comes to Judah, he uses these remarkable words, which you are now to take notice of : “ The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” Now in this prophecy three things, I think, are plainly foretold—first, that the sceptre should depart from the other tribes sooner—secondly, that it should remain with the tribe of Judah until Shiloh came—thirdly, that it should then also depart from it. Now apply this prophecy to Christ, and observe how it answers in all these particulars. First, the ten other tribes were extirpated in Assyria nine hundred years before Christ. Secondly, the tribe of Judah continued a nation, and in possession of their own country, till Christ came. Thirdly, they also were then destroyed, and their nation and government were utterly demolished by the Romans. It is said that the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shiloh came ; from this I infer, that it was to depart from the other tribes sooner, otherwise it would be saying little or nothing to Judah, and this is a promise made to Judah in particular above his other brethren. Now, how did the event answer to this ? The event was, that ten out of the twelve tribes, which formed, upon the division, the kingdom of Israel, were carried away captive more than six hundred years before Christ, and were never after-

wards heard of; so that the sceptre departed from them in every sense of the expression. The tribe of Benjamin was upon the division so mixed and incorporated with the tribe of Judah, that the one, if I may so say, was lost in the other, and it was afterwards constantly called the land of Judah. The kingdom of Judah returned after the seventy years' captivity into their own land, and continued in possession of their country, of their laws and their religion, till Christ came: as it is evident that the sceptre did not depart from Judah until Shiloh came, so it is in the common use of speech or intimation, that when Shiloh did come it should depart; accordingly, about that time (shortly after Christ's coming, that is, within forty years after his death), the kingdom of Judah also was deprived of its sceptre; that is, underwent a total destruction from the Roman armies:—their city and temple, as we all know, burnt to the ground— their government overthrown— their country laid waste— the people driven out to wander, as they do still, exiles and vagabonds upon the face of the earth. Now there is, as I said before, but one question;— whether this correspondence of the event and the prophecy could, reasonably speaking, be the effect of chance; and how small this chance is you may easily comprehend from hence. Suppose any of us to undertake to foretell what may be the fate or condition of a particular family a thousand years hence; what little probability is there, that in so wild and wide a field of conjecture we should hit on even a single

particular that turned out to be true, much less deliver a prediction, which in all circumstances was fulfilled; nay, which in all its circumstances admitted of a clear and reasonable application: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." I lay no other stress upon the name of Shiloh than just to observe that it must signify a person, and a person of great eminence and importance to the world (or the Jewish nation at least), which Christ undoubtedly was.

The description that is added, "and unto him shall the gathering of the people be," agrees well with the person and character of Christ, who, as the founder of a new religion, did actually gather together unto him an innumerable multitude of all nations and languages, paying adoration to his name, and professing obedience to his authority.

The passage I will next proceed to, omitting, as I said, many that are of a probable, though more obscure application, is the famous one of Isaiah, contained in the 7th chapter, and beginning with the 18th verse. Two neighbouring kings had conspired against Abaz, king of Judah: the king of Judah and his people being exceedingly alarmed with this confederacy, Isaiah was sent to comfort and encourage them:—before the king, and in the presence, it must be supposed, of a great assembly of the people, Isaiah delivers these solemn words: "Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary



men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel; butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know" (or till he knows) "to refuse the evil, and choose the good; for before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." Now that the former part of the prophecy, a virgin conceiving and bearing a son, and that son being called Immanuel, or God with us, is applicable in the strictest sense to Christ, and in the same sense to no other person ever heard of—all see upon the bare reading of it: but there is a difficulty in the latter part of the prophecy which we must endeavour to remove before we can justly lay so great a stress upon it. It is said that "before the child should know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good," that is, before he should come to years of discretion, the land which thou abhorrest, viz. the countries then in confederacy against Ahaz, should be forsaken of both her kings. Now this happened a few years after, so that the child here spoken of could not be Christ, who did not appear till many hundred years after this; and yet the child here spoken of seems, as the prophecy now stands, the same child which the virgin was to bear. This is the difficulty—I will now give you the explanation. In the 3d verse you read that Isaiah, when he was sent upon this message, was commanded to take with him Shear-jashub his son,

who was then a little child ; this explanation is the key to the whole prophecy, and serves to explain it in this manner : Isaiah, in the presence and audience of the king and people of Judea, who were assembled to receive a message from God, announces this august prediction of the future birth and coming of the Saviour of the world : “ The Lord himself shall give you a sign—behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel ;” which means, as you are told by the prophet, “ God with us :” the prophet then adds, “ butter and honey shall he eat, till he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good ;” that, although his birth be miraculous, yet shall he be supported by the ordinary means, till he comes to man’s estate.

Here ends, as we apprehend it, the prophecy concerning Christ, for the prophet then comes to a new subject ; and turning himself to the king in particular, and pointing, we may suppose, at his little son who stood by ; “ but before,” says he, “ this child shall know how to refuse the evil and choose the good,” that is, before the child standing by you shall attain to years of discretion, “ the country which thou abhorrest, the two nations that have conspired thy ruin, shall be forsaken of both its kings :” which, we read, accordingly happened, and within the time limited by the prophecy. The whole passage therefore contains, if we explain it right, two distinct, independent prophecies ; the one addressed to the whole nation at large, “ hear, O house of David,” and

relating to the birth and coming of the Messiah, an event of the utmost importance to that whole nation; the other addressed to the king in particular, and relating to the overthrow of the two armies, which then threatened him, and which was to take place in a few years.

Isaiah was introduced to the king and the assembly of Jerusalem, waiting with great expectations for a message from God. This surely was a fit opportunity to announce to this nation the future coming of the promised Messiah, and describes him by a circumstance in which he was distinguished from the whole race of mankind, "his being born of a virgin." This, therefore, was the first and great prophecy. But as the king Ahaz was then under apprehension from his combined enemies, who threatened him with immediate destruction, the prophet proceeds, before he leaves off speaking, to satisfy him with respect to them; and that the king might take no concern, and set himself at ease with respect to the danger which he dreaded, he assures him that in a very few years—before the child that stood near him came to years of discretion, he should get rid of them both.

There are two circumstances which confirm this interpretation, and so strong, that I cannot forbear mentioning them. Isaiah, as I told you, was commanded to take with him upon this message his young son Shear-jashub. Now this must have been for some purpose; yet unless he was the child meant as coming to man's estate, as we have explained it, it is im-

possible to say what business he had there, or for what purpose he was commanded to be taken. This is one most striking circumstance: another is this. You read in the next chapter that Isaiah had a son born, and it was solemnly recorded, that before this son could speak, this same event, namely, the destruction of the two kingdoms, should take place. Now the second son coming to his speech, and the first to years of discretion, might very naturally be about the same time; and Isaiah is made to cry out, "behold, I and my children are for signs and for wonders in Israel;" "my children," that is, not only the second child Maher-shalal-hash-baz in the 8th chapter, but his former son Shear-jashub in the prophecy we have been explaining.

If you admit the explanation which thus goes upon so many circumstances of probability, the plain and simple fact is established, that six hundred years before the birth of Christ, it was foretold that a divine person, Immanuel, God with us, should be born, contrary to the course of nature, of a pure virgin. Is not this what we are told of Christ? is it believed—is it even seriously professed indeed, of any other person in the whole world? Let no one say that he is not qualified to comprehend or judge of the proofs of this. Thanks be to God, who hath given us the sure word of prophecy, which seems to require only a little attention to apprehend it; who hath vouchsafed us such means of conviction, as only ignorance could miss, or what is worse, obstinacy could withstand.

## XXXII.

## PROPHECIES.

(PART II.)

## ACTS XXVIII. 23.

*And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God; persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.*

MANY prophecies of the Old Testament which admit not of so clear, although of a probable, application to the coming of Christ, I take no notice of, notwithstanding it should be observed that these, from the number of them, and taken altogether, constitute a very considerable proof of the truth of our religion: for throughout so large a volume as that of the Old Testament, there might occur here and there an expression which bore by accident an allusion to this great event, or was capable of some figurative application to it; yet that many of them should point the same way, that so great a number should admit of any application at all, can hardly be accounted for without design.

There are also other prophecies which, was I to read them to you, would not appear to you to have that relation to Christ which there is reason to believe they have, and that for want of understanding the style and language of the ancient prophets, which is very singular; and this is a knowledge not to be expected from the generality of an audience, nor to be taught in the compass of a sermon. Confining myself, therefore, as I proposed, to those prophecies which more apparently respect the coming of Christ, the first which I would offer to your consideration is that noted one of the prophet Micah, to be found in the 5th chapter and 2d verse of this book: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." "Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah:"—The kingdom of Judah was divided into districts, which were called thousands, as certain districts are now-a-days with us called hundreds. Bethlehem was the capital town of one of these districts, though small and inconsiderable, compared with many other capital towns. This is what the prophet means by the expression "though thou be little among the thousands of Judah." These districts were likewise sometimes called principalities; on which account Saint Matthew quotes it thus: "Though thou be little among the princes, or principalities, of Judah," without any alteration in the

verses from the words as they are read in the book of Micah itself. But the main thing to be observed is the description that is given of this extraordinary person, and the place he was to come out of—it was he that was to be ruler in Israel. Our Saviour assumed to himself the title and character of king of the Jews; that is, he whom his Father had appointed to give new laws to that nation, and to whose authority many of the Jews did, and all ought to have submitted themselves, “whose goings forth have been of old, and from everlasting.” This is a most remarkable description. Who remembers not what is said of Christ, that “he was in the beginning;” that “before Abraham was, he is; that he came forth from the Father; that he was before all things, the first-born of every creature?” If what is related of Christ be true, he existed with his Father before the foundations of the world: so that in the strictest sense, it might be said that his goings forth were of old, and from everlasting: thus much is certainly true; that Christ laid claim to this character, asserted that he had his existence with God before the creation; nor is there any reason to suppose that he made this claim or assertion in order to bring himself within the scope and description of this prophecy—for (this prophecy is never quoted by him or any of his disciples with that view, or for that purpose. There never appeared any other person, either in Bethlehem or anywhere else, of whom the same things can be said, even if you allow them every thing to which they

pretend. No man ever pretended to have his existence with God previous to his being born into the world. Our Lord did; and to his character and pretensions the words of this prophecy clearly apply. Nor is it inconsistent with Christ's character, what is said in the 5th verse—"This man shall be our peace, when the oppressor shall come into our land;"—supposing, what the style of prophecy and some similar examples will warrant us in supposing, that the prophet describes the future enemies of the Jews under the denomination of the Assyrians, who were their enemies in his time. "Out of Bethlehem shall come forth he that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting." Out of Bethlehem never came any one that we have heard of, except Jesus Christ, to whom these words could belong in any sense, nor any persons of eminence at all. Bethlehem has for nearly 1700 years been destroyed: it would be difficult, I suppose, to point out the place where it stood; it concerns the Jews therefore to show, if this prophecy did not receive its completion in Christ, how it was fulfilled, or is even possible to be fulfilled, at all. If you come to compute the power of chance, which sometimes in on every occasion, consider what the chance was, when one small town in a kingdom was pitched upon for the birth of an extraordinary person; that any extraordinary person at all should be born in it, much less one whose character and pretensions especially corresponded with so singular a description,



whose goings forth have been of old, and from everlasting. Nothing more remains of this prophecy, than just to observe by what curious and seemingly accidental means divine Providence went about to fulfil its purpose. The parents of Jesus Christ were not inhabitants of Bethlehem; yet at Bethlehem, according to the prophets, was Christ to be born. It so fell out, or rather it was so ordered, that at that precise time a decree was published from the Roman emperor, that the inhabitants of Judea should be taxed—this was the only city to which his family belonged. Joseph and Mary, in pursuance of this decree, repaired to Bethlehem, the city of David, of whose lineage they were; and during the few days of their sojourning there, this illustrious event, the birth of Christ, took place.

I will next introduce to you a very celebrated passage of the prophet Haggai: the circumstances to be explained concerning it are these: Haggai lived after the return of the Jews from the seventy years' captivity in Babylon, just at the time of the building of the second temple of Jerusalem. The first temple, or the temple of Solomon, having been utterly destroyed by their enemies, the condition of the Jews did not allow them to erect a building equal by any means in magnificence to that of Solomon. The old men, who remembered the former temple in all its splendor, when they saw the very inferior plan and structure of the new edifice, were seized with that melancholy and concern which are always natural in

such circumstances. This is described in the book of Ezra with much simplicity:—"But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice." Now the prophet Haggai was sent on this occasion to encourage those who were engaged in rebuilding the temple, that they might not be cast down by beholding the inferior condition of the new building, in comparison with the wealth and splendor of the old one; and he addresses the governor, the high-priests, and the people at large, in these words—2d chapter, 3d verse—"Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory: and how do ye see it now!—is it not in your eyes in comparison as nothing? yet be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high-priest; and be strong, O ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work, for I am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not. For thus saith the Lord of Hosts"—and here begins the prophecy we have been proposing to introduce—"yet once (it is a little while) and I will shake terribly the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations; and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord

of Hosts: the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts."

Now the first reflection is, that as the second temple had been long since destroyed, if this prophecy be not already fulfilled, it never can be. The opening of the prophecy—"Yet a little while, and I will shake terribly the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land,"—is generally understood to denote the fierce civil commotions which were to precede the coming of the Messiah. Wars and tumults are almost constantly described by the old prophets under the figure of earthquakes, as so many convulsions and discords in the course of nature. It is here also more plainly said in what is added,—"*and I will shake all nations.*" When the prophet speaks of the earth, and all nations, it must, in common reason, be understood of those nations and that part of the earth in which the Jews, the persons to whom he spoke, were personally concerned. Now this prophecy, according to this interpretation of it, was fulfilled. The coming of Christ was, in fact, preceded by violent and dreadful civil disturbances. The kingdom of Judea, after suffering many combats between its own princes, was a little before this time subjected to the Roman yoke. The Roman empire itself, which comprehended at that time the greatest part of the known world, and in Scripture sometimes comprehended the whole of it, was, from the death of Julius Cæsar to near the birth of Christ, torn and shaken

with civil wars and contests for the supreme power. "The silver and the gold is mine, saith the Lord;"—that is, I value not the splendor of silver and gold; just as in the 50th Psalm, God declares how little he values their sacrifices, by the same sort of expression,—"For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." When God declares that he values not the splendor of silver and gold, in which the former house no doubt *much* excelled, he in effect intimates that the glory and dignity of this latter house should be of a totally different nature from this. I will repeat to you the prophecy, which these two parts of it interpreted. After violent wars and tumults amongst the whole world, the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts—the glory of gold and silver, in which the former house so much excelled, I value not: the glory of this latter house, which must consequently be of a different nature, shall be greater than that of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts; and in this place will I give peace. Who sees not Jesus Christ pointed out in this prophecy? "The desire of all nations shall come." Who was the desire of all nations? He was a blessing to all, as his commission extended to all, and as, in fact, he was expected by most: for the expectation of some extraordinary person being then about to appear in the world was at that time almost universal. Of what other Jew can this, or any thing of this sort, be said?

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The second temple frequently received under its roof this divine person, and was the scene of his prodigious miracles :—thus was it filled with glory, and that of the greatest and highest kind ; in this respect was the glory of the latter house greater than of the former. “ And in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord.”

Hear Saint Paul :—“ He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken the middle wall of partition betwixt us, and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them which were nigh: for through him we both have access by one spirit unto the Father.”

How exactly do the prophet and the apostle agree! The peace here meant is peace or reconciliation with God, which it was our Saviour’s declared purpose to preach and to produce.

The last prophecy I will detain you with at present is to be found in the 3d chapter of Malachi, and the 1st verse. Here are these words: “ Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.” What is to be observed of this prophecy lies in a very little compass: “ Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.” Here is an exact description of

the office and character of John the Baptist, who came expressly to prepare the way before Jesus Christ; that is, to announce his approach, and prepare mankind for his reception. "And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple; even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in"—that is, the Messiah himself, whom they so earnestly expected, and from whom they promised themselves so much, should suddenly appear. "Suddenly;" that is, after the messenger that was to prepare his way. This is a very explicit prophecy, and has no difficulty in it, if you take care not to be misled by the term, to suppose the messenger that was to prepare the way, and the messenger of the covenant, to be the same; whereas, if you examine the prophecy with attention, you will soon see that the one means the Messiah himself—the other his forerunner. For the messenger is to prepare the way before whom? Before nothing, unless the Lord, whom ye seek, the messenger of the covenant, be a different person from him. So that two distinct persons are plainly foretold in the prophecy, who were to be associated in the same plan and commission; who were, that is, the one to be introduced to give notice of the approach of the other: both indeed called messengers from God, but of different degrees and denominations; the one the messenger to prepare the way—the other the messenger of the covenant; the one necessarily to precede the other; the second, or greater messenger, to appear soon, or immediately after his forerunner, to super-

sede his office, as being preparatory to his own. No Christian, it may be hoped, is so ill versed in the gospel history as not to perceive the correspondence of all the circumstances, as to the appearance and preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist assumed nothing, delivered nothing, in his own name:—"I am not he." His preaching and functions all referred to another: himself was the messenger of God, but only to prepare the way for a greater. That greater messenger suddenly followed—the messenger of the covenant—who came into the world to convey from the Father, and communicate to the whole race of man, the knowledge and the condition of eternal salvation.

## XXXIII.

## PROPHECIES.

(PART III.)

## ACTS XXVIII. 23.

*And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God; persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.*

THE next prophecy, in the order and manner I have proposed to mention them, is from the 9th chapter of Daniel, and begins at the 24th verse, as follows: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the time spoken of, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem until Messiah the prince shall be seven weeks, and three-score and two weeks; and the street shall be built



again, and the wall, even in troublous times; and after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined; and he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week, and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined, shall be poured upon the desolate."

Now in this prophecy, amongst some places that are dark and obscure, there are others which point out the coming and character of Jesus Christ in very plain words. I believe the best way of considering it will be, first, to lay out of the question that of the computation of the time, which forms a material part of the prophecy. Now, that for the present being omitted, it appears, I think, that at some future period, the Most Holy, the Messiah, the Saviour should appear, and that he should be cut off, that is, be put to death, but not for himself, and that some future and foreign nation should then destroy the city and the sanctuary.

I hardly need observe that, supposing Jesus Christ to be the person meant in this prophecy, all this was punctually fulfilled. I will repeat to you the former part of the prophecy, and you will judge whether it is not as plainly foretold. "From the going forth of

this commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem until Messiah the prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks the street shall be built again, and the wall, in troublous times; and after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and sanctuary."

The next thing to be represented is, from the description that is given of what was to come to pass at this appointed time, that it corresponds with the office and ministry of Christ. "Seventy weeks," the prophecy begins, "are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city." To do what? "To finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make a reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up the vision of prophecy, and to anoint the most holy." First; at this time transgressions were to be finished, and sins made an end of. The epistle to the Hebrews twice describes the Christian scheme in words borrowed from the prophet Jeremiah, and which, in effect, say the same thing that is here foretold. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities I will remember no more." Secondly; if this reconciliation was to be made for iniquity, or as it might better be rendered, iniquity to be expiated, who knows not that he is the "propitiation for our sins;" "that now, even at the end of the world, he hath appeared, to put away sins by the sacrifice of himself?" Again, everlasting righteousness was to

be brought in: "This is his name, the Lord our righteousness." "A sceptre of righteousness," says the epistle to the Hebrews, "is the sceptre of thy kingdom," that is the doctrine of the gospel. The 5th chapter and 13th verse of the same epistle is emphatically called "the word of righteousness." It does not appear that any of these expressions were applied with a view to the prophecy of Daniel: nor do I think it material to the argument, whether they were applied to Christ in a literal or figurative sense, because if these bear any sense so easy and natural as to lead his followers to apply these expressions to him afterwards, they might in the same sense, no doubt, be predicted of him before. The two remaining clauses of the verse, "to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy," are commonly supposed to signify the accomplishing the vision and consummating the prophecy, both which were done by the death of Christ. "Jesus knowing that all these things were now accomplished, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, said 'I thirst;' and when he received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost." The great outlines of the prophecy generally, I think, must apply to Christ.

We must now enter a little into the circumstances of the time, which were assigned with great precision, and composes a principal part of the whole prophecy. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy holy city." This is afterwards spoken of under two distinct

periods: "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks." Now I believe it is pretty generally allowed, both by Jews and Christians, that the weeks here meant are weeks, not of days, but of years; a week that is, being seven years instead of seven days. This way of reckoning, which seems odd enough to us, had nothing in it unintelligible to a Jew. Every seventh year was with them like every seventh day—a year of rest for the land and husbandry, and called the sabbatical year. This made the periods of seven years a familiar division of time to them; and it is not unnatural to call it a week of years, as it consists, like the common weeks, of seven parts, and the seventh in both was a sabbath. But this is not all. A similar computation is used in their book, which they are best acquainted with, the book of the law. In the 25th of Leviticus and the 8th verse, the observation of the Jubilee is enjoined in the following terms: "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years." Sabbaths of years, you observe, is a plural very like the weeks of years spoken of in Daniel; but, what is more, in the next chapter to this of Daniel, and about the beginning of it, there are the following remarkable words: "I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all till three whole weeks were fulfilled." Weeks of days it is in the original, though our translators have im-

properly rendered it three whole weeks. Now this expression, "weeks of days," is a plain indication that the weeks he had been speaking of before were not weeks of days. Reckoning then a week a week of years, or a term of seven years, it was to be seventy weeks, or 490 years, from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, unto Messiah the prince. And in fact it was so: it was 490 years betwixt the Jews being re-incorporated into a people after their captivity, and a holy city, and the death of Christ. There are two other parts of the prophecy which seem to answer according to this interpretation: verse 29th, "Yet he shall confirm this covenant with me for one week." For one week—that is, for seven years. Now, in fact, it was for just seven years that the covenant was preached to the Jews, and confirmed with many of them: for seven years after the death of Christ was the first calling of the Gentiles, and from thence we may date the rejection of the Jews. And again, in the 27th verse, "In the middle of the week," or, as it should be translated, in half a week, "he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease." Now the Roman army were three years and a half (about half a week of years), from their first invasion of Judea, to the final destruction of the city and temple, when sacrifice and the oblation of necessity ceased. At this distance of time, and with the disadvantages we are under, it is not to be wondered at if there should be some difficulty or some uncertainty in this

computation; but this single expression, "Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself, and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary," so plainly and precisely agrees with the death of Christ, and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that it can never, I think, be got over:

I have now laid before you all the prophecies I intended to produce: by no means, however, all the prophecies that are generally understood to relate to Christ, nor as some perhaps may think, the clearest; but they are those which, in my judgement, carry upon the face of them the apparent application to Jesus Christ, and were the easiest to be explained. As a sequel to the short exposition, if such it can be deemed, it may not be unsuitable to the argument to collect, into one point, the various particulars concerning Christ, described and comprised in the prophecies we have quoted from the Old Testament.

First, then, I take it to be manifest that, according to these prophecies, some extraordinary person or other was to be expected to appear. I take this to be manifest, not only from the words and terms of the prophecies themselves, but because the Jews universally, upon the strength of these prophecies, did, in fact, expect such a person, and there was no difference of opinion at all upon this head. Those who received Christ, and those who rejected him, did all acknowledge that the Messiah, an extraordinary

person, was to arrive amongst them. Christians and Jews are agreed also upon this head at this day. But the fact of an extraordinary person being foretold, and an extraordinary person appearing, would not alone be sufficient to build upon, unless some further and more appropriate circumstances be found in the prophecies to identify and describe him.

These circumstances may be reduced to the following heads : The time of his appearance ; the place of his appearance ; the circumstances of his birth, his nature, and his office.

First, the time of his appearance. It was to be “whilst the sceptre continued with the tribe of Judah,” after it had departed from the other tribes, and when it was about also to depart from this ; it was to be during the standing of the second temple, after violent civil commotions in the world ; it was to be near the time that “the people of the prince that should come would destroy the temple and the sanctuary ;” it was to be, “seventy weeks, or 490 years, from the going forth of the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem.” Exactly at such a time Christ did in fact appear.

Secondly, the place of his appearance. “He was to be of the seed of Abraham and of David, and to come out of Bethlehem of Judea.” Christ was a descendant of Abraham’s and of the house of David, and was born at Bethlehem.

Thirdly, the circumstances of his birth. He was

to be preceded by a forerunner, and “to be born of a virgin.” Christ was preceded by John the Baptist, and, as is related of him, born of a virgin.

Fourthly, his nature. “He was to be Immanuel, or God with us.” His years, further, “were of old and from everlasting.” He was the “anointed,” “the prince,” “the most Holy:” If we acknowledge his claims, he was all this, and in a sense that no other man ever pretended to.

Fifthly, his office. He was to be a “blessing to all nations.” “Unto him was the gathering of the people to be.” “He was to be ruler in Israel;” “he was to be the desire of all nations;” “he was to excel in glory of a different kind from the splendour of gold and silver;” he was to be the person whom they so earnestly expected, and from whom they promised themselves so great things; he was to give “peace;” “he was to be cut off, but not for himself;” “he was to finish transgressions, to make an end of sin, to extirpate iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.” How truly all these may be said of Jesus Christ, in a literal or scriptural sense, you must judge for yourselves. I think I have shown that these things were all, in fact, though in other words, said of him by his followers, who understood his character and office best, and who wrote without any views or desire to become public men.

There is but one objection that I can here take notice of, which is, that it does not appear from the prophecies themselves that these particulars were



foretold of one and the same person. I allow that it does not appear from the prophecies themselves ; but if they were all in fact fulfilled by, we presume it is an evidence that they were all intended for, one person ; for, supposing that these particulars might, for any thing that appears in the prophecy, belong to one or to different persons, their uniting in one person is not less extraordinary or more likely to happen by accident : and therefore such an union in the event is good proof of the design and completion of the prophecy.

I conclude the whole subject with the observation I set out with, namely, that there is but one point at issue—but one question to be tried—whether this circumstantial completion of the prophecies, and in so many particulars, could or could not merely happen by accident. If you think it might, why then the argument must be given up. If you think it could not, or that it is not probable it could, then you have one reason at least for the faith that is in you—a solid and satisfactory proof of the truth of our religion.

## XXXIV.

## EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART I.)

JOHN XX. 31.

*But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is, the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name.*

THE direct historical evidence of Christianity is contained in three propositions; which, if they can each be made out satisfactorily, amount together to a demonstration of the truth of our religion. However, when I call them the direct historical evidence, you are not to suppose that it is the only evidence—there are abundance of circumstances, both external and internal, which corroborate this evidence, which, however, I cannot enter upon now; because, in a subject so various and comprehensive, we must be content to consider one part at one time.

The three points are these:—

First: that the books of the New Testament were actually written by the persons whose names they bear.

Secondly: that those persons could not be themselves deceived in what they give an account of.

Thirdly: that they could have no reason, nor can it be conceived that they should attempt, to deceive or impose upon others.

The first of these propositions will be enough for one discourse; namely—The books of the New Testament were actually written by the authors whose names they bear; the Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles, by Luke; the Epistles by Paul, Peter, John, &c.

Now, as to this point, there is, first, the general evidence, and there is, secondly, the particular testimony.

By the general evidence, I mean, that by which we believe and are assured, on reading any book, that it was written by the author to whom it is ascribed, and which is no other than its being ascribed to such an author so far back as we are able to trace; which circumstance is sufficient, when no opposite evidence appears, nor any thing in the writing itself contradicts it, to convince any man. Upon this ground we believe (and no one, that I know of, doubts it or contradicts it) that the last great poem which bears his name was Milton's; the History Lord Clarendon's; and many years ago, that the Commentaries were Cæsar's, the Orations Cicero's, the Æneid Virgil's. Now, to say the least, there is the same reason for believing that the Gospel was Matthew's or John's; the Epistle, Paul's or Peter's: and

the reason upon which the belief of mankind proceeds in these cases is very satisfactory, and will seldom deceive them : which reason is this—that a book could hardly have gotten the reputation of belonging to any author, unless it was acknowledged as such (namely, as the work of this author,) by his contemporaries in the age in which he lived ; and that the same contemporaries in the age in which the author lived could hardly be deceived in ascribing it to him. But this matter is best supported by instances. We of this age and country know that such a particular History of England was written by Hume : we know it, because it bears his name, or because he mentions himself as the author in the ending of the work, or without these, it is universally imputed to him, and he sits quiet under the imputation of it. Now the generation which comes next, after we and he are all dead and gone, will believe and know that it is Hume's History ; for they will know that we, the predecessors, who were contemporaries of the author, believed it to be written by him, and that this belief of ours, for the reasons above-mentioned, could hardly be mistaken. Their opinion is founded upon what they know to have been ours, and the next generation upon theirs : and this point—who is the author of the books?—when it is once public, and notorious, and agreed upon, is not much altered or diminished in its evidence by length of time. So far as I can see, it will be as certain, or nearly so, three hundred years hence, that Milton

was the author of the poem, as it is now ; that Cicero was the author of the Orations will be just as evident to the next generation as to this, and to a thousand generations after the next. And this is the general evidence, supposing there was nothing but credit and general reputation to go upon—which tradition and reputation, as to the authors of books, do not often deceive us ; and we desire no other credit upon this point to the books of Scripture than to any other.

But besides the general evidence, founded upon the general tradition, there is also a vast quantity of particular testimony, that is, the certainty of other very ancient books existing, especially asserting the books of Scripture to be authenticated and of undoubted authority, and quoting passages from them as such.

We have a great many books written, some fourteen or fifteen, some sixteen hundred years ago ; some by disciples of the apostles ; others by their disciples ; which speak of four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles, not only as credible and excellent, but as never disputed, and such as never had been disputed ; as equal to the oracles of the Old Testament, as divinely inspired, as the words of the Spirit, the law and the oracles of God ; the rule of faith, which cannot be contradicted without great guilt ; with many other expressions of the like kind. This is direct testimony. But there is a species of testimony which is not direct, but quite as satisfactory, if not more so : it is this :—when ancient

writers quote texts and passages of the Scripture—either noting the author, or the book without the author, or neither—but borrowing the expression as being that of authors applicable to the argument:—now such quotations prove to an absolute certainty, both that the books so used and so borrowed existed at the time, and were attributed to the author at the time, whenever the author is mentioned, and were received as books of authority, at least, in the opinion of the person who makes the quotation. If Hume, in his History, quotes a passage from Scripture, or Lord Clarendon's History, it is as full a demonstration a thousand years hence, if both histories live so long, that Clarendon's History was written at the time, and was acknowledged to be Clarendon's History, and was as such acknowledged, and believed, and received as a history of authority:—and this is the very sort of demonstration in which we abound; for there are more quotations of the single Gospel of Saint Matthew, in old books written within 150 years after the resurrection of Christ, than there are of all the works of Cicero, from the time they were written to this time; and the books in which these quotations are found were written, one in Palestine, one in Italy, one in Africa, and in different parts of Asia—which shows that those books were known and acknowledged, not only in one particular place, amongst one particular sect of men, but that they were spread, comparatively speaking, over the world, and received by people in all countries, who

knew nothing of each other. Now, as I said before, these quotations are, on one account, the most satisfactory kind of proof. When a writer tells us expressly that such a book was written by such an author, or that such a work was of great credit and authority, he may tell us so with a design to deceive us; but in this sort of quotation there is no design at all. This proves the existence and capital authenticity of the books from which they are extracted, without the authors who made the extracts even suspecting that they would be applied to for that purpose. This argument in support of the authenticity of the Scriptures is common to the Scriptures with any or almost all other ancient books. There are, besides this, several considerations peculiar to the Scriptures, which greatly corroborate the general argument; being more easily comprehended and retained.

First: if the books of the New Testament were the rule of life and faith to the primitive Christians, and received by them as such, it was exceedingly their concern; and it is but reasonable to suppose that they would take care to inform themselves of the origin and authority of these books, and avoid being imposed upon by fraud or artifice, in matters in which they were so highly interested. No one ever attempted to forge an act of parliament; and the attempt is manifestly impossible—and why? Because those who were to obey and be bound by it would take care to have satisfaction of its authority before

they submitted to it. The same reason applies to the books of Scripture, which are as so many laws to the professors of Christianity.

Secondly: these books from the first were read, as they are now, in the churches and assemblies of the primitive Christians, and these books only: which was both a strong and public acknowledgement of their authority, and even of their exclusive authority; and that by a great number of differing and distant churches. A Russian traveller in Asia made it his object to inquire, and found the same books used in all churches: and this was withal a complete security from any corruption or alteration which could be introduced into them. I defy any man living to make now-a-days any alteration in our Bible; because its being constantly read in public, and being by that means both so dispersed, and so well known, the alteration must immediately be detected.

Thirdly: from very early, nay, perhaps from the first ages of Christianity, there were disputes, sects, and divisions amongst Christians. Now all sects appealed to these books for the confirmation of their opinions. Those who found any thing in the books to confirm their opinion produced it to gainsay the adversary: those who found any thing seemingly contrary to their opinions reconciled and explained it as well as they could; but they all agreed in referring themselves and one another to the books. This is the strongest evidence in the world: for all those who agreed in nothing else agreed in reading



these same books ; when they were disputing with the utmost vehemence with one another, all sides left the disputes to be decided by these books. It shows, I think, incontrovertibly, the high esteem in which these books were, and that they could not be controverted, whatever else they might be. If one party attempted to forge a work in the name of an apostle, in order to support a favourite opinion, the opposite party, we may depend upon it, would search out the forgery and expose it ; or if one party attempted to insert a text or passage, they would never prevail upon the adversary to allow it, so as to obtain uncontested credit. The vigilance of contending parties is the best security in the world against fraud and contradiction on either side.

Fourthly : the primitive Christians did not receive the books of the New Testament in the lump, without distinction or inquiry ; but appear to have exercised due caution and circumspection. The four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of Paul, one of Peter, and one of John, were received, so far as appears, universally and without dispute. The Epistle to the Hebrews, James, the second of Peter, the second and third of John, Jude, and the Revelations, were for a while dubious, though afterwards admitted as genuine.

Now, had none of them ever been doubted, it might have been said it was because no one of them was inquired into ; but some of them being doubted, shows there was inquiry, there was caution ; and this

is, in my judgement, the strongest imaginable confirmation of the rest. What were the reasons of the doubts, or how they were afterwards cleared up, is not now the question. It affords a fair presumption that there was no room to doubt on any of the rest; because when there was any such room, you find scruples, hesitations, and disagreements. An historian who wrote an account and history of the Christian religion between two and three hundred years after Christ's death, speaking of the books in use amongst Christians, divides them into three kinds:—those which were pretended to be written by the apostles or apostolic men, but rejected by the church; those which had been doubted, but afterwards received; and those, lastly, which had never, that he could learn, by any of the almost innumerable Christian churches or societies, been doubted or disputed at all—which distinction is exact and judicious, and settling the authority of the last set beyond controversy; because it is established upon the unconscious and unanimous consent of a vast number of Christian congregations, independent of one another, and who, as appears, were sufficiently disposed to doubt and disagree, where there was room for it.

I acknowledge that spurious pieces were published under the names of the apostles; but I contend that they never were received and acknowledged by the primitive Christians, in the way and with the consent that these Scriptures were. They may be once or

twice repeated by others; they were read and perhaps quoted; but those who read them and doubted of them, or were inclined to doubt them, always made a vast difference betwixt these and the books of which there was no doubt.

I will add two reflections, which belong particularly to Saint Paul's epistles. Saint Paul appears to have generally employed some one to write his epistles, either from his own mouth or another copy he gave him; but then to avoid the abuse of it, he always wrote a little—probably his benediction—in his own hand, expressly to prove it to be his own, and to guard the people he wrote to against any imposition. “The salutation of me, Paul, with my own hand, which is the token in every epistle; so I write.” Generally the person by whom it was sent is mentioned in the ending of the epistle. No one, therefore, would present the epistle but that person; and he must be known as coming from Saint Paul. A great number of persons are saluted by name, who, as well as the whole church, would no doubt see the letter,—and particularly the first Epistle to the Thessalonians is directed to be read in all the churches. Now this very circumstance, in my judgement, made a forgery impossible: any such forgery during Paul's lifetime must have been discovered by his subsequent communication with the church; and if such epistle was not produced till after his death, then this plain objection must have overthrown its credit. “Here

it is directed in the very body of the letter that it be publicly read in the church, and the church has never heard or seen, or been told of it, till now."

My last reflection is this: in all Saint Paul's epistles, there is an earnestness and a vehemence; I might call it an enthusiasm, and a passionate style, which I will undertake to say none could counterfeit; nor could such be found in any man's writings who was not thoroughly and entirely convinced of the truth of this religion. Let any one read Saint Paul's epistles with this view, and I am convinced he will confess that the author of these epistles, be he who he would, was really persuaded of the truth of what he wrote; not to mention the obscurity in many, or in most indeed, of his epistles, which a forger would have avoided.

Upon the whole, I trust that I have established this fundamental point to your satisfaction—that the books of Scripture were really written by the persons to whom they were ascribed. The remaining points we must reserve.

## XXXV.

## EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART II.)

JOHN XX. 31.

*But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name.*

HAVING proved, and I trust satisfactorily, that the books of the New Testament were written by the persons to whom they are ascribed, my next proposition is, that these persons could not possibly be deceived in what they related; and this will necessarily introduce an inquiry how they stood connected as to opportunity of knowledge and information, with the matters they relate, and of what nature those matters were.

One of the four Gospels, which contain the history of our Saviour's life, the first, was written by Matthew. Who was that Matthew? The publican, whom Jesus Christ saw and called at the receipt of custom, and afterwards ordained to be one of the twelve Apostles, who were to be with him as companions in his journeying and ministry till his

ascension. So that you observe this author was an eye-witness himself, and had actually seen the greatest part of the things which he relates; attended upon Christ as he passed from one place to another; was present upon the spot when he wrought his miracles; heard his discourses; sat down with him at his last supper; and, above all, saw him himself after his resurrection from the dead. No authority can be stronger than that. If this be not bringing the account to the fountain-head, I know not what is. St. John, the author of the fourth Gospel, was another apostle, and consequently, like all the other apostles, the regular companion of Jesus. He was likewise called before Matthew, therefore present at some things which Matthew was not. He was not only one of the disciples, but the disciple "whom Jesus loved," whom he distinguished upon two occasions by particular marks of regard; took and admitted, along with Peter and James, into the house at the raising of Jairus's daughter when no others were admitted; was present along with Christ, together with Peter and James, at the transfiguration; was found, with Peter and James, on our Lord's passion, in the garden. These circumstances we mention merely to show that he was not only a disciple, but a friend and particular favourite of his master: consequently perfectly well informed, we may be sure, of his history. He himself stood by the cross when Jesus was crucified; and when he describes that transaction, especially the piercing of his side and

the flowing out of blood and water, he adds these remarkable words: "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." Moreover he was present after Christ's resurrection, at the conversation betwixt Christ and Peter, and was himself the subject of that conversation. "This is that disciple," he adds, "which testifieth these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true."

What we know of Mark is, that he lived and had a house at Jerusalem; was acquainted with the apostles; that he was a disciple of some note and distinction, for it was to his house that Peter went when he was miraculously delivered out of prison, and where he found many gathered together and praying. Soon after this, he left Jerusalem to accompany Barnabas and Paul in their expedition to the Gentiles. After residing with them for some time, he left them and returned to Jerusalem, which return afterwards occasioned a dispute betwixt Barnabas and Paul: Barnabas being desirous to keep Mark with him, Paul, not thinking it good to take him, departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. Saint Paul, however, long after this, begged Timothy to bring Mark along with him to Rome, "For he is profitable to me for the ministry;" so that the offence, whatever it was, was made up. The account delivered down to us by many historians is, that Mark attended upon Peter, and wrote his Gospel under Peter's eye, and by his

direction. However we are the less solicitous to ascertain any thing further concerning Mark, because there is hardly any thing in his Gospel which is not contained in that by Saint Matthew. Thus much appears, that although he might not perhaps have been an eye-witness of many of the transactions he records (which, whether he was or not, cannot now be known), he was a companion of apostles, and apostolically aiding and assisting some of those in the ministry. At his house the first disciples, according to their custom, used to meet. He was probably the friend of Peter, as Peter went to his house the first place after his deliverance from prison; and what is as material as any thing, he was living at Jerusalem, the very spot where the most important part of Christ's miracles were exhibited.

Saint Luke wrote his Gospel, and the Acts of the Apostles. He was the companion and fellow-traveller of Paul, as appears both from his speaking in the first person plural in his account of Saint Paul's travels,—“*We went* ;” “it was determined that *they* should sail into Italy ;” “it came to pass when *we* were gone forth,” and other passages of the same kind, which show that the writer of the history was one of the company.

We find him also with Saint Peter at Rome, when Saint Paul wrote the first chapter of his second epistle to Timothy. The preface to Saint Luke's Gospel is exceedingly worthy of notice : “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration



of those things, which are most surely believed among us, even as *they* delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed."

Now this short preface informs us of a great deal. It informs us, first, that the great facts of the Gospel history were most surely believed amongst the Christians of those times. It informs us, secondly, upon what grounds they are believed, namely, as *they* delivered them, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses. It acknowledges, thirdly, that he himself was not an eye-witness, but that he received the account from those who were: writing as they delivered the instances. It asserts, fourthly, that Saint Luke had a perfect understanding of all things from the first, or, as it should have been rendered, he had penned and traced every account up to its source, to the fountain-head, and so as to have no doubt in his mind; for he professes, you see, to inform Theophilus of the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Luke having, as I said before, to attend and accompany Saint Paul, was eye-witness of many things which he there relates; in particular, Luke was with Paul in the ship when that extraordinary wreck happened, by which

they were thrown ashore on the island of Malta; he lodged with Paul in the same house when he miraculously healed one of the family, and many other diseased persons in the island. He must have known, therefore, with absolute certainty, the truth or falsehood of what he relates about it.

The thirteen epistles of Paul, though not properly historical, contain incidents, in connexion with the transactions of his life, of the miracles he saw or wrought, or references and allusions to those, which is the same thing; and in various places he refers to his miraculous conversion, particularly in the first chapter of Galatians, where he says he received his doctrine, "not of man, nor was he taught of men, but immediately by the revelation of Jesus Christ;" and then, by way of proof of it, reminds them of our Saviour being revealed to him at the very time he was persecuting the church of Christ. The same in the twelfth chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth); such an one caught up to the third heaven." And at the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, speaking of the different appearances of Christ after his resurrection, he adds, in reference to a vision he had of Christ at his conversion, "Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Upon other occasions, Saint Paul speaks in his epistles of the miracles him-

self had wrought. 2 Cor. xii. 13. "Truly," says he, "how the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds." To the Galatians, third chapter and fifth verse: "He therefore that ministereth to you the spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" To the Corinthians, in the first epistle, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than you all." Now here could be no mistake. Saint Paul certainly knew whether he did or did not see Christ at his conversion; whether he did or did not show signs, or wonders, or mighty deeds at Corinth; whether he did or did not work miracles in Galatia; whether he did or did not speak with tongues. I lay the greatest stress upon the evidence of Saint Paul's epistles, because the very matter and manner of composition of them carry with them the force of demonstration, that the author of them was in earnest; not to mention that his appeal to the miracles he wrought, in the texts I have quoted, was with no desire of publicity and authority, or handing down the memory of these miracles to posterity, but merely for the sake of the argument in hand. The very mention of them, one may say, was accidental: so far was he from any design to impose the narrative of false miracles upon the world.

Next to Saint Paul's the epistle of Saint Peter may be produced in testimony of this authenticity. Saint Peter, you all know, was an apostle from the

first to the last; a companion of our Saviour; admitted, together with James and John, to more privacy and intimacy with their master than the rest; and held a long and remarkable conversation with Christ after his resurrection. If any one had an opportunity of knowing the truth of the transactions of Christ's life, it was he. Besides speaking in general in his epistles of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection (of all which he must have known the truth or falsehood), he bears witness in his second epistle to one memorable circumstance in Christ's history, which he himself, he tells us, saw and heard—and this was the transfiguration of Christ, at which, you read in the Gospel, he and James and John alone were present: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty: for he received from God the Father honour and glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;' and this voice, which came from heaven, we heard when we were with him in the holy mount." No testimony can be more explicitly authenticated and better founded than this.

James and Jude were both apostles; and, by their epistles, bear testimony to the general truth of the Christian religion, and, consequently, to the certainty of the resurrection of Christ; for I suppose it will not be disputed, but that any one who believed

Christianity believed the resurrection of Christ. Of the facts of the resurrection these two, together with the other apostles, were eye-witnesses.

The miracles therefore, recorded in the New Testament, come down to us attested by Matthew and John; in the Acts of the Apostles, by Paul, Peter, James, and Jude, as eye-witnesses; by Saint Mark, to say the least of him, a companion and friend of those who had been eye-witnesses of these miracles, and being upon the spot when the greater part of them was performed; by Saint Luke in his Gospel, an attendant upon Paul, who sifted every thing to the bottom, and gave these accounts as they were delivered by those who, from the beginning, were eye-witnesses: and their being so circumstanced, there is no possibility of mistake in any, or at least in the whole. It is quite a different case from a set of rumours and reports handed from one to another, and repeated after one another, of which each reporter, if he knew from whom he had it, pretends to know nothing more. It is different from accounts published in one country of what has been done or is doing in another, where the publisher of the accounts, from the very distance at which he is situated, can know nothing for himself. It is still more different from histories of travels, which appeared many ages before the history we have, and of which the historian could know very little of what he relates, and with little more authority than ourselves. The Gospel histories are sufficiently acquainted with the truth or false-

hood of any or most of the facts they relate: if the facts be not so, it is wilful and designed deceit.

Again; and which is a second consideration. The facts themselves were of such a nature that they were capable of being known with absolute certainty—they were of such a nature as, if the accounts be allowed, were unquestionably miraculous. A diseased person, upon the application of a supposed remedy, either natural or supernatural, may recover from his disease; and it may remain in doubt how far the remedy was successful in the cure, because it cannot be known whether the disease would not have abated of itself, or whether imagination might not contribute to it; but when a man, blind or lame from his birth, is made to see and walk by a word in an instant, there is no room for any supposition of other interference. Nor was the power of working miracles confined to such cures. There are many acts wrought by miracles besides cures, as turning the water into wine, feeding the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes, blighting the fig-tree, walking on the sea, and, above all, raising the dead. Lastly, which is a very material consideration, the miracles of Christ were of a permanent kind, such as would be very capable of being examined and inquired into afterwards. It was not like a spectre, appearing and disappearing on a sudden, and where, consequently, the whole proof must rest only upon the credit of those who saw it at that moment. The thing in that case was gone and vanished, and admitted no search or investigation. When the

blind man was restored to sight, as related in the 8th chapter of John, he continued upon the spot and to enjoy the use of his sight. We hear that he was produced and examined after the miracle, as he had all along lived and was known there before it. When the lame man, at the gate of the temple, was cured by Peter and John, the cure continued: every one that pleased was at liberty to inquire into and examine it, if they disputed the reality of it. It did not depend upon what the apostles or any one said: his condition before the miracle was notorious, and he was there for them to examine as to his condition after it. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, he did not die again immediately—merely speak or move, then sink into his former state—but he lived, and ate, and conversed like other people. The Jews and all had the opportunity, and many of them, we read, did go down to Bethany to see him, sat at table with him, and at length the rulers formed a design of ruining and putting him to death for it.

Upon the whole, the facts are of such a nature, the persons who related them so prepared with knowledge and information, that I think we may rest satisfied in holding that they could not be imposed upon or deceived in what they tell us—that we have all the assurance of the truth of these reports which the number, credit, character of any witnesses or allegations can give us.

## XXXVI.

## EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART III.)

JOHN XX. 31.

*But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his name.*

THE only remaining supposition, is that the evangelists, the apostles, and many writers and preachers of the gospel, have all entered into a confederacy of imposing their story upon the world; for if the facts they relate, and their relation with respect to them, were of such a nature that they could not by any possibility be mistaken—that no enthusiasm or even madness will account for their being deceived in them—there is nothing left but either to admit these facts to be true, or to say that the disciples purposely joined and went about to cheat and deceive men. Now before we proceed any further, I would observe that this may always be said. In any cause or trial, let the fact be proved ever so clearly by witnesses ever so positive or many, or of ever so good character, it is easy to say that they have combined to im-



pose upon the court—it is easy to say so, but nobody believes it, nobody attends to it, or is affected by it. The cause is decided upon the testimony of these witnesses, and every one can rest satisfied with the decision, and can have no doubt about the matter; whereas those who were interested on the other side, when they had nothing else left to say, would have insinuated that the witnesses were all forsworn, and that it was all a story not to be believed.

But to return—let us now inquire into the probability, or even the possibility, of the supposition, that it was a conspiracy in the friends of Christianity to carry on a cheat.

Now the first impression which this supposition includes, and which alone, I conceive, would stagger the belief of any reasonable man, is that a handful of fishermen in a small town, near the lake of Galilee, should take into their heads a scheme of covertly setting up a new religion, and converting the world to it, and should leave their homes, families, and business, upon this errand, and should expect success in it by means of a tale made up of lies and forgeries. Is this creditable? Is it conceivable? Is it consistent with any principle in human nature or in the nature of things? Is there any instance of such an attempt in the history of the world? That Mahomet at the head of a victorious army should set up pretensions to a divine commission, and endeavour to establish a religion which redounded so much to the interest and glory of himself and his family, is nothing un-

natural. With these advantages Mahomet appealed, as did the apostles, to public miracles. Had the apostles been statesmen or philosophers, there would have been more likelihood of such contrivances amongst them, as such men may some of them entertain ambitious views, and from their influence and celebrity might imagine themselves qualified for such an undertaking; but that a set of low and illiterate mechanics (for from such it is allowed both by friends and enemies that christianity originated) should conceive a plan of this kind, knowing all the while the falsehood of what they were delivering, is too wild and extravagant a supposition to account for any of these stories; for, always active in finding out what may supply their wants—in carving and contriving at all times, the lower, laborious part of mankind have enough to do to support themselves and their families—their wants, their occupation, their domestic duties and affections are sufficient to engage the whole of their attention and employment. Is a scheme of setting up a religion in the world very likely to interest or engage such as these? or is it probable that such as these should plot and contrive together to do nothing less than to overturn the established religion in all countries of the world, and introduce into the place of it a fabulous tale of their own contriving? I know that we have examples of people of very low estate and little education quitting their own calling to turn preachers of religion; but that bears no resemblance to the present case, for these persons are

most, or all of them, I think, sure of what they go about: whereas the apostles, evangelists, and first founders of christianity must, according to this account, have been impostors, and have known in their own breasts that they were so. Besides, these persons are led to what they do by the example of others in superior station, and after all do not aspire at founding a new religion, but only an unusual method of explaining or propagating the old one.

But secondly, what was it that all the apostles went about to overturn—the attachment of men to virtue and holiness? It must be allowed, whether what they wrote and preached was true or false, that the behaviour and morality which they inculcated were excellent; since all acknowledged, even those who were inclined to question the religion most, that whatever they inculcated, they required. They insisted upon the most perfect purity, benevolence, justice, obedience, piety. Now, what would this accomplish? Was it from a virtuous motive that they enjoined on all their followers these virtues, as they certainly did? Such a motive excludes the supposition of imposture. In many instances the best motives may be mistaken; but it is impossible that with these motives any one could carry on a continued deliberate plan of deceiving and cheating others. Read those passages of the epistles especially, which exhort to virtue and holiness—with what a strain of lively earnestness and zeal the exhortations run! with what threats and denunciations they warn men from

vice! with what entreaties they invite them to virtue! how they over and over again declare and protest the worth of a life of virtue, that religion without such a life is nothing—that nothing else, that nothing besides holiness in heart, principle, and practice, would conduct themselves and their followers to salvation! and then reflect, how we are to believe that the authors of the Epistles were all the while themselves carrying on a cheat and an imposture, knowing in their hearts that what they were telling their followers was all falsehood and fable.

Thirdly, what had the apostles to gain by the scheme? did they distinguish themselves or their families? did any of them advance thereby their posterity to honours, and favours, and high states? was there any prospect or probability of such advancement? Here is an infallible rule, an impostor has always something to get by his imposition: he may not get it; that is another thing; he aims at some advantage to himself or friends; and thus it becomes a natural consideration and inquiry, was there any interest to bias them? Now if ever men were disinterested, the apostles were; upon all occasions they declined and reprobated the idea of taking any thing of their converts. “I have coveted,” says Saint Paul in his pathetic farewell to the church of Macedonia, “I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel; nay, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me.” When Simon Magus offered them

money for some of their supernatural powers: "Thy money," replied Peter, "perish with thee, because thou hast thought the gift of God may be purchased with money."—"Did I make a gain of you," says Saint Paul to the Corinthians, "by any of them whom I sent unto you; did Titus make a gain of you?" The apostles, it is true, had all an opportunity of making themselves masters of the fortunes of their followers; and that was when the disciples at Jerusalem, as you read in the 4th chapter of the Acts, in the height of their zeal sold their lands and houses, and brought the prices of those things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet; how did the apostles behave upon this occasion? So far from taking advantage of the unlimited confidence of their followers to their own interest and use, they embraced the first opportunity of getting rid of their charge, only receiving the contributions of the rich, and distributing them amongst the poor, and transferring it to some men appointed for that purpose, not by themselves, but by the people at large, as you find in the 6th chapter of Acts. So that there is no pretence for charging them with seeking their own profit, or following a profession which promised gain. If it be said that they might be drawn in by the expectation of honours and advancement from the Messiah himself, under the notion, which they probably in common with the other Jews entertained of the Messiah himself, I answer, they could not be so drawn in, if they knew him to be an impostor, which

they must have known, if he was one, and which is the supposition we are now arguing upon; for the question now is, what they were to gain or look for from a scheme which they knew to be founded in falsehood and deceit.

Fourthly, this is not all—the apostles and first teachers of Christianity had not only nothing to gain by the lie, supposing it to have been one, but had every thing to fear and every thing to suffer in support of it. Here indeed is the great strength and stress of the Christian evidence. It is certain that the founder of the Christian religion suffered death upon the cross for the undertaking: it seems equally certain that the apostles and first of his followers underwent all manner of persecution, and many of them martyrdom, for their opinions. This is expressly stated in Scripture. It is confirmed by corresponding accounts of heathen writers, who being enemies to Christianity, cannot be suspected of giving false testimony in its favour; and who described the first Christians as resolutely undergoing stripes, imprisonment, and death, rather than renounce or impugn the truth of their religion: and these accounts come near to the times of the apostles, if not to their times. Add to which, that the thing itself was in the highest degree probable, and, morally speaking, certain, that the setters-up and maintainers of a religion which overthrew all other religions, diverse and irreconcilable to, or, as it were, directly against, the established tenets and prejudice of both Jews and Gentiles,

should meet with opposition from the rulers and teachers of this world, who were all interested in the support of their own establishment. We know what fate and usage the first promoters of the reformation met with, and there is all likelihood that the first publishers of Christianity would share the same. "I think," says Saint Paul, "that God hath set forth us the apostles last as it were appointed unto death—for we are made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men; even in this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labour, working with our hands—being reviled, we bless—being persecuted, we suffer it—being defamed, we entreat—we are made as the filth of the world, as the offscouring of all things unto this day." Was all this, think you, from any liking for an imposture—for what they knew in their hearts to be a falsehood of their own contriving? The epistles, all of them, abound with exhortations to patience; some of these were written for no other purpose than to encourage their new converts to sustain the struggle they had together: "Call to remembrance," says the epistle to the Hebrews, "the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used; for ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye had in heaven a better

and enduring substance :” “ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us ; for I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And they not only suffered these things, but foresaw that they should suffer them. It was what might easily enough be foreseen from the nature of the undertaking they were engaged in. Besides that, they were expressly forewarned of it from the very first by their divine Master : “ And ye shall be betrayed both by parents and brethren, and kinsfolk and friends—and some of you shall they cause to be put to death—and ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.” Now if the fact be established, which appears to me unquestionable, that the first teachers of Christianity suffered great extremities, and some of them death in the cause, and for the sake of, their religion, it carries with it the strongest possible proof of the truth of that religion. One man relates a story—it appears to me so improbable in its own nature, that I could not bring myself to believe it ; five or six others join with this man in the same agreement ; this staggers, but by no means satisfies me—they protest over and over again—they declare it with every possible mark



and expression of seriousness and earnestness—this also has some weight ; but to come to the truth and certainty of the matter, I pretend that the relations of this are, and treat them all as, impostors. I threaten them with imprisonment if they do not confess the truth, and retract the story—my threats have no effect ; they answer they cannot but declare what they have seen and heard—I carry my threats into execution—confine them in prison—beat them with stripes—try what hunger, or cold, or nakedness, will do—not one of them relents—spite of all I can do, or all I threatened, they persevere in their original story: I consider that perhaps these people may be mistaken—nay, but I reflect, that is impossible ; what they relate is not opinions and notions, but matters of fact, and of such a nature that they cannot be mistaken : what they tell us they saw with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears ; they must know the truth or falsehood of what they say—either they are the most obstinate, deliberate impostors, or what they say, notwithstanding all its seeming improbabilities, must be true. I will make, however, a decisive experiment. I will make this short proposal to them ; either disown and give up your story, or prepare to suffer death—to seal your asseveration with your blood—some of them do so—what shall I now say ? I can no longer refuse conviction.

Now this description agrees in all its points with the case of Christianity. And upon this I rest—produce me an example of any one man, since the

beginning of the world, voluntarily suffering death for what he knows to be false, and I give up the cause. If no such instance was ever heard of, I cannot see upon what grounds, or in what way, we can know right from wrong; or on what pretence we can reject the evidence of the apostles, martyrs, and first preachers of Christianity.

## XXXVII.

## PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART I.)

## ROMANS X. 10.

*But I say, Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words into the ends of the world.*

THE spreading and propagation of Christianity has always been deemed a proof of its truth; because it is said that a false or fabulous religion could not, under the same circumstances, have so speedily and gained credit in the world. To do the argument justice, it will be necessary just to state the fact how Christianity did really spread and make its way, though it will be necessary to take notice of the circumstances under which Christianity was practised, whether they were such as that no imposture could have made its way under the same. When this is done, you will judge for yourselves of the degree of weight and credit which the argument deserves.

The account of the preaching and spreading of Christianity must set off from the ascension of Christ into heaven; for it was from that time that the apo-

stles were commissioned to publish and teach it to the world ; and before that time the world could not be said to know perfectly what it was.

Now a few days after Christ's ascension, we find the disciples assembled in Jerusalem to the number of 120. Acts i. 15. " And in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples ; the number of the names being about a hundred and twenty." This number will appear to you extremely small ; but I think it is not to be supposed to be the whole number of those who believed in Christ : for first, you will observe, this was only in one city, of Jerusalem. Secondly : it was the number of those who were *assembled* ; and it is not necessary to suppose, nor probable, that all should be collected upon that occasion who believed in Christ. Thirdly : these were not yet formed into any regular society, so as to be known to, or associate much with, one another. It was not yet either settled or known that the believers in Christ were to meet, or where, or when, or how. The 120, the little knot and association who had gathered themselves together, and joined themselves to the apostles, were probably not merely met together as believers in Christ, but as personally known to and connected with the apostles and one another : all the believers in Jerusalem it could not be, if it was true what Saint Paul asserts, that Christ appeared to 500 brethren at once. I can very well conceive that the death of Christ had staggered many

of his followers: not that they distrusted the reality of the miracles which they had seen or been informed of, but because they did not see what it tended to; what was to be done, or what was to be the end and event of all these extraordinary appearances. It did not as yet appear that a new religion was to be set up in the world, or how the professors of that religion were to act or to be distinguished from the rest of mankind; so that they ceased to be his disciples, because his departure out of the world left them nothing more to do, and nothing more to hope. This assembling of 120 was held a few days after his ascension; for forty days after that event was the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles, accompanied with miraculous effects; the appearance of fire resting upon them, and the speaking in the audience of the people in a variety of languages, which it was known they understood nothing of before. Upon this memorable day, three thousand were added to the church. But here, as before, I would remark, that it is not to be taken that these three thousand were converted by this single miracle, but rather that many who were before believers in Christ became now professors of Christianity; that is, when they found that a religion was to be established, a society formed and set up in the name of Christ, governed by his laws, professing belief in his name, united among themselves, and separated from the rest of the world by many visible distinctions—as baptism, the Lord's supper, and the like; when

they found such a community established there, by virtue of their former conviction of what they had seen, and heard, and known of Christ whilst on earth, they declared themselves members of it. A very little after this, we read in the fourth chapter of Acts, that the number of the men was about five thousand : so that here is an addition of two thousand in a very little time. Christianity continued to advance at Jerusalem by the same progress: for in the next chapter we read “that believers were the more added to the Lord; multitudes both of men and women.” In the 6th chapter we meet with another instance of the increase of the disciples; for we read that “the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and that a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

This I call the first period in the propagation of Christianity: it contains scarcely more than one year from the ascension of Christ; during which year the preaching of the gospel was confined, so far as we learn, to Jerusalem—and how did it prevail there? They set off with 120; in one day 3000 were added; in a short time after that they were increased to 5000; multitudes, both of men and women, continued to be added; disciples multiplied greatly, and many of the Jewish priesthood, amongst others, became obedient to the faith. This was the first year’s increase, and this was upon the spot where the things were transacted upon which the religion rests. And Christianity now began to spread. By reason of

a great persecution against the Christians of Jerusalem, they were all, except the apostles, driven from thence, and scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria; and wherever they went they carried their religion with them. "They that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word." We read that the gospel was preached with great success in Samaria; first by Philip, and then by Peter and John. Some time after this, namely three years from Christ's ascension, Paul was converted, and found many others professing Christianity at Damascus; three years after which, that is, six years after the ascension, the churches throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, were multiplied in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. This I call the second period; and contains four years, as the first did. First: during the first period, Christianity was confined to Jerusalem; in the second, we hear of it in Samaria and Damascus; and by the end of that period churches, that is assemblies and societies of Christians, were multiplied throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria. It is worth observing likewise, that there is reason to believe this is far from a full and complete account of the spreading of Christianity: for although the work from which we fetch our information be called the Acts of the Apostles, it is not, nor was intended to be, a history of all the apostles; only of a few of the most remarkable transactions of Peter, and the travels and persecutions of Paul; which after his conversion chiefly indeed sim-

ploy the history. It is not credible, nor is there the least reason to suppose, that the other apostles, of whom little or no mention is made in this history, were idle all the while, or that their labours wanted success. Hitherto the preaching of the gospel had been confined to the Jews or Jewish proselytes, and to the Samaritans: it was not known, except to the apostles, that they ought to propose it to any others, or admit any others into their religion;—that great mystery, as Saint Paul calls it, and as it then was, was imparted first to Peter, in the case of Cornelius—afterwards to Paul, upon various occasions—and by the report of the preaching to the Gentiles, and God vouchsafing to accompany the preaching by miracles, it came to be known at length to the other apostles and the whole company of disciples “that God to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life.” This being understood, and the way being thus opened, the progress of the gospel became rapid and extensive. It was about seven years after the ascension of Christ that the gospel was first preached to the Gentiles at Cæsarea. Acts x. 44. A year after this, a great multitude were converted at Antioch; as you read in the eleventh chapter: and at Herod’s death, which happened in the next year, the word of God grew and multiplied. Two years afterwards, great multitudes, both of the Jews and Gentiles, were converted at Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe; as you read in the fourteenth chapter. Three years after this—which brings us to the fourteenth after the ascension—the



apostles sent a letter from Jerusalem to the Gentile converts in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia; through which countries Paul travelled, and found the churches established in the faith, and increasing in numbers daily. Two years after, great numbers of devout Greeks were arrested at Thessalonica and Berea, and the next year at Corinth. See the eighteenth chapter of the Acts. Five years after this, and twenty-two after the ascension, we find Demetrius complaining at Ephesus, that not only there, but almost throughout Asia, Paul persuaded and turned away much people. Besides these, notice is incessantly made of converts at fifteen of the principal cities in the ancient world. This is the third period; and sets off in the seventh year after the ascension, and ends at the twenty-eighth, and includes nearly nineteen or twenty years; during which there was hardly a city or place in the most populous and flourishing part of the Roman empire which the gospel had not visited, and where it had not converted "great multitudes," a "great number," "much people:" for these are the expressions almost constantly made use of. Now lay these three periods together, and see how the matter stands. The institution which began after its Author's removal from the earth with one hundred and twenty disciples, assembled in a small room at Jerusalem, by the end of thirty years had spread itself much throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Now passing over amongst the Gentiles, and amongst them converting

numbers, and continually spreading at Iconium, Lystra, Derbe; in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia; at Thessalonica, and Berea; persuading and turning away much people from the religion of their ancestors, at Ephesus, and throughout all Asia; founding churches or regular societies of professed Christians in Alexandria, Athens, Cyprus, Cyrene, Macedonia, Philippi, Perga, Phœnice, Ptolemais, Puteoli, Rome, Lydda, Saron, Tyre; which were all considerable cities: and accounts of converts at all these occur in the Acts of the Apostles, though as observed above, this book contains little besides the history of Paul, and a small part of Peter's. Six of these societies, it may be presumed, were considerable; as Saint Paul addressed an epistle to them. Seven ancient churches are also distinguished, or accosted by name, in the book of Revelations: so that Saint Paul might truly say, as he did about this period, that the gospel had been preached to every nation under heaven—that is, throughout every part of the Roman empire—by themselves or others. First then, the Scriptures cannot well be suspected of exaggeration in these matters—for they never profess to set off, or even describe, the extent of the religion, but are led to mention these particular incidents; such as Saint Paul's coming to a place, and finding the converts ordaining elders, or comforting and establishing the churches, or on some such occasions. Besides that, it would have been a fruitless imposture to have published epistles to Christian churches which never

existed, or accounts of the establishment of Christianity in places where it had never been heard of.

The Scripture history of the propagation of Christianity is followed up, as might be expected, by corresponding accounts of succeeding writers. Clement, of Rome, having known Saint Paul, and been mentioned in Saint Paul's epistles, speaking of that apostle, says, "in the East and West he became a preacher of the word, instructing the whole world in righteousness, and penetrating to the extreme regions of the West." This author wrote about sixty years after Christ's ascension. Justin Martyr, who wrote just about one hundred years after the ascension, has these remarkable words:—"There is not a nation, either Greeks or barbarians, or of any other name, even of those who wander in tribes or live in tents, amongst whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the universe by the name of the crucified Jesus."

Tertullian, a famous writer in defence of Christianity, and who lived about 150 years from the ascension, thus appeals to the great men and governors of the Roman empire: "We were but of yesterday," says he, "and we have filled your towns and boroughs, the very camp, the senate, and the forum." He then enumerates the several countries already mentioned as believing in Christ, so far following up the scripture account. To this he adds the Moors and Gattulians of Africa, the borders of Spain, several nations of France, and parts of Great Britain inas-

cessible to the Romans, the Samatians, Dacians, Germans, and Scythians.

Origen, who wrote about 200 years after the ascension of Christ, delivers the same account: "In every part of the world," says he; "throughout all Greece; in all other nations, they are innumerable; an immense multitude, who, having left the laws of the country, and those whom they esteemed gods, have given themselves up to the law of Moses, and the religion of Christ; and this not without the bitterest resentment against them from idolaters, by whom they were frequently put to torture, and sometimes to death. And it is wonderful to observe how, in so short time, the religion has increased, amidst punishments, and death, and confiscation, and every kind of torture."

It is a satisfaction also to find that these accounts are confirmed by the testimony of Heathen writers, who either knew nothing of Christianity, or were bitter enemies to it. Four principal writers, who were contemporaries of the apostles, complain in their works of the vast increase of Judaism about their age. There is no doubt but that this was Christianity, which they naturally enough confounded with Judaism. Tacitus, who writes thirty years after the ascension, mentions "this superstition," as he calls it, being repressed for awhile by persecution; then breaking out again, not only in Judea, where it began, but in the very city of Rome itself. But the most memorable testimony to our purpose is a

letter from Pliny, the governor of Bythinia, to the Roman governor, requesting his advice how to treat this new sect. "Their number," says he, "makes it worthy of advice; for many of every age and order, and of both sexes, are accused of maintaining this religion: for the infection of it has spread, not only in cities, but in villages, and many places. The temples," says he, "of their gods have been deserted, the sacred rites intermitted, and nothing can we find to offer in sacrifice." This same governor wrote about seventy years after Christ's ascension. Upon this evidence, the fact itself of the rapid progress and propagation of Christianity may be depended upon. The circumstances under which Christianity was propagated remain yet to be considered. One reflection, however, is striking; that a handful of men, of no learning, mean in character, obscure and friendless wanderers, should prevail on such numbers to turn from a loose religion to a strict one; from vice to virtue; from indulgence to self-denial:—should persuade them to quit the religion in which they had been educated, and were at ease; to forego the enjoyment also of worldly pleasures and convenience; to give up ample fortunes, and oblige their dearest friends and relations to leave their country; to offend rulers and magistrates; to suffer all kinds of temporal evils, and in many cases even the loss of life, and this among Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, savage nations and polished people;—that they should do this

without having any proof to offer of the truth of what they taught, is altogether incredible. Human nature is undoubtedly the same in every age and in every country : to suppose therefore, that thousands, and tens of thousands, should do then, what no man in his senses would do now, is to set aside every rule of reason and probability.

## XXXVIII.

## PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART II.)

2 PETER I. 16.

*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

HAVING given some account of the first preaching and spreading of Christianity in the world, and shown from infallible testimony, that the credit it gained, and the progress it made, was rapid and extensive; we will now proceed to consider the circumstances under which the religion was propagated, with a view to prove that its success under these circumstances can fairly be attributed to nothing but its truth.

Christianity, in our way of considering it, is our history; for it would be received or rejected, according as those to whom it was proposed, thought the history of Christ's life and miracles to be true or false. It will be our business, therefore, to note the circumstances which principally distinguish true history from false, supposing the last to have obtained

some credit in the world ; and then to observe how these circumstances are applicable to the history of Christianity as contained in the gospel, and published in the very country and days of the apostles and early teachers of the religion.

Now the first important circumstance to be looked for in the history is, that the account be published at or near the time in which the thing related is said to have happened. A celebrated Roman historian, of great reputation for truth and exactness, describes in his history of Rome several prodigies and miracles which attended the first foundation and early ages of that city ; but these accounts, notwithstanding the character and abilities of the author, are universally suspected, because those prodigies confessedly happened some two, others three, and all some centuries before the writer's own time ; so that we see the writer of the history could know little or nothing more of the matter than we do. Whatever, therefore, be the integrity of the historian, a very slender deference is due to history so circumstanced ; in like manner, was an author of this time of day to publish the original history of one of our Saxon kings, few probably would pay much regard to it ; whereas, was the same man to publish a history of the last reign, every one would pay it implicit credit. Of such consequence it is, that the original account of the fact be published near the time in which it is said to happen. Now we are assured that this is the case with the history and first propagation of Christianity. There



is some difference amongst learned men in the account of the dates of the gospels and epistles; but by the best accounts, they were within thirty years after Christ's ascension: Saint Matthew's gospel probably within nine. As they were most of them written by persons who were present at the transactions they relate, their dates could not be long after; and even if some years had passed after they had happened, it was not so long after, but that many who had it in their power to detect the fraud and falsehood, if there was any, were still living.

Saint Paul, in the 15th chapter of the 1st epistle to the Corinthians, says that "Christ after his resurrection was seen of about five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some are fallen asleep." All those who did remain, remained to contradict the assertion if it was not true. I believe it will be impossible to produce so fair, so sublime an appeal to living witnesses in any thing which is not founded in truth. But to return to the authority of the New Testament, especially the epistles—suppose the religion to be already preached and known in the world; the preaching, therefore, and the publishing of Christianity, and of the facts upon which it depends, must have commenced some time before the books were written, and consequently very soon after Christ's death. We are told by Tacitus, a heathen writer of great credit, and a stranger, or rather an enemy indeed, to Christianity, that Christianity began in Judea, that it had

spread as far as Rome, that there were Christians there in great numbers. Tacitus relates this about thirty years after Christ's crucifixion; if this religion therefore could have spread so far, and converted such numbers, within thirty years after Christ's death, it must have been begun and set forward presently after his death—and this is the testimony of a heathen.

But independent of testimony, there is a circumstance in the nature of the thing, which proves that the preaching and publishing of the gospel facts must immediately have followed the facts themselves, as it is related to have done in the acts of the apostles. The preachers of Christianity, start where they would, must have set off with this story—that a person who had demonstrated his authority by miracles had left behind him certain precepts, and tenets, and instructions, and commanded his disciples to teach them to the world. Now, had they lain by forty or fifty years, and then begun to hold forth this account, every man's answer and every man's reflection would have been—if you were commanded to teach the world in this man's name, why did you not? what have you been doing all this while? this is the first time you have spoken of these matters—wherefore conceal it so long? A story, I say, thus circumstanced, and first set up at this distance of time, would have carried its own refutation upon the face of it.

A second material circumstance in the history is,

that it be published near the place which is the scene of the transactions related: and what makes that circumstance material is, that at a great distance from the place, an historian may relate what he pleases, and such relation may pass current, as those near can contradict little. We in England might be easily imposed upon by stories of pretended wonders in the South Sea, of cities swallowed up in Persia or China, of men of gigantic stature, or of particular forms of body, at either of the Capes: I say such stories may be credited and acquiesced in without any foundation, but I defy a man to pass off, for any continuance, an account of a city being swallowed up in any county in England, or of a race of giants, or preternaturally formed people in any part of these islands; such stories would hardly be seriously attempted, or if attempted, would presently be exploded.

How, therefore, is it in the result with the gospel? I desire that it may be recollected that the witnesses of Christianity did not run to a distance to put off the story. Jerusalem and Judea were the scenes of the miracles—in Jerusalem and Judea were the first Christian churches established; the church at Jerusalem was the central and mother-church of all the rest, whither the converts in all parts of the world sent their contributions, referred their doubts and difficulties, and with which they carried on a constant correspondence. We have the testimony of Tacitus, as observed before, a heathen and an enemy, that the Christian religion began to be pub-

lished in Judea. It appeared again, says he, not only throughout Judea, the origin of it, but in the city of Rome.

And Irenæus, an ancient father, who was himself a disciple of one of Saint John's disciples, and therefore not far removed from the fountain-head, tells us that the gospel of Saint Matthew was written for the Jews: and it is plain indeed, from the gospel itself, that it was so, being calculated by quoting the prophecies to convince the Jews, and taking it for granted that the reader is acquainted with the Jewish rites, customs, and ceremonies.

Saint James directs his epistle to the Jews, Saint Paul to the Hebrews, and in all the epistles argues with the Jews, and appeals to them: the churches in Palestine acknowledged and allowed all the books of the New Testament the same as other churches; therefore the proofs and writings of Christianity were set forth upon the spot where the history and miracles are related to have passed, and are addressed to the people among whom they passed.

But what comes the closest to the circumstances of time and place is some of Saint Paul's epistles—Paul writing to Corinth, a populous, learned, and flourishing city, called the light, pride, and glory of Greece, finds fault with them for the misapplication of spiritual and miraculous gifts, in one epistle; in another he tells them that the signs of apostles were wrought among them in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. Here, therefore, he publishes his epistles upon the

very spot, addressed to the very people, where and amongst whom that epistle pretends that miracles had just been wrought. Now the most enthusiastic sort would forsake their founder, if he was to write these long and grave letters, full of facts which they knew to be false, appealing to miracles amongst them, which he never wrought, and directing them to a discreet use of powers which they never had. The same thing may be said of his epistles to the Galatians, in which he appeals to their receiving of the Holy Ghost, and his own working of miracles among them.

The third great article to be looked to in the history is, whether the subject of the narrative be of importance to the persons to whom it is related. If a thing be of little or no signification whether it be true or false, if no concern to the persons that see it, there is an indolence and credulity in mankind which acquiesces in most stories upon the slenderest testimony: or, perhaps also, there is a love of the marvellous which inclines people to receive them. I assert it may be as a matter of course—it is not worth while to inquire, think, or dispute about it. But let the intelligence any how affect a man's circumstances, or prospects, or conduct, or profession, and it becomes quite a different case; you will see him bestir himself about it in good earnest, be as wary, inquisitive, and suspicious, as you please—searching into the bottom of the story, bringing things to the fountain-head, and fully satisfying himself of the grounds before he take any measure, or make up his mind

about it. Curious articles of intelligence from time to time may be given to the public, and they again may publish accounts of monstrous animals, or strange adventures; and other marvellous stories may pass current without a syllable of truth in them: they may continue uncontradicted, and being uncontradicted, will in some degree be credited: and all for this reason—that they concern nobody—no one is interested to inquire into them; but if an event be publicly asserted, which affects individuals or the public, or trade, or taxes, or occupations, or professions—as that a law has been passed, or peace concluded, a victory obtained, a defeat suffered, or war broken out betwixt neighbouring nations—or a plague or infection, distemper or epidemic, rages in countries carrying on intercourse with our own; such events, and such narratives, if they be asserted and believed for any length of time, you may be almost certain they were true: and the foundation of them certainly is, that having others concerned in the truth or falsehood of these articles, they would be investigated, and if false, detected; and also, that those who were from their interest able to inform themselves of the truth would do so before they proceeded upon them as truths; men not being accustomed to act upon slight or slender evidence, and without inquiry.

Now let us see how it stands in this respect with the gospel history. What were the miracles of Christianity? They were of infinitely more im-

portance to all to whom they were preached and related than any thing which affects a man's property and business can be; for upon these facts and accounts being true depended all their hopes of everlasting happiness.

Nor was this all—a convert to Christianity would and must reason with himself in this manner: “If these accounts be true, what then?—why, if they be true, I must give up the opinions and principles I have been born and brought up in. I must quit the religion in which my forefathers lived and died, and which I have all along believed and practised—I must take up with a new course of life, part with my old pleasures and gratifications, and begin a new set of rules and system of behaviour:” this is never easily done, and it is not conceivable that the first believers in Christianity should do it upon any idle, blind report, or frivolous story; or indeed without fully satisfying themselves of the truth and credibility of the history which was related to them, and upon the sole strength and credit of which they took the steps, and underwent the difficulties they did.

There are further considerations of a similar nature to those already proposed, together with some objections to the argument, which we must defer to another opportunity.

## XXXIX.

## PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART III.)

ACTS v. 38, 39.

*If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.*

HAVING observed three principal marks and tokens, by which a true history is known and distinguished from a false one, namely, that the history be published near the time in which the facts related are said to have happened, near the place which was the scene of the transactions, and that they be of a nature to interest and concern those to whom the history is addressed; and how or in what manner these circumstances apply to the case of the Gospel history; I now proceed to describe a fourth particular, of as much weight and moment in the scale of credibility as any of the others; and that is, whether the story coincided with the prevailing opinions and prejudices, or was supported by the authority of the time and place where it was delivered. We are all sensible that a story, which falls in with our own previous



sentiments and passions, gains an easy admission. When parties run high, on the contrary, the most incredible things told against one side will go down with the other ; rumours and reports will be received and repeated upon the slightest foundation, if they confirm the notion one party has taken up of the adversary, or serve to humour their resentment against them ; but it is not only where faction and factious passions are concerned, which confound and prevent every rule of reason and justice, but any prevailing opinion whatever will espouse and embrace accounts which support and favour it, with very little examination into the testimony, and, consequently, often with little testimony at all. It is upon this principle that the many stories, which are handed down to us from the early parts of the last century, concerning witches and apparitions, find few people to believe them at this time of day, because we know that such stories might be a mere propagation, or credited upon the slenderest evidence ; for there was no more doubt entertained at that time of the reality of witchcraft and apparitions than we have of our own ; and therefore accounts of them were received, not as we should receive them, with surprise and caution, or any curiosity to see into the bottom of them, but with open ears, with more greediness and less distrust than any common transactions or ordinary circumstances whatever. Of a like nature were the popular stories that were formerly told of Jewish barbarities to Christian infants. Such stories were put forth at a

time when the populace were beforehand enraged against that people ; and, by their falling in with the public prejudice and hatred, disposed people to believe and repeat them against all reason and probability. The same observation holds with respect to the popish miracles, which were pretended to be wrought in the dark ages of Christianity. This proved nothing but what was already allowed : they had the popular cry and persuasion on their side to set off with ; and it is remarkable that these miracles were never pretended in Protestant countries, or amongst enemies, where one would think they were not wanting ; but the case was, that such pretences would there have been investigated and examined into more than they could brook. Whilst these miracles were only produced as vouchers for tenets and principles already professed and believed, no one was interested to inquire into them, or detect the imposition, if there was any. Every one found himself disposed to credit them himself and pass them to others ; but when miracles attempt to make converts to new opinions, and are produced to overturn old and favourite opinions, they will find unbelievers enow : every man to whom they are proposed is inclined to question them ; and if they are done upon the spot, they must have the opportunity, as well as the inclination, to know the truth of the matter on one side or the other.

Public authority, also, by stifling inquiry or silencing contradiction, may frequently hold up the

reputation of a story that has little else to support it. This remark is also applicable to the popish miracles nearer these times, when it was as much as a man's life was worth to question or dispute them.

On the contrary, therefore, if a story make its way in opposition to prejudice, passion, established opinion, and public authority; if every adversary to the principle it is calculated to establish confess the truth of it, or, what is still more, be converted and drawn over, by having in their hands the means of discovering the falsehood if there be any there, then you may depend upon the truth of such a story, because nothing but the truth would force from men acknowledgement against the bent of their wills and inclinations.

Now under the inpression of these remarks, let us investigate the Scripture history of Christ. Was it backed or upheld by prejudice, by preconceived opinion, by passion, by any public authority? The very reverse of every particular was the case. The Gospel had to contend with all these. So far, in the first place, from falling in with the established prejudices and opinions concerning the Messiah, it directly contradicted the opinion that had almost universally been taken up of him—that of a temporal prince. All the false Messiahs knew the importance of complying with the prejudices, and conforming their pretensions to this opinion; and they drew followers after them for a season by virtue of it. Christ, so far from humouring their prejudices, cut off the

hopes they had for ages flattered themselves with ; he pulled down the dependence they placed, and the value they set, upon their ceremonies and traditions ; he taught that even publicans and sinners and harlots should enter the kingdom of heaven before them, with all their pretended sanctity and strictness ; he gave no encouragement to assert or claim deliverance from the Roman yoke, or to expect the independence of their nation, which was the passion of the Jews ; he took away, what the Jews could never forgive him for, the superiority they supposed they had in God's favour over the Gentiles and the Samaritans ; he called idolaters, with whom they would not so much as eat or drink, and told them that these should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whilst *they* should be cast out. Was this the way to make friends, to root and conciliate them all to his cause, amongst whom he might pass off false and uncertain stories of miracles and wonders, whilst he gained over their good-will and affection by the flattering doctrine he had held out to them ? When the Gospel came among the heathen, it was no very palatable lesson to them to be told that they must forthwith quit those lusts and pleasures to which they were universally addicted, and take up for the future with constant purity of manners—to be taught that the idols and temples, and splendid shows and daily ceremonies were folly and absurdity. Nor was this history, whether contained in books or in the preaching of

the apostles, likely to fare much better with the priests and philosophers of those times, for the plain tendency of it was to ruin one profession and discredit the other.

As to the article of authority, that was all in opposition to the new religion. Pharisee and Sadducee, lawyers and Scribes, synagogues and sanhedrims, their own kings and Roman governors, princes and priests, philosophers and populace, were in arms against it. It was full three hundred years before Christianity became the religion of the state, or at all supported by civil government ; so that there is not a colour for saying that it was a state contrivance, or a measure adopted by the rulers and great men of the world to keep the inferior part of mankind in awe. Christ never courted the favour of the rulers or powerful men of his own time and country. He dealt upon all occasions plainly and roundly with them. The event was what might be expected, that he drew down upon himself their indignation and resentment. They put him to death, persecuted his disciples, reviled, threatened, imprisoned, beat, punished, stoned ; declared all who took a part infamous and excommunicated ; yet we find the force of truth and evidence fought its way through the temper and disposition of the powers which Christ and the apostles had to contend with ; and this a temper and disposition ready to make a handle and advantage of every thing which might influence the minds of the

people against miracles which had no foundation. Was this any thing like the case of a credulous multitude, already disposed to the matter which is delivered, and prepared to carry away with them whatever any one may please to tell them in confirmation of it? Is it not more like one who lives amongst vigilant enemies, eager to spy out any infirmity, and ready to publish them, to go on in spite of ill-grounded and idle reports, believing that any evidence short of improbability would gain credit?

To sum up the argument in a few words. We desire no other credit or favour to the Gospel history than what is due to any other history under the same circumstances. If it be found in experience that various accounts of facts published close upon, or near to, the time in which the facts are alleged to have happened; at the very place and in the country where they are alleged to have happened; addressed to the people among whom they happened; facts upon which much depended, or in consequence of which much was to be done and great alterations made, and in which, consequently, those to whom they were proposed were highly interested to inquire and inform themselves; facts, also, the belief of which was recommended by no previous inclination or favourable sentiments towards them, or upheld by authority and the sanction of great men; if, I say, accounts so circumstanced have been found by experience to gain credit without foundation, there might then be no

foundation for the credit which was certainly given to the Scripture accounts. If, on the other hand, accounts or circumstances, almost unprecedented in human life, be credited for this reason, that they are found by experience not to deceive ; then with what reason can we expect any deception in the accounts of the Gospel ? Why should we withhold from it that assent which, I believe, every one of us would readily give to another history in the same circumstances of credibility ?

I will now apply myself to an objection, which many seem to think enough to balance the force of the argument which arises from the actual credit which Christianity obtained in the first ages of the propagation of it ; which objection, in two words, is this : If the miracles were really wrought as related, how is it possible that any one should resist them ? How could those, however, who saw them, withstand the evidence they afforded ? If Christ restored the blind, healed the sick, recovered the lame man who had lain for years at Jerusalem, raised Lazarus from the dead without the walls of the city ; if Peter and John restored a cripple to perfect soundness, who had long begged at the gate of the Temple, and was well known to all who resorted thither ; if the persons cured, and the circumstances of the cure, were there at hand to be examined, if they were actually examined by the Pharisees, and Priests, and rulers, as they are related to have been,—how comes it to pass

that the whole nation was not converted, that the inhabitants of Jerusalem at large did not one and all fall down and confess the hand and authority of God? The answer to the objection is this: That they did not dispute the reality of the miracles, but they did not attribute them to the finger of God, but to the agency and assistance of evil spirits. In one word, it was by Beelzebub the prince of the devils, they insinuated that he cast out devils, and performed all other miracles. We are now sensible that every such insinuation is absurd. For once admit the truth and reality of a miracle, and nobody now-a-days disputes but that it comes from God. But it was not so then: their antipathy to Christ, owing, as before stated, to his disappointing the eager expectation of being a temporal prince, destroying their favourite hopes and opinions, reproving their vices, and exposing their hypocrisy, put them upon every imaginable device to avoid the proofs of his mission; and this was the way they did avoid it; and, according to the notion which then prevailed concerning the activity and operation of evil spirits, it was likely enough to go down with many. Hence arose their perpetually calling for a sign, or, as it is sometimes expressed, a sign from heaven, that is, some display of glory and wonderful appearance in the heavens as, they thought, became the Messiah, and which they supposed was above the power of inferior spirits to produce. And the Jewish authority afterwards, down to the third century, goes



upon the same foundation, imputing Christ's miracles, which they do not deny, to magic and secret arts, which he had learned in Egypt.

The candid, the humble-minded and well-disposed were above such foolish shifts and prejudices which gave birth to them ; but these are in every age and every country a small part of the whole.

THE END.



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