

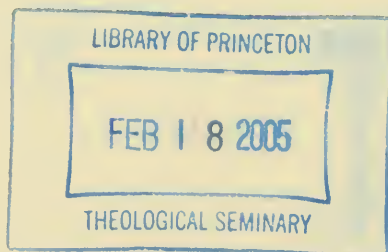
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THE
COMPLETE WORKS
OF THE
REV. ANDREW FULLER:

WITH A MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE,
BY
ANDREW GUNTON FULLER.

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BY
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EXPOSITIONS—MISCELLANEOUS.

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EXPOSITORY DISCOURSES
ON
THE BOOK OF GENESIS,
INTERSPERSED WITH
PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS.

TO THE
BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST AT KETTERING.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

It is now upwards of twenty-two years since I first took the oversight of you in the Lord. During the last fifteen years it has, as you know, been my practice to expound among you, on a Lord's day morning, some part of the Holy Scriptures, commonly a chapter. From all that I have felt in my own mind, and heard from you, I have reason to hope these exercises have not been in vain. They have enabled us to take a more connected view of the Scriptures than could be obtained merely by sermons on particular passages; and I acknowledge that, as I have proceeded, the work of exposition has become more and more interesting to my heart.

I have not been in the habit of writing dedications to what I have published, but in this instance I feel inclined to deviate from my usual practice. Considering my time of life, and the numerous avocations on my hands, I may not be able to publish any thing more of the kind; and if not, permit me to request that this family book may be preserved as a memorial of our mutual affection, and of the pleasures we have enjoyed together in exploring the treasures of the lively oracles.

You will consider these Discourses as the result of having *once* gone over that part of the Scriptures to which they relate. Were we to go over it again and again, such is the fulness of God's word, that we should still find interesting and important matter which had never occurred in reading it before; and this should encourage us not to rest in any exposition, but to be constantly perusing the Scriptures themselves, and digging at the precious ore.

As the Exposition was delivered in public worship, it was not my wish to dwell upon particular words, so much as to convey the general scope and design of the Scriptures. Whether I have in any considerable degree caught the *spirit* which runs through them is too much for me to decide; but this I can say, that such has been my aim. I know by experience that, with respect

to this, when I have been the most spiritually-minded, I have succeeded the best; and therefore conclude, that if I had lived nearer to God the work had been better executed. But, such as it is, I commend it to the blessing of God and your candid acceptance; and remain

Your affectionate Pastor,

Kettering, October 29, 1805.

THE AUTHOR.

DISCOURSE I.

THE BOOK IN GENERAL, AND THE FIRST DAY'S CREATION.

GENESIS I. 1-4.

IT is common for the writers of other histories to go back in their researches as far as possible; but Moses traces his from *the beginning*. The whole book is upon *the origin of things*, even of all things that had a beginning. The visible creation, the generations of man, moral evil among men, the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, the new world, the church in the family of Abraham, the various nations and tribes of man; every thing, in short, now going on in the world, may be traced hither as to its spring-head. Without this history the world would be in total darkness, not knowing whence it came, nor whither it goeth. In the first page of this sacred book a child may learn more in an hour than all the philosophers in the world learned without it in thousands of years.

There is a majestic sublimity in the introduction. No apology, preamble, or account of the writer: you are introduced at once into the very heart of things. No vain conjectures about what was before time, nor *why* things were done thus and thus; but simply so it was.

In this account of the creation nothing is said on the *being of God*; this great truth is taken for granted. May not this apparent omission be designed to teach us that those who deny the existence of a Deity are rather to be rebuked than reasoned with? All reasoning and instruction must proceed upon some principle or principles, and what can be more proper than this? Those writers who have gone about to prove it, have, in my opinion, done but little, if any, good; and in many instances have only set men a doubting upon a subject which is so manifest from every thing around them as to render the very heathens *without excuse*, Rom. i. 20.

The foundation of this vast fabric is laid in an adequate cause—*ELOHIM, The Almighty*. Nothing else would bear it. Man, if he attempt to find an adequate cause for what is, to the overlooking of God, shall but weary himself with very vanity.

The writer makes use of the plural term *Elohim*, which yet is joined to singular verbs. This has been generally thought to intimate the doctrine of a plurality in the unity of the Godhead. It is certain the Scriptures speak of the Son and Holy Spirit as concerned in creation, as well as the Father, John i. 1; Gen. i. 2. Nor can I, on any other supposition, affix a consistent meaning to such language as that which afterwards occurs: "Let us make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness."—"Behold, the man is become like *one of us*."

The account given by Moses relates not to the *whole creation*, but merely to what it immediately concerns us to know. God made angels; but

nothing is said of them. The moon is called one of the *greater* lights, not as to what it is in itself, but what it is *to us*. The Scriptures are written, not to gratify curiosity, but to nourish faith. They do not stop to tell you *how*, nor to answer a number of questions which might be asked; but tell you so much as is necessary, and no more.

Ver. 1, 2. The first act of creation seems to have been *general*, and the foundation of all that followed. What the *heavens* were when first produced, previously to the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, it did not greatly concern us to know, and therefore we are not told. What the *earth* was we are informed in verse 2. It was a chaos, *without form, and void*; a confused mass of earth and water, covered with darkness, and void of all those fruits which afterwards covered the face of it. As regeneration is called a *creation*, this may fitly represent the state of the soul while under the dominion of sin.—“The Spirit of God *moved* upon the face of the waters.” The word signifies as much as brooded; and so is expressive of “an active, effectual energy, agitating the vast abyss, and infusing into it a powerful vital principle.” Hence those lines of Milton:—

“And chiefly thou, O SPIRIT——
——that, with mighty wings outspread,
Dove-like, satt’st *brooding* on the vast abyss,
And mad’st it pregnant.”

Thus also God hath wrought upon the moral world, which, under sin, was without form, and void; and thus he operates upon every individual mind, causing it to bring forth fruit unto himself.

Ver. 3. From a general account of the creation, the sacred writer proceeds to particulars; and the first thing mentioned is the production of *light*. The manner in which this is related has been considered as an example of the sublime. It expresses a great event in a few simple words, and exhibits the Almighty God perfectly in character: “He speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast.” The work of the Holy Spirit upon the dark soul of man is fitly set forth in allusion to this great act of creation: “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” As soon might chaos have emerged from its native darkness as our benighted world, or benighted souls, have found the light of life of their own accord. Nor was it sufficient to have furnished us with a revelation from heaven: the same almighty power that was necessary to give material light a being in the world was necessary to give spiritual light a being in the heart.

The *light* here mentioned was not that of the sun, which was created afterwards. Hence a late infidel writer has raised an objection against the Scriptures, that they speak of *light*, and even of *night* and *day*, which are well known to arise from the situation of the earth towards the sun, before the sun was made. But he might as well have objected that they speak of the *carth* in ver. 1, 2, and yet afterwards tell us of the dry land, as separated from the waters, constituting the earth, ver. 9, 10. The truth seems to be, that what chaos was to the earth, that the light was to the sun: the former denotes the general principles of which the latter was afterwards composed. A flood of light was produced on the first day of creation, and on the fourth it was collected and formed into distinct bodies. And though these bodies, when made, were to rule day and night, yet, prior to this, day and night were ruled by the Creator’s so disposing of the light and darkness as to *divide* them, ver. 4. That which was afterwards done ordinarily by the sun was now done extraordinarily by the division of darkness and light.

Ver. 4. “God saw the light that it was good.” Light is a wonderful

creature, full of goodness to us. This is sensibly felt by those who have been deprived of it, either by the loss of sight, or by confinement in dungeons or mines. How pathetically does our blind poet lament the loss of it:—

“Seasons return; but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer’s rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine:
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me! From the cheerful ways of men
Cut off; and, for the book of knowledge fair,
Presented with a universal blank
Of nature’s works, to me expunged and rased
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out!”

If such be the value of material light, how much more of that which is mental and spiritual! and how much are we indebted to the Holy Spirit of God for inditing the Scriptures, and opening our benighted minds to understand them!

DISCOURSE II.

THE LAST FIVE DAYS’ CREATION.

Gen. i. 6–31.

VER. 6–8. We here enter upon the second day, which was employed in making a *firmament* or *expanse*. It includes the atmosphere, and all that is visible, from the position of the sun, moon, and stars, down to the surface of the globe, ver. 14, 15, 20.

The *use* of it was to “divide the waters from the waters;” that is, the waters on the earth from the waters in the clouds, which are well known to be supported by the buoyant atmosphere. The *division* here spoken of is that of *distribution*. God, having made the substance of all things, goes on to distribute them. By means of this the earth is watered by the rain of heaven, without which it would be unfruitful, and all its inhabitants perish. God makes nothing in vain. There is a grandeur in the firmament to the eye; but this is not all; usefulness is combined with beauty. Nor is it useful only with respect to animal subsistence, it is a mirror, conspicuous to all, displaying the glory of its Creator, and showing his handiworks. The clouds also, by emptying themselves upon the earth, set us an example of generosity, and reprove those who, *full* of this world’s good, yet keep it principally to themselves, Eccles. xi. 1–3.

Ver. 9–13. God having divided the heavens and the earth, he now, on the third day, proceeds to subdivide the earth, or chaos, into land and water. The globe became terraqueous; partly earth, and partly sea.

It is easy to perceive the goodness of God in this distribution. Important as earth and water both are, yet, while mixed together, they afford no abode for creatures; but, separated, each is a beautiful habitation, and each subserves the other. By means of this distribution the waters are ever in motion, which preserves them, and almost every thing else, from stagnancy and putrefaction. That which the circulation of the blood is to the animal frame, the waters are to the world: were they to stop, all would stagnate and

die, Eccles. i. 7. See how careful our heavenly Father was to build us a habitation before he gave us a being. Nor is this the only instance of the kind: our Redeemer has acted on the same principle, in going before to *prepare a place for us*.

Having fitted the earth for fruitfulness, God proceeds to clothe it with grass, and herbs, and trees of every kind. There seems to be an emphasis laid on every herb and tree *having its seed in itself*. We here see the prudent foresight, if I may so speak, of the great Creator in providing for futurity. It is a character that runs through all his works, that, having communicated the first principles of things, they should go on to multiply and increase, not independently of him, but as blessed by his conservative goodness. It is thus that true religion is begun and carried on in the mind, and in care and the world.

Ver. 14-19. After dividing this lower world, and furnishing it with the principles of vegetation, the Creator proceeded, on the fourth day, to the producing of the heavenly bodies. First they are described in general, as the lights of heaven (ver. 14, 15), and then more particularly, as the sun, moon, and stars, ver. 16-19.

The *use* of these bodies is said to be not only for dividing the day from the night, but "for signs and seasons, and days and years." They ordinarily afford *signs* of weather to the husbandman (Matt. xvi. 3); and, prior to the discovery of the use of the loadstone, were of great importance to the mariner, Acts xxvii. 20. They appear also, on some extraordinary occasions, to have been premonitory to the world. Previously to the destruction of Jerusalem, our Lord foretold that there should be great earthquakes in divers places, and famines, and pestilences, and fearful sights, and great *signs* from heaven, Luke xxi. 11. And it is said by Josephus that a comet, like a flaming sword, was seen for a long time over that devoted city, a little before its destruction by the Romans. Heathen astrologers made gods of these creatures, and filled the minds of men with chimerical fears concerning them. Against these God warns his people, saying, "Be ye not dismayed at the signs of heaven." This, however, does not prove but that he may sometimes make use of them. Modern astronomers, by accounting for various phenomena, would deny their being signs of any thing; but, to avoid the superstitious of heathenism, there is no necessity for our running into atheism.

The heavenly bodies are also said to be for *seasons*, as winter and summer, day and night. We have no other standard for the measuring of time. The great vicissitudes also which attend them are expressive of the *goodness* of God. If it were always day or night, summer or winter, our enjoyments would be unspeakably diminished. Well is it said at every pause, *And God saw that it was good!*

David improved this subject to a religious purpose: "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." Every night we retire we are reminded of death; and every morning we arise, of the resurrection. In beholding the sun also, "which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run his race," we see every day a glorious example of the steady and progressive "path of the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Ver. 20-25. We are next led to review the animal creation; a species of being less resplendent, but not less useful, than some of greater note. In one view, the smallest animal has a property belonging to it which renders it superior to the sun. It has life, and some degree of knowledge. It is worthy of notice, too, that the creation begins with things without life, and proceeds to things possessing vegetative life, then to those which have

animal life, and after that to man, who is the subject of rational life. This shows that life is of great account in the Creator's estimation, who thus causes the subject to rise upon us as we proceed.

Ver. 26-31. We are now come to the sixth and last day's work of creation, which is of greater account to us than any which have gone before, as the subject of it is *man*.—We may observe,

1. That the creation of man is introduced differently from that of all other beings. It is described as though it were the result of a special counsel, and as though there were a peculiar importance attached to it, "God said, Let us make man." Under the Great Supreme, man was to be the lord of the lower world. On him would depend its future well-being. Man was to be a distinguished link in the chain of being; uniting the animal with the spiritual world, the frailty of the dust of the ground with the breath of the Almighty; and possessing that consciousness of right and wrong which should render him a proper subject of moral government.

2. Man was honoured in being made after his Creator's *image*. This is repeated with emphasis: "God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him." The image of God is partly natural, and partly moral; and man was made after both. The former consisted in *reason*, by which he was fitted for dominion over the creatures, James iii. 7; the latter, in *righteousness and true holiness*, by which he was fitted for communion with his Creator. The figure of his body, by which he was distinguished from all other creatures, was an emblem of his mind: *God made man upright*. I remember once, on seeing certain animals which approached near to the human form, feeling a kind of jealousy (shall I call it?) for the honour of my species. What a condescension then, thought I, must it be for the eternal God to stamp *his image* upon man!

"God made man upright." He knew and loved his Creator, living in fellowship with him and the holy angels. Oh how fallen! "How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!"

DISCOURSE III.

CREATION REVIEWED.

Gen. ii.

THIS chapter contains a review of the creation, with the addition of some particulars, such as the institution of the sabbath, the place provided for man, the law given him, and the manner of the creation of woman.

Ver. 1. There is something impressive in this review: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them"—wisely, mightily, kindly, gradually, but perfectly. Man's work, especially when great, is commonly a work of ages. One lays the foundation, and another the top-stone; or, what is worse, one pulls down what another had reared; but God finishes his work. "He is a rock, and his work is perfect."

Ver. 2, 3. The conclusion of so Divine a work required to be celebrated, as well as the Creator adored, in all future ages; hence arose the institution of the sabbath. We are not to imagine that God was weary, or that he was unable to have made the whole in one day; but this was done for an example to us.

The keeping of a sabbath sacred for Divine worship has been a topic of

much dispute. Some have questioned whether it was kept by the patriarchs, or before the departure of Israel from Egypt; supposing that Moses, who wrote the Book of Genesis about that time, might be led to introduce God's resting from his works on the seventh day as a motive to enforce what was then enjoined upon them. But if there was social worship before the flood, and during the patriarchal ages, one should think there must have been a time for it. We expressly read of time being divided into *weeks* during these ages, chap. xxix. 27, 28; and as early as the flood, when Noah sent out the dove once and again from the ark, the term of "seven days" is noticed as the space between the times of sending her. Add to this, the division of time into weeks is said to have been very common in heathen nations in all ages; so that though they ceased to observe the sabbath, yet they retained what was a witness against them—the time of its celebration.

The sabbath was not only appointed for God, but to be a *day of rest for man*, particularly for the poor. It was enjoined on Israel for this reason, "That thy man-servant and thy maid-servant may rest as well as thou: and remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt." Those who would set it aside are no less the enemies of the poor than of God and religion: they consult only their worldly interest. If such sordid characters could so order it, their servants would be always in the yoke. Nor would their being so in the least tend to increase their wages: every day's work would be worth a little less than it is now, and the week's work would amount to much the same. To those who fear God it is also a rest to the *mind*; a time of refreshing after the toils of worldly labour.

The *reason* for keeping the sabbath was drawn not only from God's having rested, but from the rest which Israel felt from the yoke of Egypt, Dent. v. 14, 15. And we have since that time another reason, namely, Christ having rested from his works, as God did from his, Heb. iv. 4–10. Hence, according to the practice of the primitive Christians, the day was altered, Acts xx. 7: and by how much more interesting the work of redemption is than that of creation, by so much is this reason greater than the other.

Finally, It is a Jewish tradition, and seems to have generally prevailed, that, as there is a harmony of times in the works of God, this seventh day of rest is prefigurative of the seven thousandth year of the world being a rest to the church. We know that years were divided into sevens, and seven times sevens. Every seventh year the land was to have its sabbath, and every fiftieth year its jubilee: and thus it may be with the world. If so, we are not at a great distance from it; and this will be the period when a great number of prophecies of the universal spread of the gospel shall be fulfilled.

Ver. 4–7. After reviewing the whole in general, and noticing the day of rest, the sacred writer takes a special review of the vegetable creation, with an intent to mark the difference of its first production and ordinary propagation. Plants are now ordinarily produced by rain upon the earth and human tillage; but the first plants were made before there was any rain, or any human hand to till the ground. *After this*, a mist or vapour arose which engendered rain, and watered the earth, ver. 6. So also *after this* God formed man to till the ground, ver. 7. It is God's immediate work to communicate the first principles of things; but their growth is promoted by the instrumentality of man. And now, having made mention of man, he tells us of what he was made. His body was formed "of the dust of the ground." His soul proceeded from the inspiration of the Almighty. What a wonderful compound is man! There seems to be something in the additional phrase, "And man became a living soul." God is said to breathe the breath of life into all animals; and we sometimes read of the *soul* of every living thing: but they are never said to *be* living souls, as men are.

God hath stamped rationality and immortality upon men's souls, so as to render them capable of a separate state of being, even when their bodies are dead. Hence the soul of a beast, when it dies, is said to go downwards; the soul of man upwards, Eccles. xii. 7.

Ver. 8. Next we have an account of the *place* provided for man; not only the world at large, but a pleasant part of it. It was situated in the country of Eden, in Asia; probably among the mountains of the East. It was near the origin of several rivers, which always proceed from mountainous parts of the country. It is spoken of as rich and fruitful in a high degree, so as even to become proverbial, Gen. xiii. 10; Isa. li. 3.

Ver. 9. Things were also adapted to *accommodate* man: trees and fruits, for pleasure and use, were ready to his hand. Among the trees of Eden there were two in particular which appear to have been *symbolical*, or designed by the Creator to give instruction, in the manner which is done by our positive institutions. One was "the tree of life," to which he had free access. This was designed as a symbol to him of that life which stood connected with his obedience; and, therefore, when he sinned, he was debarred from eating it, by the flaming sword and cherubim, which turned every way to guard it. The other was "the tree of knowledge of good and evil," which was the only tree of the fruit of which he was forbidden to eat. As the name of the former of these trees is given it from the effect which should follow obedience, so that of the latter seems to have been from the effect which should follow on disobedience. Man, on the day he should eat thereof, should know good in a way of loss, and evil in a way of sufferance.

Ver. 10-14. Besides this, it was a well-watered garden. A river rose among the mountains of the country of Eden, which directed its course through it; and afterwards divided into four heads, or branches. Two of them are elsewhere mentioned in Scripture; viz. the Hiddekel, or Tigris, and the Euphrates, both rivers of Asia. With the others we are less acquainted.

Ver. 15. Among the provisions for man's happiness was *employment*. Even in innocence he was to *dress the garden and keep it*. Man was not made to be idle. All things are full of labour: it is a stupid notion that happiness consists in slothful ease, or in having nothing to do. Those who are so now, whether the very rich or the very poor, are commonly among the most worthless and miserable of mankind.

Ver. 16, 17. The trial of man, by a special prohibition, was singularly adapted to the end. To have conformed to his Creator's will, he must always have been contented with implicit obedience, or satisfied in abstaining from a thing on the mere ground of its being forbidden of God, without perceiving the *reason* of his being required to do so. In truth, it was a test of his continuing in the spirit of a little child, that should have no will of its own; and this is still the spirit of true religion. The consequences attached to a breach of this positive law teach us also not to trifle with the will of God in his ordinances, but implicitly to obey it.

More particularly, Observe, 1. The *fulness* of the grant. Here was enough for man's happiness without the forbidden fruit; and so there is now in the world, without transgressing the boundaries of Heaven. 2. The *positiveness* of the prohibition—"Thou shalt not eat of it." So long as this was kept in mind it was well; and it appears to have been deeply impressed, from the first answer of the woman to the serpent, chap. iii. 3. It was this impression which he aimed to efface by his devilish question, "Yea, hath God said it?" And when once she began to doubt of this, all was over. Let us learn to keep God's words in our minds, and hide them in our hearts,

that we may not sin against him. It was with—Thus and thus *it is written*, that our Lord repelled all his temptations. 3. The *penalty* annexed,—“Thou shalt die,” or, “Dying thou shalt die.” Some think this means corporeal death, and that only; and that if the threatening had been executed man must have been immediately struck out of existence. But the death here threatened, whatever it was, is said to have *passed upon all men*, which implies the existence of all men, and which would have been prevented if Adam had at that time been reduced to a state of non-existence. The original constitution of things provided for the existence of every individual that has since been born into the world, and that whether man should stand or fall. The death here threatened doubtless included that of the body, which God might execute at pleasure; the day he should eat he would be dead in law. But it also included the loss of the Divine favour, and an exposedness to his wrath. If it were not so, the redemption of Christ would not be properly opposed to it, which it frequently is, Rom. v. 12–21; Heb. ix. 27, 28. Nor is Adam to be considered as merely a private individual: he was the public head of all his posterity, so that his transgression involved their being transgressors from the womb, and alike exposed to death with himself. Such has been the character of all mankind; and such is the account of things given in the Scriptures. If men now find fault with this part of the Divine government, it is what they will not be able to stand to at the last day. The Judge of all the earth will, in that day, appear to have done right, whatever may be thought of him at present. 4. The *promise* of life implied by it. There is every reason to believe that if man had obeyed his Creator’s will, he would, of his own boundless goodness, have crowned him with everlasting bliss. It is his delight to impart his own infinite blessedness as the reward of righteousness; if Adam, therefore, had continued in the truth, he and all his posterity would have enjoyed what was symbolically promised him by the tree of life. Nor is there any reason to suppose but that it would have been the same *for substance* as that which believers now enjoy through a Mediator; for the Scriptures speak of that which the law could not do (in that it was weak *through the flesh*, that is, through the corruption of human nature) as being accomplished by Christ, Rom. viii. 3, 4.

Ver. 18–25. The subject closes with a more particular account of the creation of woman. We had a general one before (chap. i. 27); but now we are led to see the reasons of it. Observe, 1. It was not only for the propagation of the human race, but a most distinguished provision for human happiness. The woman was made *for the man*; not merely for the gratification of his appetites, but of his rational and social nature. It was not good that man should be alone; and therefore a helper that should be *meet*, or suitable, was given him. The place assigned to the woman in heathen and Mahomedan countries has been highly degrading; and the place assigned her by modern infidels is not much better. Christianity is the only religion that conforms to the original design, that confines a man to one wife, and that teaches him to treat her with propriety. Go among the enemies of the gospel, and you shall see the woman either reduced to abject slavery, or basely flattered for the vilest of purposes; but in Christian families you may see her treated with honour and respect; treated as a friend, as naturally an equal, a soother of man’s cares, a softener of his griefs, and a partner of his joys. 2. She was made after the other creatures were named; and, consequently, after Adam, having seen and observed all the animals, had found none of them a fit companion for himself, and thus felt the want of one. The blessings both of nature and of grace are greatly endeared to us by our being suffered to feel the want of them before we have them.

3. She was made *out of man*, which should lead men to consider their wives as a part of themselves, and to love them as their own flesh. The woman was not taken, it is true, from the head, neither was she taken from the feet; but from some where near the heart! 4. That which was now done would be a standing law of nature. Man would "leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and they twain should be one flesh." Finally, It is added, "They were both naked, and were not ashamed." There was no guilt, and therefore no shame: shame is one of the fruits of sin.

DISCOURSE IV.

THE FALL OF MAN.

Gen. iii. 1-7.

WE have hitherto seen man as God created him, upright and happy. But here we behold a sad reverse; the introduction of moral evil into our world, the source of all our misery.

There can be no doubt but that the serpent was used as an instrument of Satan, who hence is called "that old serpent, the devil." The subtlety of this creature might answer his purposes. The account of the serpent *speaking* to the woman might lead us to a number of curious questions, on which, after all, we might be unable to obtain satisfaction. Whether we are to understand this, or the temptations of our Lord in the wilderness, as spoken in an audible voice, or not, I shall not take upon me to decide. Whatever may be said of either case, it is certain, from the whole tenor of Scripture, that evil spirits have, by the Divine permission, access to human minds; not indeed so as to be able to impel us to sin without our consent; but it may be in some such manner as men influence each other's minds to evil. Such seems to be the proper idea of a tempter. We are conscious of *what we choose*; but are scarcely at all acquainted with the things that *induce* choice. We are exposed to innumerable influences; and have therefore reason to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!"

With respect to the temptation itself, it begins by calling in question the *truth* of God.—Is it true that God has prohibited any tree?—Can it be? For what was it created?—Such are the inquiries of wicked men to this day. "For what are the objects of pleasure made," say they, "but to be enjoyed? Why did God create meats and drinks, and dogs and horses? What are appetites for, but to be indulged?" We might answer, among other things, to try them who dwell on the earth.

It seems also to contain an insinuation that if man must not eat of *every tree*, he might as well eat of none. And thus discontent continues to overlook the good, and pores upon the one thing wanting. "All this availeth me nothing, so long as Mordecai is at the gate."

Ver. 2, 3. The answer of Eve seems to be very good at the outset. She very properly repels the insinuation against the goodness of God, as though, because he had withheld one tree, he had withheld, or might as well have withheld, all. "No," says he, "we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; there is only one withheld." She also, with equal propriety and decision, repelled the doubt which the tempter had raised respecting the prohibition of that one. The terms by which she expresses it show how clearly she understood the mind of God, and what an impression his com-

mand had made upon her mind: "Of the fruit of this tree, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it; neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die!" We do not read that they were forbidden to *touch* it; but she understood a prohibition of eating to contain a prohibition of *touching*. And this exposition of the woman, while upright, affords a good rule to us. If we would shun evil, we must shun the *appearance* of it, and all the avenues which lead to it. To parley with temptation is to play with fire. In all this Eve sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Ver. 4, 5. The wily serpent now proceeds to a second attack. Mark the progress of the temptation. At the outset he only suggested his doubts; but now he deals in positive assertion. In this manner the most important errors creep into the mind. He who sets off with apparently modest doubts will often be seen to end in downright infidelity.

The positivity of the tempter might be designed to oppose that of the woman. She is peremptory; he also is peremptory; opposing assertion to assertion. This artifice of Satan is often seen in his ministers. Nothing is more common than for the most false and pernicious doctrines to be advanced with a boldness that stuns the minds of the simple, and induces a doubt: "Surely I must be in the wrong, and they in the right, or they could not be so confident."

Yet the tempter, it is observable, does not positively deny that God might have *said* so and so; for this would have been calling in question the veracity of Eve, or denying what she knew to be true; which must have defeated his end. But he insinuates that, whatever God might have said, which he would not now dispute, *it would not in the end prove so*. Satan will not be so unpolite as to call in question either the honour or the understanding of Eve, but scruples not to make God a liar; yea, and has the impudence to say that *God knew* that, instead of proving an evil, it would be a benefit. Alas, how often has man been flattered by the ministers of Satan at God's expense! Surely we need not be at a loss in judging whence those doctrines proceed which invalidate the Divine threatenings, and teach sinners going on still in their trespasses, "*Ye shall not surely die*." Nor those which lead men to consider the Divine prohibitions as aimed to diminish their happiness; or, which is the same thing, to think it rigid or hard that we should be obliged to comply with them. And those doctrines which flatter our pride, or provoke a vain curiosity to pry into things unseen, proceed from the same quarter. By aspiring to be a god, man became too much like a devil; and where human reason takes upon itself to set aside revelation, the effects will continue to be much the same.

Ver. 6. This poison had effect the woman paused looked at the fruit it began to appear desirable she felt a wish to be *wise* in short, she took of the fruit and did eat! But was she not alarmed when she had eaten? It seems not; and feeling no such consequences follow as she perhaps expected, ventured even to persuade her husband to do as she had done; and with her persuasion he complied. The connexion between sin and misery is *certain*, but not always *immediate*: its immediate effects are deception and stupefaction, which commonly induce the party to draw others into the same condition.

It does not appear that Adam was deceived; but the woman only, 1 Tim. ii. 14. He seems to have sinned with his eyes open, and perhaps from love to his wife. It was the first time, but not the last, in which Satan has made use of the nearest and tenderest parts of ourselves, to draw our hearts from God. Lawful affection may become a snare. If the nearest relation or friend tempt us to depart from God, we must not hearken. When the woman had sinned against God, it was the duty of her husband to have dis-

owned her for ever, and to have left it to his Creator to provide for his social comfort; but a fond attachment to the creature overcame him. He *hearkened to her voice*, and plunged headlong into her sin.

Ver. 7. And now, having both sinned, they began to be sensible of its effects. Conscious innocence has forsaken them. Conscious guilt, remorse, and shame possess them. Their eyes are now opened indeed, as the tempter had said they would be; but it is to sights of woe. Their naked bodies, for the first time, excite shame; and are emblems of their souls; which, stripped of their original righteousness, are also stripped of their honour, security, and happiness.

To hide their outward nakedness, they betake themselves to the *leaves of the garden*. This, as a great writer observes, was “to cover, not to cure.” And to what else is all the labour of sinners directed? Is it not to *conceal* the bad, and to *appear* what they are not, that they are continually studying and contriving? And being enabled to impose upon one another, they with little difficulty impose upon themselves, “trusting in themselves that they are righteous, and despising others.” But all is mere show, and when God comes to summon them to his bar will prove of no account.

DISCOURSE V.

THE TRIAL OF THE TRANSGRESSORS.

Gen. iii. 8-14.

VER. 8. We have seen the original transgression of our first parents; and now we see them called to account and judged. The Lord God is represented as “walking in the garden in the cool of the day;” that is, in the evening. This seems to denote the ordinary and intimate communion which man enjoyed with his Maker, while he kept his first estate. We may be at a loss in forming an idea how God could *walk* in the garden, and how he *spoke*; but he was not at a loss how to hold communion with them that loved him. To accommodate it to our weak capacities, it is represented under the form of the owner of a garden taking his evening walk in it, to see, as we should say, “whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded;” to see and converse with those whom he had placed over it.

The cool of the day, which to God was the season for visiting his creatures, may, as it respects man, denote a season of *reflection*. We may sin in the daytime; but God will call us to account at night. Many a one has done that in the *heat* and bustle of the day which has afforded bitter reflection in the *cool* of the evening; and such, in many instances, has proved the evening of life.

The *voice* of God was heard, it seems, before any thing was seen: and as he appears to have acted towards man in his usual way, and as though he knew of nothing that had taken place till he had it from his own mouth, we may consider this as the voice of kindness; such, whatever it was, as Adam had used to hear beforetime, and on the first sound of which he and his companion had been used to draw near, as sheep at the voice of the shepherd, or as children to the voice of a father. The voice of one whom we love conveys life to our hearts: but, alas, it is not so now! Not only does conscious guilt make them afraid, but contrariety of heart to a holy God renders them unwilling to draw near to him. The kindest language, to one

who is become an enemy, will work in a wrong way. "Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord." Instead of coming at his call, as usual, they "hide themselves from his presence among the trees of the garden." Great is the *cowardice* which attaches to guilt. It flies from God, and from all approaches to him in prayer or praise; yea, from the very thoughts of him, and of death and judgment, when they must appear before him. But wherefore flee to the trees of the garden? Can they screen them from the eyes of Him with whom they have to do? Alas, they could not hide themselves and their nakedness from their own eyes; how then should they elude discovery before an omniscient God? But we see here to what a stupid and besotted state of mind sin had already reduced them.

Ver. 9. God's general voice of kindness receiving no answer, he is more particular; calling Adam *by name*, and inquiring, "Where art thou?" In vain does the sinner hide himself: the Almighty will find him out. If he answer not to the voice of God in his word, he shall have a special summons served upon him before long? Observe what the summons was, "Where art thou?" It seems to be the language of injured friendship. As if he should say, How is it that I do not meet thee as heretofore? What have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Have I been a barren wilderness, or a land of drought? How is it that thou hailest not my approach as on former occasions.—It was also language adapted to lead him to reflection: "Where art thou?" Ah, where indeed! God is thus interrogating sinful men. Sinner, where art thou? What is thy condition? In what way art thou walking, and whither will it lead thee?

Ver. 10. To this trying question man is compelled to answer. See with what ease God can bring the offender to his bar. He has only to speak, and it is done. "He shall call to the heavens and the earth, that he may judge his people." But what answer can be made to him? "I heard thy voice in the garden."—Did you? Then you cannot plead ignorance. No, but something worse:—"I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." Take notice, he says nothing about his *sin*, but merely speaks of its *effects*; such as fear, and conscious nakedness, or guilt. The language of a contrite spirit would have been, "I have sinned!" But this is the language of *impenitent misery*. It is of the same nature as that of Cain, "My punishment is heavier than I can bear!" This spirit is often apparent in persons under first convictions, or when brought low by adversity, or drawing near to death; all intent on bemoaning their misery, but insensible to the evil of their sin. To what a condition has sin reduced us! Stripped naked to our shame, we are afraid to meet the kindest and best of Beings! O reader! we must now be clothed with a better righteousness than our own, or how shall we stand before him?

Ver. 11. Adam began, as I have said, with the *effects* of his sin; but God directed him to the *cause* of those effects.—Naked! how came such a thought into thy mind? The nakedness of thy body, with which I created thee, was no nakedness; neither fear nor shame attached to that. What meanest thou by being naked?—Still there is no confession. The truth will not come out without a direct inquiry on the subject. Here then it follows: "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" Thus the sinner stands convicted. Now we might suppose he would have fallen at the feet of his Maker, and have pleaded guilty. But oh the hardening nature of sin!

Ver. 12. Here is, it is true, a confession of his sin. It comes out at last; "I did eat;" but with what a circuitous, extenuating preamble, a preamble

which makes bad worse. The first word is, *The woman*; aye, the woman. It was not my fault, but hers. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me."—It was not I, it was *thou thyself*! If thou hadst not given this woman to be with me, I should have continued obedient.—Nay, and as if he suspected that the Almighty did not notice his plea sufficiently, he repeats it emphatically; "*She* gave me, and I did eat!" Such a confession was infinitely worse than none. Yet such is the spirit of fallen man to this day: It was not I . . . it was my wife, or my husband, or my acquaintance, that persuaded me; or it was my situation in life, in which *thou* didst place me!—Thus "the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord."

It is worthy of notice that God makes *no answer* to these perverse excuses. They were unworthy of an answer. The Lord proceeds, like an aggrieved friend who would not multiply words:—I see how it is: stand aside!

Ver. 13. Next the woman is called, and examined: "What is this that thou hast done?" The question implies that it was no trifling thing; and the effects which have followed, and will follow, confirm it. But let us hear the woman's answer. Did she plead guilty? The circumstance of her being first in the transgression, and the tempter of her husband, one should have thought, would have shut her mouth at least; and being also of the weaker sex, it might have been expected that she would not have gone on to provoke the vengeance of her Creator. But, lo! she also shifts the blame: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."—I was deceived. I did not mean evil; but was drawn into it through the wiles of an evil being.—Such is the excuse which multitudes make to this day, when they can find no better:—The devil tempted me to it!—Still God continues his forbearance; makes no answer; but orders her, as it were, to stand aside.

Ver. 14. And now the serpent is addressed: but mark the difference. Here is no question put to him, but merely a doom pronounced. Wherefore? Because no mercy was designed to be shown him. He is treated as an avowed and sworn enemy. There was no doubt *wherefore* he had done it, and therefore no *reason* is asked of his conduct.

The workings of conviction in the minds of men are called *the strivings of the Spirit*, and afford a hope of mercy. Though they are no certain sign of grace received, (as there was nothing good at present in our first parents,) yet they are the workings of a merciful God, and prove that he has not given over the sinner to hopeless ruin. But the serpent has nothing to expect but a fearful looking for of judgment.

The form under which Satan is cursed is that of *the serpent*. To a superficial reader it might appear that the vengeance of Heaven was directed against the animal, distinguishing him from all cattle, subjecting him to a most abject life, condemning him to creep upon his belly, and of course to have his food besmeared with dust. But was God angry with the serpent? No: but as under that form Satan had tempted the woman, so that shall be the form under which he shall receive his doom. The spirit of the sentence appears to be this—Cursed art thou above all creatures, and above every thing that God hath made. Miserable shalt thou be to an endless duration!—Some have thought, and the passage gives some countenance to the idea, that the state of fallen angels was not hopeless till now. If it had, the curse could only have added a greater degree of misery.

DISCOURSE VI.

THE CURSE OF SATAN, INCLUDING A BLESSING TO MAN—EFFECTS OF THE FALL.

Gen. iii. 15-24.

VER. 15. By all that had hitherto been said and done, God appears to have concealed from man who was his tempter; and for this reason, among others, to have pronounced the doom on Satan under the form of a curse upon the serpent. By this we may learn that it is of no account, as to the criminality of sin, whence it comes, or by whom or what we are tempted to it. If we choose it, it is *ours*, and we must be accountable for it.

But mark the wisdom and goodness of God: as under the form of cursing the serpent he had pronounced a most tremendous doom on the tempter, so under the form of this doom is covertly intimated a design of mercy the most transcendent to the tempted! If man had been in a suitable state of mind, the promise might have been *direct*, and addressed to him: but he was not; for his heart, whatever it might be afterwards, was as yet hardened against God. It was fit, therefore, that whatever designs of mercy were entertained concerning him, or his posterity, they should not be given in the form of a promise to *him*, but of threatening to Satan. The situation of Adam and Eve at this time was like that of sinners under the preaching of the gospel. The intimation concerning the woman's Seed would indeed imply that she and her husband should live in the world, that she should bring forth children, and that God would carry on an opposition to the cause of evil: but it does not ascertain *their salvation*; and if there appear nothing more in their favour in the following part of the history than what has hitherto appeared, we shall have no good ground to conclude that either of them is gone to heaven. The Messiah might come as the Saviour of sinners, and might descend from them after the flesh, and yet they might have no portion in him.

But let us view this famous passage more particularly, and that in the light in which it is here represented, as a *threatening to the serpent*. This threatening does not so much respect the *person* of the grand adversary of God and man as his *cause* and *kingdom* in the world. He will be punished in his person at the time appointed; but this respects the manifestation of the Son of God to destroy his *works*. There are four things here intimated, each of which is worthy of notice. 1. The ruin of Satan's cause was to be accomplished by *one in human nature*. This must have been not a little mortifying to his pride. If he must fall, and could have had his choice as to the mode, he might rather have wished to have been crushed by the immediate hand of God; for however terrible that hand might be, it would be less humiliating than to be subdued by one of a nature inferior to his own. The human nature especially appears to have become odious in his eyes. It is possible that the rejoicings of eternal wisdom over man were known in heaven, and first excited his envy; and that his attempt to ruin the human race was an act of revenge. If so, there was a peculiar fitness that from *man* should proceed his overthrow. 2. It was to be accomplished by the Seed of the *woman*. This would be more humiliating still. Satan had made use of her to accomplish his purposes, and God would defeat his schemes through the same medium; and by how much he had despised and abused her, in making her the instrument of drawing her husband aside, by

so much would he be mortified in being overcome by one of her descendants. 3. The victory should be obtained, not only by the Messiah himself, but by all his adherents. The Seed of the woman, though it primarily referred to him, yet, being opposed to "the seed of the serpent," includes all that believe in him. And there is little or no doubt that the account in Rev. xii. 17, has allusion to this passage: "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Now if it were mortifying for Satan to be overcome by the Messiah himself, considered as the Seed of the woman, how much more when, in addition to this, every individual believer shall be made to come near, and as it were set his feet upon the neck of his enemy! Finally, Though it should be a long war, and the cause of the serpent would often be successful, yet in the end it should be utterly ruined. The *head* is the *seat of life*, which the *heel* is not: by this language, therefore, it is intimated that the life of Christ's cause should not be affected by any part of Satan's opposition; but that the life of Satan's cause should be that of Christ. For this purpose is he manifested in human nature, that he may *destroy* the works of the devil; and he will never desist till he have utterly crushed his power.

Now as the threatenings against Babylon conveyed good news to the church, so this threatening against the old serpent is full of mercy to men. But for this enmity which God would put into the woman's seed against him, he would have had every thing his own way, and every child of man would have had his portion with him and his angels.

From the whole, we see that Christ is the foundation and substance of all true religion since the fall of man, and, therefore, that the only way of salvation is by faith in him. We see also the importance of a decided attachment to him and his interest. There are two great armies in the world, Michael and his angels warring against the dragon and his angels; and, according to the side we take, such will be our end.

Ver. 16-19. The sentence of the woman, and of the man, which follows, like the rest, is under a veil. Nothing but temporal evils are mentioned; but these are not the whole. Paul teaches us that, by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to *condemnation*; and such a condemnation as stands opposed to *justification of life*, Rom. v. 18. See on chap. iv. 11, 12, p. 21. The woman's load in this life was *sorrow in bearing children*, and *subjection to her husband*. The command to be fruitful and multiply might originally, for aught I know, include some degree of pain; but now it should be "greatly multiplied;" and there was doubtless a natural subordination in innocence; but through sin woman becomes comparatively a slave. This is especially the case where sin reigns uncontrolled, as in heathen and Mahomedan countries. Christianity, however, so far as it operates, counteracts it; restoring woman to her original state, that of a friend and companion. See on chap. ii. 18-25. The sentence on *man* points out to him wherein consisted his sin; namely, in hearkening to the voice of his wife, rather than to God. What a solemn lesson does this teach us against loving the creature more than the Creator, and hearkening to any counsel to the rejection of his! And, with respect to his punishment, it is worthy of notice, that as that of Eve was common to her daughters, so that of Adam extends to the whole human race. The *ground* is cursed for his sake—cursed with barrenness. God would, as it were, take no delight in blessing it; as well he might not, for all would be perverted to and become the food of rebellion. The more he should bless the earth, the more wicked would be its inhabitants. Man also himself is doomed to wretchedness upon it; he should drag on the few years that he might live in sorrow and misery, of

which the *thorns and thistles* which it should spontaneously produce were but emblems. God had given him before to eat of *the fruit of the trees of the garden*; but now he must be expelled thence, and take his portion with the brutes, and live upon *the herb of the field*. He was allowed *bread*, but it should be by the *sweat of his face*; and this is the lot of the great body of mankind. The end of this miserable state of existence was that he should return to his native *dust*. Here the sentence leaves him. A veil is, at present, drawn over a future world; but we elsewhere learn that at what time "the flesh returns to dust, the spirit returns to God who gave it;" and that the same sentence which appointed man "once to die" added, "but after this the judgment."

It is painful to trace the different parts of this melancholy sentence, and their fulfilment in the world to this day; yet there is a bright side even to this dark cloud. Through the promised Messiah a great many things pertaining to the curse are not only counteracted, but become blessings. Under his glorious reign "the earth shall yield its increase, and God, our own God, delight in blessing us." And while its fruitfulness is withheld, this has a merciful tendency to stop the progress of sin; for if the whole earth were like the plains of Sodom in fruitfulness, which are compared to the garden of God, its inhabitants would be as Sodom and Gomorrah in wickedness. The necessity of hard labour, too, in obtaining a subsistence, which is the lot of the far greater part of mankind, tends more than a little, by separating men from each other, and depressing their spirits, to restrain them from the excesses of evil. All the afflictions of the present life contain in them a motive to look upward for a better portion; and death itself is a monitor to warn them to prepare to meet their God. These are things suited to a *sinful* world; and where they are sanctified, as they are to believers in Christ, they become real blessings. To them they are "light afflictions," and last "but for a moment;" and while they do last, "work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." To them, in short, death itself is introductory to everlasting life.

Ver. 20. Adam's wife seems hitherto to have been known only by the name of *woman*; but now he calls her *Eve*, that is, *life, living, or the mother of all living*. He might possibly have understood from the beginning that the sentence of death would not prevent the existence of the human race, or if not, what had been said of the woman's seed would at least satisfy him on the subject.

But it is generally supposed, and there seems to be ground for the supposition, that in calling his wife *life, or living*, he intended more than that she would be the mother of all mankind; that it is expressive of his faith in the promise of her victorious Seed destroying, what Satan had succeeded in introducing—*death*, and that thus she should be the means of *immortal life* to all who should live in him. If such was his meaning, we may consider this as the first evidence in favour of his being renewed in the spirit of his mind.

Ver. 21. By the coats of skins wherewith the Lord God clothed them, it seems to be implied that animals were slain, and as they were not at that time slain for food, it is highly probable they were slain for sacrifice, especially as this practice is mentioned in the life of Abel. Sacrifices therefore appear to have been ordained of God to teach man his desert, and the way in which he must be saved. It is remarkable that the clothing of Adam and Eve is ascribed to *the Lord God*, and that it appears to have succeeded the slender covering wherewith they had attempted to cover themselves. Is it not natural to conclude that God only can hide our moral nakedness, and

that the way in which he does it is by covering us with the righteousness of our atoning sacrifice?

Ver. 22. This ironical reflection is expressive of both indignation and pity.—Man is becoming wonderfully wise! Unhappy creature! He has for ever forfeited my favour, which is life, and having lost the thing signified, let him have no access to the sign. He has broken my covenant: let neither him nor his posterity henceforward expect to regain it by any obedience of theirs.*

Ver. 23, 24. God is determined that man shall not so much as dwell in the garden where the tree of life grows, but be turned out as into the wide world. He shall no longer live upon the delicious fruits of Eden, but be driven to seek his food among the beasts of the field; and, to show the impossibility of his ever regaining that life which he had lost, “cherubim and a flaming sword” are placed to guard it. Let this suffice to impress us with that important truth, “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified;” and to direct us to a tree of life which has no flaming sword to prevent our access! Yet even in this, as in other threatenings, we may perceive a mixture of mercy. Man had rendered his days *evil*, and God determines they shall be but *few*. It is well for us that a life of sin and sorrow is not immortal.

DISCOURSE VII.

THE OFFERINGS OF CAIN AND ABEL.

Gen. iv. 1-8.

HAVING seen the origin of sin in our world, we have now the origin and progress of things as they at present are among mankind, or of the world as it now is.

Ver. 1. Adam has by his wife a son, who is called Cain; viz. *a possession or acquisition*; for, said Eve, “I have gotten a man from the Lord!” Many learned men have rendered it *a man, the Lord*; and it is not very improbable that she should understand “the seed of the woman” of her immediate offspring; but if so, she was sadly mistaken! However, it expresses what we have not seen before, i. e. Eve’s *faith* in the promise. Even though she should have had no reference to the Messiah, yet it shows that she eyed God’s hand in what was given her, and viewed it as a great blessing, especially considering what a part she had acted. In this she sets an example to parents to reckon their children “a heritage from the Lord.” But she also affords an example of the uncertainty of human hopes. Cain, so far from being a comfort to his parents, proved a wicked man; yea, a pattern of wickedness; held up like Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, as a warning to others: “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother!” The joys attending the birth of a child require to be mixed with trembling; “for who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?”

Ver. 2. Eve bears Adam another son, who was called *Abel*, or *Hebel*. In these names we probably see the partiality of parents for their first-born children. Abel signifies *vanity*, or *a vanishing vapour*. Probably he was not so goodly a child in appearance as Cain, and did not seem likely to live

* See on chap. ii. 9.

long. The hearts and hopes of the parents did not seem to centre in him, but in his brother. But God seeth not as man seeth. In bestowing his blessing, he has often crossed hands, as Jacob did in blessing Ephraim and Manasseh. "He chooseth the base things of the world, that no flesh should glory in his presence." These two brothers were of different occupations; one a husbandman, and the other a shepherd; both primitive employments, and both very proper.

Ver. 3-5. In process of time the two brothers both present their offerings to God: this speaks something in favour of their parents, who had brought them up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Ainsworth renders it, "At the end of the days," and understands it of the end of the year, which was then in autumn, the time of the gathering in of the harvest and the vintage. The institution of a solemn feast among the Israelites on this occasion (Exod xxiii. 16) seems therefore to have borne a near resemblance to that which was practised from the beginning.

In the offerings of these two first-born sons of man, we see the essential difference between spiritual worship and that which is merely formal. As to the *matter* of which their offerings were composed, it may be thought there was nothing particularly defective: each brought what he had. There is indeed no mention made of Cain's being of the *best* of the kind, which is noticed of Abel's. And if he neglected this, it was a sign that his heart was not much in it. He might also, no doubt, have obtained a lamb out of his brother's flock for an expiatory sacrifice. But the chief difference is that which is noticed by the apostle: "By *faith* Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Cain's offering was just what a self-righteous heart would offer: it proceeded on the principle that there was no breach between him and his Creator, so as to require any confession of sin, or respect to an atonement. Such offerings abound among us; but they are "without faith," and therefore it is impossible they should please God. The offering of Abel I need not describe; suffice it to say, it was the reverse of that presented by Cain. It was the best of the kind, and included an expiatory sacrifice.

The result was, "the Lord had respect to Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect." The one was probably consumed by fire from heaven, the other not so. This we know was afterwards a common token of the Divine acceptance, Lev. ix. 24; Psal. xx. 3, margin. The *order* of things is worthy of notice. God first accepted Abel, and then his offering. If he had been justified on the ground of his good deeds, the order should have been reversed; but, believing in the Messiah, he was accepted for his sake; and being so, his works were well-pleasing in the sight of God. And as Abel was accepted as a believer, so Cain was rejected as an unbeliever. Being such, the Lord had no respect to him; he was under the curse, and all he did was abhorred in his eyes.

The rejection of Cain and his offering operated upon him very powerfully. If the love of God had been in him, he would have fallen before him, as Joshua and his brethren did when Israel was driven back; and have pleaded, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me?" But "he was *wroth, and his countenance fell.*" This is just what might be expected from a self-righteous, proud spirit, who thought so highly of his offering as to imagine that God must needs be pleased with it, and with him on account of it. He was *very* wroth; and that no doubt against God himself, as well as against his brother. He went in high spirits, like the Pharisee to the temple, but came away dejected and full of foul passions, of which his fallen countenance was but the index.

Ver. 6, 7. Cain having returned home, the Lord, perhaps in a dream or vision of the night, expostulated with him. "Why art thou wroth?"—What

cause is there for this enmity against thy Maker, and envy against thy brother?—Doubtless, he thought that he had a cause; but when interrogated of God he found none. “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” By *doing well* he means doing as Abel did, offering in faith, which is the only well-doing among sinful creatures. If Cain had believed in the Messiah, there was forgiveness for him, no less than for his brother; and he should also have had the excellence attached to the first-born, which he reckoned he had a right to, and the loss of which galled him. “If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door;”* unforgiven, to go down with thee to the grave, and to rise with thee, and appear against thee in judgment.

Observe how things are ordered in the dealings of God with men. Abel was not accepted of God *for* his well-doing; neither faith nor obedience was that *on account of which* he was justified, but the righteousness of him in whom he believed. Yet it was *in* well-doing that he obtained eternal life, Rom. ii. 7. Though faith was not the *cause* of the Lord’s having respect to him, nor his having offered in faith the cause of his having respect to his works; yet each was a necessary concomitant. And this, while it secures the interests of righteousness in the righteous, serves to silence the wicked, and make them feel the justice of their condemnation. Thus, at the last judgment, though every one who is saved will be saved by grace only, yet all will be judged according to their works. Things will be so ordered that the righteous will have nothing to boast of, and the wicked nothing to complain of, inasmuch as the decision in both cases will proceed according to character.

But though Cain was silenced by the Almighty, yet his malice was not subdued, but rather inflamed. If the life of God had been within his reach, he would have killed him; but this he could not do. From that time, therefore, his dark soul meditated revenge upon Abel, as being God’s favourite, his own rival, and the only object within his power. This is the first instance of the enmity of the seed of the serpent breaking out against the seed of the woman; but not the last! Observe the subtlety and treachery with which it was accomplished: “Cain talked with Abel his brother.” He talked with him, probably, in a very familiar manner, as though he had quite forgotten the affair which had lately hurt his mind; and when they were engaged in conversation, persuaded him to take a walk with him into his field; and, having got him away from the family, he murdered him! O Adam! thou didst murder an unborn world, and now thou shalt see some of the fruits of it in thine own family! Thou hast never before witnessed a human death: go, see the first victim of the king of terrors in the mangled corpse of Abel thy son!—Poor Abel! Shall we pity him? In one view we must, but in others he is an object of envy. He was the first of the noble army of martyrs, the first of human kind who entered the abodes of the blessed, and the first instance of death being subservient to Christ. When the serpent had drawn man into sin, and exposed him to its threatened penalty, he seemed to have obtained *the power of death*; and, had man been left under the ruins of the fall, he would have been continually walking through the earth, arm in arm, as it were, with the monster, the one taking the bodies and the other the souls of men. But the woman’s Seed is destined to overcome him. By death he destroyed “him who had the power of death, and delivered them who” must otherwise, “through fear of death,” have been “all their lifetime subject to bondage,” Heb. ii. 14, 15.

* This clause, which is in the middle of verse 7, I suppose should be in a parenthesis. I have therefore placed the first and last in connexion, and introduced this after them, by which the sense is clear.

DISCOURSE VIII.

CAIN'S PUNISHMENT AND POSTERITY.

Gen. iv. 9-24.

VER. 9. We have seen the tragical end of righteous Abel; but what becomes of the murderer? Probably he had hid the dead body of his brother to elude detection; but God will find him out. Jehovah said to Cain, "Where is Abel, thy brother?" What a cutting question! The words *thy brother* would remind him of the tender ties of flesh and blood which he had broken; and if he had any feeling of conscience left in him, must pierce him to the quick. But oh how black, how hardened is the state of his mind! Mark his answer. First, The falsehood of it—"I know not." We feel astonished that a man can dare to lie in the presence of his Maker; yet how many lies are uttered before him by formalists and hypocrites! Secondly, The insolence of it—"Am I my brother's keeper?" This man had no fear of God before his eyes; and where this is wanting, regard to man will be wanting also. Even natural affection will be swallowed up in selfishness. Supposing he had not known where his brother was, it did not follow that he had no interest in his preservation; but he did know, and instead of being his keeper, had been his murderer.

Ver. 10. "And he said, What hast thou done?" Ah, what indeed! This was the question put to Eve; and sooner or later it will be put to every sinner, and conscience must answer to it too! But Cain refuses to speak: be it so; there needs no confession to substantiate his guilt. His *brother's blood* had already done this! *Blood* has a voice that will speak; yea, that will "cry to Heaven from the ground" for vengeance on him who sheds it; and a *brother's* blood especially.—What a scene will open to view at the last judgment, when the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain! And if such was the cry of Abel's blood, what must have been that of the blood which was shed on Calvary? We should have thought that blood must have called for vengeance sevenfold; and in one view it did so, but in another it speaks "better things than that of Abel."

Ver. 11, 12. But let us notice the doom of Cain. He was cursed from the earth; it should in future refuse to yield him its wonted fruits, and he should be a fugitive and a vagabond in it. Three things are here observable: 1. By the sovereign will of the Lord of all, his life was spared. Afterwards a positive law was made by the same authority, that "whosoever should shed man's blood, by man should his blood be shed." But at present, for reasons of state in the breast of the King of kings, the murderer shall be reprieved. If he had died by the hand of man, it must have been either by an act of private revenge, which would have increased bloodshed; or Adam himself must have been the executioner of his son, from which trial of "quenching the coal that was left" God might graciously exempt him. 2. The curse which attached to his life, like that of our first parents, is confined to the present state. There is no reason in the world to suppose that the punishment of such a crime would actually be so, any more than others, nor others any more than this; but a future life was at this time sparingly revealed, and almost every thing concealed under the veil of temporal good and evil. 3. It contains a special addition to that which was denounced on Adam. The earth was cursed to him; but Cain was "cursed from the earth." It had

been his brother's friend, by affording a kind of sanctuary for his blood, which he had pursued; but to him it should be an enemy, not only refusing its wonted fruits, but even a place whereon to rest his foot, or in which to hide his guilty head!

Ver. 13, 14. This tremendous sentence draws forth an answer from the murderer. There is a great change since he spoke last, but not for the better. All the difference is, instead of his high tone of insolence, we perceive him sinking into the last stage of depravity, sullen desperation. Behold here a finished picture of impenitent misery! What a contrast to the fifty-first Psalm! There the evil dwelt upon and pathetically lamented is sin; but here it is only punishment. See how he expatiates upon it. . . . Driven from the face of the earth . . . deprived of God's favour and blessing, and, in a sort, of the means of hope (ver. 16) . . . a wanderer and an outcast from men . . . to all which his fears add,—Wherever I am, by night or by day, my life will be in perpetual danger!—Truly it was a terrible doom, a kind of hell upon earth. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Ver. 15. From the last part of what his fears foreboded, however, God was pleased to exempt him; yet not in mercy, but in judgment. He shall not die, but live, a monument of Divine justice. If he had died, his example might soon have been forgotten; but mankind shall see and fear. "Slay them not, lest my people forget: scatter them by thy power, and bring them down, O Lord!" God is not obliged to send a sinner to the place of the damned, in order to punish him: he can call his name Magormissabib, and render him a terror to himself and all about him, Jer. xx 3, 4. What the *mark* was which was set upon Cain we know not, nor does it behove us to inquire: whatever it was, it amounted to a safe passage through the world, so far as respected a punishment from man for his present crime.

Ver. 16. And now, having obtained a reprieve, he retires in the true spirit of a reprobate, and tries to forget his misery. It shocked him at first to be driven out from God's face, by which perhaps he meant from all connexion with the people and worship of God, from the means of grace, and so from the hope of mercy; but in a little time the sensation subsides, and he resolves to enjoy the present world as well as he can. He goes out "from the presence of the Lord," takes a final leave of God, and his worship, and his people, and cares no more about them. If this be the meaning of the words, (and I know of no other so probable,) it wears a very favourable appearance with respect to the state of things in Adam's family. It shows that the worship of God was there carried on, and that God was with them. Indeed, if it were not carried on there, it appears to have had no existence in the world, which there is no reason to believe was ever the case when once it had begun. With respect to Cain, the country whither he went is called *Nod*, or *Naid*, which signifies *a vagabond*. It was not so called before, but on his account; as who should say, *The land of the vagabond*.

Ver. 17. He was married before this, though we are not told to whom. Doubtless it was to one of Adam's daughters, mentioned in chap. v. 4, which near affinity, though since forbidden, was then absolutely necessary. Of her, in the land of the vagabond, he had a son, whom he called Enoch; not him who *walked with God*, but one of the same name. It signifies *taught* or *dedicated*: it is rather difficult to account for his calling the child by this name after what had taken place. Possibly it might be one of those effects of education which are often seen in the ungodly children of religious parents. When he himself was born, he was, as we have seen, accounted *an acquisition*, and was doubtless *dedicated*, and as he grew up *taught* by his parents. Of this it is likely he had made great account, priding himself

in it, as many graceless characters do in being the children of the righteous; and now, having a child of his own, he might wish to stamp upon him this mark of honour, though it was merely nominal. After this, Cain built, or was building, a city; a very small one no doubt, as need required. He began what his family, as they increased, perfected; and called it after the name of his son. Thus he amused himself as well as he could. The Divine forbearance probably hardened him in his security, as it commonly does the ungodly. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil."

Ver. 18-24. Next follow the generations of Cain, which present a few general observations.—1. Nothing good is said of any of them; but, heathen like, they appear to have lost all fear of God and regard to man. 2. Two or three of them become famous for arts; one was a shepherd, another a musician, and another a smith; all very well in themselves, but things in which the worst of men may excel. Some have supposed that we are indebted to revelation for all this kind of knowledge. Had it been said we are indebted to our Creator for it, it had been true; for to his instruction the discretion of the husbandman is ascribed, Isa. xxviii. 24-29. But revelation was given for greater and better objects; namely, to furnish not the man, but "the man of God." 3. One of them was infamous for his wickedness; namely, Lamech. He was the first who violated the law of marriage; a man who gave loose to his appetites, and lived a kind of lawless life. Among other evils, he followed the example of his ancestor Cain. It is not said whom he slew; but he himself says it was a *young man*. This is the first instance, but not the last, in which sensuality and murder are connected. Nor did he barely follow Cain's example; but seems to have taken encouragement from the Divine forbearance towards him, and to have presumed that God would be still more forbearing towards him. Thus one sinner takes liberty to sin from the suspension of judgment towards another.

Here ends the account of cursed Cain. We hear no more of his posterity, unless it be as tempters to "the sons of God," till they were all swept away by the deluge!

DISCOURSE IX.

THE GENERATIONS OF ADAM.

Gen. iv. 25, 26; v.

WE have of late met with little else than the operation of sin and misery; here I hope we shall find something that will afford us pleasure. Adam had lived to see grievous things in his family. At length, about a hundred and thirty years after the creation, Eve bare him another son. Him his mother called Seth; that is, set, or appointed; "for God," said she, "hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew." The manner in which the mother of mankind speaks on this occasion is much in favour of her personal religion. The language implies that though at first she had doted upon Cain, yet as they grew up, and discovered their dispositions, Abel was preferred. He was the child in whom all the hopes of the family seem to have concentrated; and, therefore, when he fell a sacrifice to his brother's cruelty, it was considered as a very heavy loss. She was not without a son before Seth was born, for Cain was yet alive: but he was considered as

none, or as worse than none; and therefore, when Seth was born, she hoped to find in him a successor to Abel: and so it proved; for this appears to have been the family in which the true religion was preserved in those times. At the birth of Enos, which was a hundred and five years after that of his father Seth, it is remarked with emphasis by the sacred historian—"Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord." This cheering information doubtless refers to the families in connexion with which it is spoken, and denotes, not that there had been no calling upon the Lord till that time, but that thence true religion assumed a more *visible* form; the seed of the woman, afterwards called "the sons of God," assembling together to worship him, while the seed of the serpent might very probably be employed in deriding them.

From the genealogy in chap. v. I shall barely offer the following remarks:

1. It is a very honourable one. Not only did patriarchs and prophets, and the church of God for many ages, descend from it, but the Son of God himself according to the flesh; and, to show the fulfilment of the promises and prophecies concerning him, is the principal reason of the genealogy having been recorded.

2. Neither Cain nor Abel has any place in it. Abel was slain before he had any children, and therefore *could not*; and Cain by his sin had covered his name with infamy, and therefore *should not*. Adam's posterity therefore, after a lapse of one hundred and thirty years, must begin anew.

3. The honour done to Seth and his posterity was of grace; for he is said to have been born *in Adam's likeness, and after his image*; a phrase which, I believe, is always used to express the qualities of the mind, rather than the shape of the body. Man was made "after the image of God;" but this being lost, they are born corrupt, the children of a corrupt father. What is true of all mankind is here noted of Seth, because he was reckoned as Adam's first-born. He therefore, like all others, was by nature a child of wrath; and what he or any of his posterity were different from this, they were by grace.

4. The extraordinary length of human life at that period was wisely ordered; not only for the peopling of the world, but for the supplying of the defect of a written revelation. From the death of Adam to the call of Abram, a period of about eleven hundred years, there were living either Enoch, Lamech, Noah, or Shem; besides other godly persons, who were their contemporaries, and who would feelingly relate to those about them the great events of the creation, the fall and recovery of man.

5. Notwithstanding the longevity of the antediluvians, it is recorded of them all, in their turn, that they *died*. Though the stroke of death was slow in its approach, yet it was sure. If man could live to a thousand years, yet he must die; and if he die in sin, he will be accursed.

6. Though many of the names in this genealogy are passed over without any thing being said of their piety, yet we are not hence to infer that they were impious. Many might be included among them who "called upon the name of the Lord," and who are denominated "the sons of God," though nothing is personally related of them.

7. Two of them are distinguished for eminent godliness; or, as it is here called, *walking with God*; namely, Enoch and Noah. Both these holy men are enrolled in the list of worthies in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Let us look a little intensely at the life of the former of these worthies, the shortest of all the lives, but surely the sweetest: "Enoch walked with God, after he begat Methuselah, three hundred years."—"He walked with God, and was not; for God took him." This is one of those brief, impres-

sive descriptions of true religion with which the Scriptures abound. Its holy and progressive nature is here most admirably marked. "Enoch walked with God." He must then have been in a state of *reconciliation* with God; for two cannot walk together except they be agreed. He was what Paul infers from another consideration, a *believer*. Where this is not the case, whatever may be his outward conduct, the sinner walks contrary to God, and God, to him. What an idea does it convey, also, of his setting God always before him, seeking to glorify him in every duty, and studying to show himself approved of him, whatever might be thought of his conduct by sinful men! Finally, What an idea does it convey of the communion which he habitually enjoyed with God! His conversation was in heaven while dwelling on the earth. God dwelt in him, and he in God!

"Enoch walked with God, after he begat Methuselah, three hundred years," and perhaps some time before that event. Religion with him, then, was not a transient feeling, but an habitual and abiding principle. In reviewing such a character, what Christian can forbear exclaiming, in the words of our Christian poet,

"Oh for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame;
A light, to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!"—COWPER.

Just so much as we have of this, so much we possess of true religion, and no more.

"Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him;" that is, as Paul explains it, "he was translated, that he should not see death." This singular favour conferred on Enoch, like the resurrection of Christ, might be designed to afford a sensible proof of a blessed immortality, which, for the want of a written revelation, might then be peculiarly necessary. He had warned the wicked of his day that "the Lord would come, with ten thousand of his holy ones, to execute judgment;" and now, however offensive his doctrine might have been to *them*, God, by exempting him from the common lot of men, will bear testimony that he hath pleased *him*, not only to the mind of Enoch, but to the world. It is possible, also, that the translation of this holy man might be conferred in order to show what would have been common to all had man persisted in his obedience—a translation from the earthly to the heavenly paradise.

With respect to Noah, we shall have an account of his righteous life in the following chapters: at present we are only told of the circumstances of his birth, ver. 28–32. His father Lamech speaks, on this occasion, like a good man and a prophet. He called his son *Noah*, which signifies *rest*; "for this same," saith he, "shall comfort us concerning our work, and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." Noah, by building the ark, saved a remnant from the flood; and, by offering an acceptable sacrifice, obtained the promise that the ground should no more be cursed for man's sake, chap. viii. 21. As Lamech could have known this only by revelation, we may infer thence the sweet rest which Divine truth affords to the believing mind from the toils and troubles of the present life; and if the birth of this child afforded comfort, in that he would save the world and remove the curse, how much more His who would be a greater Saviour, and remove a greater curse, by being *HIMSELF* an ark of salvation, and by offering "*HIMSELF* a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour!"

DISCOURSE X.

THE CAUSE OF THE DELUGE.

Gen. vi. 1-7.

VER. 1-3. When we read of men beginning to "call upon the name of the Lord," we entertained a hope of good times, and of comfort, as Lamech said, after toil and sorrow; but, alas, what a sad reverse! A general corruption overspreads the earth, and brings on a tremendous deluge, that sweeps them all, one family excepted, into oblivion.

First, We may remark the *occasion* of this general corruption, which was the increase of population. "When men began to multiply" they became more and more depraved: yet an increase of population is considered as a blessing to a country, and such it is in itself; but through man's depravity it often proves a curse. When men are collected in great numbers they whet one another to evil, which is the reason why sin commonly grows rankest in populous places. We were made to be helpers; but by sin we are become tempters of one another, drawing and being drawn into innumerable evils.

Secondly, Observe *the first step towards degeneracy*, which was *the uniting of the world and the church by mixed marriages*:—The sons of God and the daughters of men—the descendants of Seth and those of Cain—the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The great end of marriage, in a good man, should not be to gratify his fancy, nor to indulge his natural inclinations, but to obtain a helper; and the same in a woman. We need to be helped on in our way to heaven, instead of being hindered and corrupted. Hence it was that, in the law, marriages with idolaters were forbidden (Deut. vii. 3, 4); and hence Christian marriages were limited to those "in the Lord," 1 Cor. vii. 39. The examples which we have seen of the contrary have, by their effects, justified these injunctions. I would earnestly entreat serious young people, of both sexes, as they regard God's honour, their own spiritual welfare, and the welfare of the church of God, to avoid being unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

Thirdly, Observe *the great offence* that God took at this conduct, and the consequences which grew out of it: "The Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man," &c. Had the sons of God kept themselves to themselves, and preserved their purity, God would have spared the world for their sakes; but they mingled together, and became in effect one people. The old folks were in their account too bigoted, and it seemed much better for them to indulge a more liberal way of thinking and acting. But this, in the sight of God, was worse than almost any thing that had gone before it. He was more offended with the religious than with the irreligious part of them. Seeing they had become one people, he calls them all by one name, and that is *man*, without any distinction; and in giving the reason why his Spirit should not always strive with man, special reference is had to their having become degenerate—It was for that *he also, or these also, were flesh*; that is, those who had been considered as the sons of God were become corrupt. God's Holy Spirit in his prophets had long strove or contended with the world (see Neh. ix. 30; 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20); and while the sons of God made a stand against their wickedness, God was with them, and the contest was kept up: but they having, like false allies, made a kind of separate peace, or rather gone over to the enemy, God will give up the war,

let sin have a free course, and let them take the consequences! "*Bread-corn is bruised, because he will not ever be threshing it.*"

Fourthly, Observe *the long-suffering of God* amidst his displeasure: "*His days shall be a hundred and twenty years.*" This refers to the period of time which should elapse before the drowning of the world, "when," as an apostle expresses it, "the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing." All this time God *did* strive or contend with them; but it seems without effect.

Ver. 4. Among various other evils which at that time prevailed, a spirit of ambition was predominant; a thirst of conquest and dominion; and of course a flood of injuries, outrages, and oppressions. The case seems to have been this: Previously to the unhappy junction between the families of Cain and Seth, there were, among the former, *giants*, or men of great stature, who, tempted by their superior strength, set up for champions and heroes, and bore down all before them.* Nor was the mischief confined to them; for *also after that*, when the two families had become one, as the children that were born unto them grew up, they emulated, as might be expected, not the virtues of their fathers, but the vices of their mothers, and particularly those of the gigantic and fierce heroes among their relations. Hence there sprang up a number of characters famous, or rather infamous, for their plunders and depredations. Such, in after-times, was Nimrod, that "mighty hunter before the Lord."

Ver. 5. The church being thus corrupted, and in a manner lost in the world, there is nothing left to resist the torrent of depravity. *Man* appears now in his true character. The picture which is here drawn of him, though very affecting, is no more than just. If it had been drawn by the pen of a prejudiced erring mortal, it might be supposed to exceed the truth; but that which was written was taken from the perfect and impartial survey of God. Hear, ye who pretend that man is naturally virtuous! That the wickedness of man has in all ages, though at some periods more than others, been *great upon the earth*, can scarcely be called in question; but that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart should be only evil, and that continually," is more than men in general will allow. Yet such is the account here given. Mark the affecting gradation. *Evil*: evil *without mixture*; "only evil." Evil *without cessation*; "continually." Evil from the very *fountain-head of action*; "the imagination of the thoughts of the heart." Nor is it a description of certain vicious characters only, but of "man," as left to himself. And all this "God saw," who sees things as they are. This doctrine is fundamental to the gospel: the whole of redemption rests upon it; and I suspect that every false scheme of religion which has been at any time advanced in the world might be proved to have originated in the denial of it.

Ver. 6. The effect of this Divine survey is described in language taken it is true from the feelings of men, but unusually impressive. "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart!" We are not to attribute to an immutable mind the fickleness of man, nor to suppose that the omniscient Jehovah was really disappointed; but thus much we learn, that the wickedness of man is such as to mar all the works of God over which he is placed, and to render them worse than if there were none; so that if he had not counteracted it by the death of Christ, there had better have been no world. In short, that any one but himself, on seeing his work thus marred and perverted, would have really

* They are denominated נפלל and נפל *to fall*, which in this connexion has been thought to mean that they were a kind of *fellers*, causing men to fall before them like trees by the axe.

repented, and wished from his heart that he had never made them! The words express, with an energy and impressiveness which it is probable nothing purely literal could have conveyed, the exceeding sinfulness and provoking nature of sin.

Ver. 7. From this cause proceeded the Divine resolution to "destroy man from the face of the earth;" and, to show the greatness of his sin, it is represented as extinguishing the paternal kindness of God as his Creator: "The Lord said, I will destroy man, *whom I have created*, from the face of the earth."—"He that *made them* would not have mercy on them, and he that *formed them* would show them no favour!" And further, to show his displeasure against man, the creatures which were subject to him should be destroyed with him. Thus, when Achan had transgressed, to render his punishment more impressive upon Israel, "his sons, and daughters, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, and tent, and all that he had, were brought forth, and with himself stoned with stones, and burnt with fire." However light man may make of sin during the time of God's forbearance, it will prove in the end to be an evil and bitter thing.

DISCOURSE XI.

NOAH FINDS FAVOUR WITH GOD, AND IS DIRECTED TO BUILD THE ARK.

Gen. vi. 8-22.

By the foregoing account, it would seem as if the whole earth had become corrupt. In the worst of times, however, God has had a remnant that has walked with him; and over them he has in the most sore calamities directed a watchful eye. When God said, "I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth," it seemed as if he would make an end of the human race. "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Observe, 1. It is painful to find but one family, nay, it would seem but one person, out of all the professed sons of God, who stood firmly in this evil day. Some were dead, and others by mingling with the wicked had apostatized. 2. It is pleasant to find one upright man in a generation of the ungodly; a lily among thorns, whose lovely conduct would shine the brighter when contrasted with that of the world about him. It is a great matter to be faithful among the faithless. With all our helps from the society of good men, we find it difficult enough to keep on our way; but for an individual to set his face against the whole current of public opinion and custom requires and implies great grace. Yet that is the only true religion which walks as in the sight of God, irrespective of what is thought or done by others. Such was the resolution of Joshua, when the whole nation seemed to be turning aside from God: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." 3. It is encouraging to find that one upright man was singled out from the rest when the world was to be destroyed. If he had been destroyed with the world, God could have taken him to himself, and all would have been well with him; but then there had been no public expression of what he loved, as well as of what he hated.

Ver. 9. As Noah was to be the father of the new world, we have here a particular account of him. His "generations" mean an account of him and his family; of what he was, and of the things which befell him.—See chap. xxxvii. 2. The first thing said of him, as being the greatest, is, "He was a

just, or righteous, man, and perfect in his generations, walking with God." Character is of greater importance than pedigree. But notice particularly,

1. He was *just*. He was the first man who was so called, though not the first who was so. In a legal sense, a just man is one that doeth good, and sinneth not; but since the fall, no such man has existed upon earth, save the man Christ Jesus. If any of us be denominated just, it must be in some other sense; and what this is, the Scriptures inform us when they represent *the just as living by faith*. Such was the life of Noah, and therefore he is reckoned among the believing worthies, Heb. xi. 7. And the faith by which he is justified before God operated in a way of righteousness, which rendered him just before men. He is called "a preacher of righteousness," and he lived according to his doctrine, 2 Pet. ii. 5.

2. He was *perfect* in his generations. The term in this connexion is not to be taken absolutely, but as expressive, not only of sincerity of heart, but of a *decidedness* for God, like that of Caleb, who followed the Lord *fully*. It does not merely distinguish good men from bad men, but good men from one another. It is said of Solomon, that his "heart was not *perfect* with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father." Alas, how much of this half-hearted religion there is among us! Instead of serving the Lord with a perfect heart and a willing mind, we halt as it were between two, the love of God and the love of the world.

3. He *walked* with God. This is the same as was said of Enoch. It not only implies his being reconciled to God, and denotes his acknowledging him in all his ways, and enjoying communion with him in the discharge of duties, but is also expressive of the *continuity* and *progressive tendency* of true religion. Whatever he did, or wherever he went, God was before his eyes; nor did he ever think of leaving off till he should have finished his course.

Ver. 10. From Noah's character the sacred writer proceeds to his descendants. He had three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth. These afterwards became the patriarchs of the world, between whose posterity the three great divisions of Asia, Africa, and Europe have been principally divided. Thus much at present for the favoured family.

Ver. 11. Here we have the charge against the old world repeated as the ground of what should follow. If succeeding generations inquire, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto the work of his hands? What meaneth the heat of this great anger? Be it known that it was not for a small matter: "The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." Here are two words used to express the wickedness of the world, *corruption* and *violence*, both of which are repeated and dwelt upon in verses 12, 13. The *former* refers, I conceive, to their having debased and depraved the true religion. This was the natural consequence of the junction between the sons of God and the daughters of men. Whenever the church is become one with the world, the corruption of true religion has invariably followed; for if wicked men have a religion, it must needs be such as to accord with their inclinations. Hence arose all the heresies of the early ages of Christianity; hence the grand Romish apostacy; and in short every corruption of the true religion, in past or present times. The *latter* of these terms is expressive of their conduct towards one another. The fear of God and the regard of man are closely connected; and where the one is given up, the other will soon follow. Indeed, it appears to be the decree of the eternal God, that when men have cast off his fear, they shall not continue long in amity with one another. And he has only to let the laws of nature take their course in order to effect it; for when men depart from God, the principle of union is lost, and self-love governs every thing; and being "*lovers*

of their own selves," they will be "covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." Such a flood of wickedness is at any time sufficient to deluge a world with misery. If these things did not then break forth in national wars as they do with us, it was merely because the world was not as yet divided into nations: the springs of domestic and social life were poisoned, the tender ties of blood and affinity violated, and quarrels, intrigues, oppression, robberies, and murders pervaded the abodes of man.

From the influence of corruption in producing violence, and bringing on the deluge, we may see the importance of pure religion, and those who adhere to it, to the well-being of society. They are the preserving principle, the salt of the earth; and when they are banished, or in any way become extinct, the consequences will be soon felt. While the sons of God were kept together and continued faithful, for their sakes God would not destroy the world; but when reduced to a single family, he would, as in the case of Lot, take that away and destroy the rest. The late convulsions in a neighbouring nation may, I apprehend, be easily traced to this cause: all their violence originated in the corruption of the true religion. About a hundred and thirty years ago, the law which protected the Reformation in that country was repealed, and almost all the religious people were either murdered or banished. The consequence was, as might have been expected, the great body of the nation, princes, priests, and people, sunk into infidelity. The protestant religion, while it continued, was the salt of the state; but when banished, and superstition had nothing left to counteract it, things soon hastened to their crisis. Popery, aided by a despotic civil government, brought forth infidelity; and the child as soon as it grew up to maturity murdered its parents. If the principal part of religious people, in this or any other country, were driven away, the rest would soon become infidels and practical atheists; and what every order and degree of men would have to expect from the prevalence of these principles there is no want of examples to inform them.

Ver. 12, 13. The corruption and violence which overspread the earth attracted the notice of Heaven. God knows at all times what is doing in our world; but his *looking* upon the earth denotes a special observance of it, as though he had instituted an inquiry into its affairs. Thus he is represented as "going down to Sodom, to see whether they had done altogether according to the cry of it, which was come up unto him." Such seasons of inquiry are the days of "inquisition for blood," and are so many days of judgment in miniature.

The inquiry being instituted, sentence is passed, and Noah is informed of it. "God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me behold, I will destroy them with the earth." In cases where individuals only, or even a majority, are wicked, and there is yet a great number of righteous characters, God often inflicts only a partial punishment; but where a whole people are become corrupt, he has more than once made a full end of them. Witness the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the seven nations of Canaan; and thus it will be with the world when the righteous shall be gathered out of it.

Ver. 14-16. As it was the design of God to make an exception in favour of his faithful servant Noah, he is directed to the use of an extraordinary means, namely, the building of the ark; a kind of ship which, though not in the shape of ours, as not being intended for a voyage, should float on the surface of the waters, and preserve him and his family alive in the midst

of death. It is possible that this was the first floating fabric that was ever built. Its dimensions were amazing. Reckoning the cubit at only a foot and a half, which is supposed to be somewhat less than the truth, it was a hundred and fifty yards long, twenty-five yards wide, and fifteen yards deep; containing three stories, or, as we should call them, decks, each five yards in depth. It had a window also, it should seem, from end to end, a foot and a half deep, for light, and perhaps for air.*

Ver. 17. When Joseph was called to interpret the dream of Pharaoh, he observed concerning its being *doubled* that it was "because the thing was established by God, and God would shortly bring it to pass;" and thus we may consider the repetition which is here given of the sentence: "Behold I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh wherein is the breath of life from under heaven."

Ver. 18-22. But though it was the purpose of God to make an end of the world that then was, yet he did not mean that the generations of men should here be terminated. A new world shall succeed, of which his servant Noah should be the father. Thus when Israel had offended at Horeb, the Lord said unto Moses, "Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and I will make of thee a great nation." Hence pairs of every living creature were to go with Noah into the ark, to provide for futurity.

The terms in which this gracious design is intimated are worthy of special notice: "With thee will I establish my covenant." Observe three things in particular. 1. The leading ideas suggested by a covenant are those of *peace* and *good-will* between the parties, and if differences have subsisted, forgiveness of the past, and security for the future. Such were the friendly alliances between Abram and Abimelech, Isaac and another Abimelech, and between Jacob and Laban. God was highly displeased with the world, and would therefore destroy that generation by a flood; but when he should have done this, he would return in loving-kindness and tender mercies, and would look upon the earth with a propitious eye. Nor should they be kept in fearful expectation of being so destroyed again; for he would pledge his word no more to be wroth with them in such a way, nor to rebuke them for ever. 2. In covenants wherein one or both of the parties had been offended it was usual to *offer sacrifices*, in which a kind of atonement was made for past offences, and a perfect reconciliation followed. Such were the covenants before referred to; and such, as we shall see at the close of the eighth chapter, was the covenant in question. "Noah offered sacrifices, and the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and promised to curse the ground no more for man's sake." 3. In covenants which include a blessing on *MANY*, and them *unworthy*, it is God's ordinary method to bestow it *in reward*, or *for the sake*, of one who was dear to him. God loves men, but he also loves righteousness; hence he delights to bestow his blessings in such a way as manifests his true character. If there had been any dependence on Noah's posterity, that they would all have walked in his steps, the covenant might have been established *with them*, as well as with him; but they would soon degenerate into idolatry and all manner of wickedness. If therefore he will bestow favour on them in such a way as to express his love of righteousness, it must be for their father Noah's sake, and in reward of his righteousness. To say, "With *thee* will I establish my covenant," was saying, in effect, I will not treat with thine ungodly posterity; whatever favour I show them, it shall be for thy sake.

* Noah's ark is said to have been equal to forty of our largest men of war.†

† This note is singularly incorrect. Dr. Hales has calculated, apparently on correct data, that the ark would be of about 42,413 tons burthen; a first rate man of war is about 2,300 tons; so that the ark would hold about as much as eighteen of the largest men of war.—B

It was on this principle that God made a covenant with Abram, in which he promised great blessings to his posterity. "As for me," saith he, "behold, my covenant is with *thee*, and thou shalt be a father of many nations." Hence, in a great number of instances wherein mercy was shown to the rebellious Israelites, they were reminded that it was not for *their* sakes, but on account of *the covenant made with their father Abraham, and renewed with Isaac and Jacob*. It was upon this principle also that God made a covenant with David, promising that his seed should sit upon his throne for ever. And this is expressed in much the same language as that of Noah and Abraham: "My covenant shall stand fast with him."—"Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before him." Solomon pleaded this at the dedication of the temple. Hezekiah also derived advantage from it; and when the seed of David corrupted their way, the Lord reminded them that the favours which they enjoined were not for their own sakes, but for his name's sake, and for the covenant which he had made with David his servant.

After these remarks, I scarcely need say that, by these proceedings, God, even at this early period, was preparing the way for the redemption of his Son, by rendering the great principle on which it should proceed familiar to mankind. A very small acquaintance with the Scriptures will enable us to perceive the charming analogy between the language used in the covenants with Noah, Abram, David, &c., and that which respects the Messiah, "I will give *thee* for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages."—"It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth."—"Ask of me, and I will give *thee* the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." "*He* shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." In these, as in the former instances, God's covenant stands fast with one, and many are blessed for his sake; their salvation is his reward.

DISCOURSE XII.

THE FLOOD.

Gen. vii.

WE have seen the preparation of the ark, the warnings of God by it, and his long-suffering for a hundred and twenty years. Now we see it finished; now the end of all flesh is come before him.

Ver. 1. Observe, 1. God gave special notice to Noah, saying, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous." He who in well-doing commits himself into the hands of a faithful Creator, needs not fear being overtaken by surprise. What have we to fear when he whom we serve hath the keys of hell and of death? This is not the only instance in which, when impending ills have been ready to burst upon the world, God has, in effect, said to his servants, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were

for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." 2. God gave him all his household with him. We are not informed whether any of Noah's family at present followed his example; it is certain that all did not; yet all entered with him into the ark for his sake. This indeed was but a specimen of the mercy which was to be exercised towards his distant posterity on behalf of him, as we have seen in the former chapter. But it is of importance to observe, that though temporal blessings may be given to the ungodly children of a godly parent, yet without walking in his steps they will not be partakers with him in those which are spiritual and eternal. 3. It is an affecting thought that there should be *no more* than Noah and his family to enter into the ark. Peter speaks of them as *few*; and few they were, considering the vast numbers that were left behind. Noah had long been a preacher of righteousness; and what! is there not one sinner brought to repentance by his preaching? It should seem not one; or, if there were any, they were taken away from the evil to come. Not one that we know of was found at the time who had received his warnings, and was desirous of casting in his lot with him. We are ready to think our ministry has but little success; but his, so far as appears, was without any; yet, like Enoch, he pleased God. 4. The righteousness of Noah is reported as the reason of the difference put between him and the world. This does not imply that the favour shown to him is to be ascribed to his own merit; for whatever he was, he was by grace; and all his righteousness was rewardable only out of respect to Him in whom he believed; but being accepted for his sake, his works also were accepted and honoured. And while the *mercy* of God was manifested towards him, the distinction between him and the world being made according to character, would render his *justice* apparent. Thus at the last day, though the righteous will have nothing to boast of, yet, every man being judged according to his works, the world will be constrained to acknowledge the equity of the Divine proceedings.

Ver. 2, 3. Of the animals which were to enter into the ark with Noah, those that were clean, that is, those which were fit for human food and for sacrifice to God, were to go in by sevens, and those which were unclean, only by two of a kind. It would seem as if this direction differed from that in chap. vi. 19, 20, which mentions only two of every sort; but the meaning there may be, that whatever number entered in they should be in *pairs*, that is, male and female, to preserve them alive; whereas here the direction is more particular, appointing the number of pairs that should be admitted, according as they were clean or unclean. This order is expressive of the goodness of God in providing food for man, and of his regard for his own worship.

Ver. 4-9. Just one week was allowed for Noah to embark. What a week was this! What feelings must it excite! His neighbours had seen him busily employed for the last hundred and twenty years in rearing the massy fabric; and doubtless had had many a laugh at the old man's folly and credulity; and now, behold, he is going to remove all his family into it, with birds, and beasts, and creeping things, and provisions for their accommodation! "Well, let him go! a week longer, and we shall see what will become of his dreams!" Meanwhile they eat and drink, and buy and sell, and marry and are given in marriage. As for Noah, he must have felt much in contemplating the destruction of the whole of his species, to whom he had preached righteousness in vain. But it is not for him to linger; but to "do according to all that the Lord commanded him." He had borne his testimony; he could do no more. He, his sons, his wife, and his son's wives, therefore, with all the inferior creatures, which probably were caused to assemble before him by the same power which brought them to Adam to be

named, enter into the ark. The same thing which is said of him in ver. 7 is repeated in ver. 13. He doubtless would have to enter and re-enter many times in the course of the week; but the last describes his final entrance, when he should return no more.

Ver. 10-16. From the account taken together, it appears that though God suffered long with the world during the ministry of Noah, yet the flood came upon them at last very suddenly. The words, *after seven days*, in ver. 10, seem to mean *on the seventh day*;* for that was the day when Noah made his final entrance into the ark; namely, the seventeenth day of the second month, answering to our October or November, in the six hundredth year of his life; and "on that same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven opened." What a scene of consternation and dismay must that day have exhibited, on the part of those who were left behind! The manner in which the rains set in would leave little or no hope of their being soon over. It was not a common rain: it came in torrents, or, as we should say, in a manner as though heaven and earth were come together. The waters of the subterraneous cavities from beneath, and of the clouds from above, all met together at God's command, to execute his wrath on guilty men.† There is one sentence concerning Noah which is worthy of special notice: when he and all pertaining to him had entered into the ark, it is said, "And the Lord shut him in." The door of such a stupendous building may be supposed to have been too large for human hands to fasten, especially so few as they were, and all withinside it. It is possible, too, there might be, by this time, numbers crowding round it for admittance; for those who trifle with death at a distance are often the most terrified when it approaches. But lo, all is over! That act which shut Noah and his family in shut them for ever out! And let it be considered that something very nearly resembling this will ere long be acted over again. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be at the coming of the Son of man." Not only shall the world, as then, be full of dissipation, but the concluding scene is described in nearly the same words—"And they that were ready went in, and the door was shut!"

Ver. 17-24. We hear no more of the inhabitants of the world, except that "all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, *and every man*: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died." We are informed, however, of the progress of the flood. For six weeks, within two days, it continued to rain incessantly; during which period it was of sufficient depth to bear up the ark from the earth, which after this floated upon the surface of the waters, like a ship on the sea. For some time, however, there were mountains and high hills which were out of water. Hither therefore, we may naturally suppose, the inhabitants of the earth would repair, as to their last refuge: but, by the end of the forty days, these also were covered; the waters rising above seven yards higher than the highest of them. Thus every creature was swept away and buried in one watery grave, Noah and his family only excepted.

* Such a mode of speaking is usual in the Scriptures. Compare ver. 6 with ver. 11, and chap. xl. 18, 20.

† The *great deep* seems to mean that vast confluence of waters said to have been gathered together on the third day of the creation into one place, and called seas, chap. i. 9, 10. These waters not only extend over a great part of the surface of the earth, but probably flow, as through a number of arteries and veins, to its most interior recesses, and occupy its centre. This body of waters, which was ordained, as I may say, unto life, was turned, in just displeasure against man's sin, into an engine of destruction. Bursting forth in tremendous floods, multitudes were hereby swept away; while, from above, the clouds poured forth their torrents, as though heaven itself were a reservoir of waters, and God had opened its windows.

The waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days (that is, about five months) before they began to abate. This might seem to us unnecessary, seeing every living creature would be drowned within the first six weeks; but it would serve to exercise the faith and patience of Noah, and to impress his posterity with the greatness of the Divine displeasure against man's sin. As the land of Israel should have its sabbaths during the captivity, so the whole earth, for a time, shall be relieved from its load, and fully purified, as it were, from its uncleanness.

DISCOURSE XIII.

THE FLOOD (CONTINUED).

Gen. viii.

THE close of the last chapter brought us to the crisis of the flood, or to the period in which it had arrived at its greatest height: hence it began to abate. Observe the form in which it is expressed: "God remembered Noah, and those that were with him in the ark." A common historian would only have narrated the event; but the sacred writers ascribe every thing to God, sometimes to the omission of second causes. The term is figurative; for, strictly speaking, God never forgot them: but it is one of those modes of speaking which convey a great fulness of meaning. It is expressive of tender mercy, of covenant mercy, and of mercy after a strong expression of displeasure. These are things which frequently occur in the Divine proceedings. Hence a wind passes over the earth, and the waters begin to assuage.

Ver. 2-4. The causes of the deluge being removed, the effects gradually subside; and the waters, having performed their work, return into their wonted channels. The ark, which had hitherto floated on the waters, now finds land, and rests upon the top of one of the Armenian mountains; and this just five months after the entrance into it. For a ship in the sea to have struck upon a rock or land would have been extremely dangerous; but at this stage of the flood we may suppose the heavens were clear and calm, and the waters still. Noah did not steer the ark; it was therefore God's doing, and was in mercy to him and his companions. Their voyage was now at an end. They put in as at the first possible port. The rest which they enjoy is a prelude to a more perfect one approaching. Thus God places believers upon high ground, on which they are already safe, and may anticipate a better country, even a heavenly one.

Ver. 5-13. The first objects that greet them, after having been nearly eight months aboard, are the tops of the mountains. They had felt one of them before; but now the waters are sufficiently abated to see several of them. If we had been on a long and dangerous voyage at sea, we should be better able to conceive of the joy which this sight must have occasioned than we possibly can be without it. Often has a ship's company been called on deck to see a distant object which promised to be land. Often too have Christians in their voyage been cheered by the signs of approaching blessedness, and the happy foretastes bestowed upon them. After the lapse of forty days more, the window of the ark was opened, and a raven sent forth for the purpose of experiment, that they might see whether it could subsist of itself or not; and the event proved that it could subsist, for it returned no more

This was encouraging. Seven days after this, Noah tries a more delicate bird, the dove, which could not live unless the ground was at least in some places dry; but she from necessity returned. A proof this that the waters as yet were on the face of the whole earth. Tarrying yet other seven days, Noah sends out a second time his faithful messenger, the dove, which again returned to him in the evening; but lo, a sign is in her mouth which gladdens all their hearts! It is "an olive leaf plucked off!" An olive leaf might have floated upon the surface of the waters; but it was observable of this that the dove had plucked it off the tree; a proof that the tops of the trees, in some places, were out of water. Perhaps it is from this event that the olive branch has ever since been considered as the emblem of peace. After seven days more, Noah sends forth the dove again; which returning no more, he knew the earth must in some places be dry. The repeated mention of *seven days* seems to imply that from the beginning time had been divided into weeks; which can no otherwise be accounted for, that I know of, than by admitting that, from the beginning, those who feared God remembered the sabbath day to keep it holy. About a month after this the waters are dried up from off the earth, and the covering of the ark is removed. Now they have the pleasure to look around them, and to see the dry land in every direction; but still it is not habitable. And as Noah came into the ark by God's command, so he must wait his time ere he attempts to go out, which will be nearly two months longer.

Ver. 14-19. At length the set time to favour this little company is come. On the 27th day of the second month, that is, just a year and ten days after their entrance into the ark, they are commanded to go forth of it, with all that pertained to them, and to begin, not the world, as we should say, again, but a new world. Obedient to the heavenly vision, they take leave of the friendly vessel which through many a storm had preserved them, and landed them in safety.

Ver. 20-22. The first object of attention with a worldly man might have been a day of rejoicing, or the beginning to build a house; but Noah begins by building *an altar to Jehovah*, on which he offered "burnt-offerings of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl." I think this is the first time we read of a *burnt-offering*. It was so called, as Moses says, "because of the burning upon the altar all night unto the morning." It was a substitutional sacrifice, for the purpose of atonement. The process is described in Lev. i. 2-9. The sinner confessed his sin upon its head; the animal was killed, or treated as if it were the transgressor, and as if the sin had been actually transferred to it; the blood of the creature being shed, was sprinkled round about upon the altar; and to show the Divine acceptance of it on behalf of the offerer to make atonement for him, it was consumed by fire, either descending immediately from heaven, as was the case on some occasions, or kindled by the priest from the sacred fire kept for the purpose (Lev. ix. 24; Psal. xx. 3, mar.); finally, the sacrifice being sprinkled with salt, and perhaps with odours, ascended up in a sweet savour, and God was propitious to the offerer.

The burnt-offerings of Noah, according to this, must have been designed for an atonement in behalf of the remnant that was left; and, as Hezekiah said after the carrying away of the ten tribes, "for the making of a covenant with the Lord." This his offering was graciously accepted: "The Lord smelled a sweet savour," and bestowed upon him, and those who were with him, a covenant promise, not to curse the ground any more for man's sake. The reason given for this is singular: "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." If God had dealt with man according to law and justice, this should have been a reason for destroying rather than sparing

him; and was the reason why the flood was brought upon the earth. But here he is represented as dealing with him through a substitute (for the promise follows the acceptance of the burnt-offering); and in this view the wickedness of man, however offensive, should not determine his conduct. He would, as it were, look off from him, and rest his future conduct towards him on another ground. He would, in short, knowing what he was, deal with him on a footing of mercy and forbearance.

Surely I need not say that this sacrifice of Noah was one of those which bore a peculiar aspect to the offering of the body of Jesus once for all. It is not improbable that the apostle has a direct allusion to it when he says, "Christ hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."

In reviewing the destruction of the world by a flood, and the preservation of Noah and his family, we are furnished with three important reflections:—

1. It is a solid proof of the truth of Divine revelation. "We are acquainted," says a late perspicuous and forcible writer, "with no ancient people who were without traditions of this great event. From Josephus we learn that Berosus, a Chaldean historian whose works are now lost, related the same things as Moses of the deluge, and the preservation of Noah in an ark. Eusebius informs us that the history of the flood was contained in the works of Abydenus, and Assyrian writer. Lucian, the Greek writer, says that the present is not the original race of men; but is descended from Deucalion, who was preserved in an ark from the universal deluge which destroyed men for their wickedness. Varro, the Roman writer, divided time into three periods, the first from the origin of men to the deluge. The Hindoo puranas contain the history of the deluge, and of Noah under the name of Satyavrata. They relate that Satyavrata was miraculously preserved in an ark from a deluge which destroyed all mankind."* The same writer adds, "That the whole of our globe has been submerged by the ocean is proved, not by tradition only, but by its mineralogical and fossil history. On the summits of high mountains, and in the centres of continents, vast beds of shells and other marine productions are to be found. Petrified fishes and sea weed exist in the heart of quarries. The vegetable and animal productions of the torrid zone have been dug up in the coldest regions, as Siberia; and, *vice versa*, the productions of the polar regions have been found in warm climates. These facts are unanswerable proofs of a deluge."

2. It is intimated by the apostle Peter that the salvation of Noah and his family in the ark was a figure of our salvation by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was for a time buried, as it were, in the floods of Divine wrath from above and beneath. It rose however, and weathered the storm, safely landing those on dry ground who had been committed to its care. I need not make the application. A "like figure" of the same thing is Christian baptism, in which believers are said to be baptized into the death of Christ: "Buried with him into death, that like as he was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, so they also should walk in newness of life."

3. We are directed to consider the destruction of the world by water as a presage and premonition of its being destroyed in the end by fire. "The heavens and the earth, which now are, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men."

* Letters on the Evidences of the Christian Religion, by an Inquirer. First printed in the Oriental Star, at Calcutta; reprinted at Serampore in 1802; and since reprinted in England, with additions and corrections by the author.

DISCOURSE XIV.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH.

Gen. ix.

VER. 1, 2. We have now the beginning of a new world, and various directions given to those who are to people it. In several respects it resembles its first beginning; particularly in the command to be fruitful and multiply, and in the subjection of the creatures to man. But there is one great difference: all must now rest upon a *gracious covenant*. Man by sin had forfeited, not his existence indeed, (for that was given him to hold on no conditional tenure,) but the blessing of God, and his dominion over his creatures. Nevertheless, he shall be reinstated in it. God will, as it were, make a covenant for him with the beasts of the field, and they shall be at peace with him, or at least shall be awed by his authority. All this is out of respect to the mediation of Christ, and for the accomplishing of the designs of mercy through him.

Ver. 3, 4. Here is also a special grant, which does not appear to have been given before: not only the herbs of the field, but the animals, are given to man for food. It is however accompanied with a special exception with regard to *blood*, which is the life. This, being forbidden to Noah, appears also to have been forbidden to all mankind; nor ought this prohibition to be treated as belonging to the ceremonies of the Jewish dispensation. It was not only enjoined before that dispensation existed, but was enforced upon the Gentile Christians by the decrees of the apostles, Acts xv. 20. To allege, as some do, our Lord's words, "not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man," would equally justify the practice of cannibals in eating human flesh. The *reason* of this prohibition might be in part the prevention of *cruelty*; for the eating of blood implies and cherishes a ferocious disposition. None but the most ferocious of animals will eat it in one another; and one would think none but the most ferocious of mankind could endure it. But there may be a higher reason. Blood is *the life*, and God seems to claim it as sacred to himself. Hence, in all the sacrifices, the blood was poured out before the Lord; and, in the sacrifice of Christ, he shed his blood, or poured out his soul unto death.

Ver. 5, 6. As God was tender of animal blood, in not suffering man to eat it, so, on the other hand, he would be especially tender of human blood. If any animal slew a man, let him be slain on that account; or if any man slew himself, God would require it; or if any man slew another man, he should be put to death by man. This also appears to be a new law, as we read of no executions for murder among the antediluvians. The reason for this law is not taken from the well-being of man, but man's being made in the *image* of God. The image of God is of two kinds, natural and moral. The latter was lost by sin; but the former continues with man in every state, and renders it peculiarly criminal to abuse him. To deface the king's image is a sort of treason among men, implying a hatred against him, and that if he himself were within reach, he would be served in the same manner; how much more treasonable must it be to destroy, curse, oppress, or in any way abuse the image of the King of kings!—James iii. 9.*

* In defending the principles of civil and religious liberty against persecution for conscience' sake, it has often been alleged that civil government has no right to restrain or

Ver. 7. The command to multiply is repeated, and contains permission, not of promiscuous intercourse, like the brutes, but of honourable marriage. The same law which forbade the eating of blood, under the gospel, forbade *fornication*, which was common among the heathen; and, alas, too common among those who call themselves Christians!

Ver. 8-17. Having given the foregoing precepts, God graciously proceeds to enter into a solemn *covenant* with Noah and his posterity, and every living creature that was with them, no more to destroy them by water, of which "the bow in the cloud" was to be the token. This covenant is an amplification of what was said at the altar, where the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and indeed the first seventeen verses of this chapter are a continuation of that subject.

We see here, 1. The mercy and goodness of God in proceeding with us in a way of covenant. He might have exempted the world from this calamity, and yet not have told them he would do so. The remembrance of the flood might have been a sword hanging over their heads *in terrorcm*. But he will set their minds at rest on this score, and therefore promises, and that with an oath, that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, Isa. liv. 9. Thus also he deals with us in his Son. Being willing that the heirs of promise should have strong consolation, he confirms his word by an oath, Heb. vi. 17, 18. 2. The importance of living under the light of revelation. Noah's posterity by degrees sunk into idolatry, and became "strangers to the covenants of promise." Such were our fathers for many ages, and such are great numbers to this day. So far as respects them, God might as well have made no promise; to them all is lost. 3. The importance of being believers. Without this it will be worse for us than if we had never been favoured with a revelation. Finally, We see here the kind of life which it was God's design to encourage—a *life of faith*. "The just shall live by faith." If he had made no revelation of himself, no covenants, and no promises, there would be no ground for faith; and we must have gone through life feeling after him, without being able to find him; but having made known his mind, there is light in all our dwellings, and a sure ground for believing, not only in our exemption from another flood, but in things of far greater importance.

With respect to the sign, or token, of this covenant, *the bow in the cloud*, as it seems to be the effect of causes which existed from the beginning, it is probable that that also existed; but it was not till now a *token* of God's covenant with the world. Such a token was extremely suitable, on account of its conspicuousness, and its appearance *in the cloud*, or at a time when the fears of man would be apt to rise, lest they should be overwhelmed with another flood. This being a sign of peace, the King of Zion is described as having "a rainbow about his throne."

Ver. 18, 19. God having thus saved, counselled, and covenanted with this little company, Moses proceeds to narrate their history. In general, we are informed that the fathers of the new world were Noah's three sons, Shem,

punish men, but on account of their injuring their fellow men. That whatever is punishable by man is injurious to man is true, because all sin in some way or other is so; but to make this *the sole ground, or reason*, of punishment, is selfish and atheistical. It is making ourselves the chief end; whereas this is what God claims to himself at the hand of every man and body of men. The cognizance of the civil magistrate ought indeed to be confined to what is civil and moral; but, in punishing men for immorality, he ought not merely to regard his own safety, nor even that of the community, but the honour of God; and if he be a good man, he will do so. If he regard merely his own safety, punishing crimes only in so far as they endanger it, the people will soon perceive that he is a selfish tyrant, and cares not for the general good; and if he regard only the public safety, punishing crimes merely on account of their being injurious to men, it is still a spirit of selfishness, only a little more extended; and God will disapprove of this, as the people do of the other.

and Ham, and Japheth; from whom the earth was peopled. And having mentioned Ham, he says, "He was the father of Canaan." This remark of Moses was doubtless made with a special design; for living, as he did, when the Israelites, who descended from Shem, were about to take possession of the land of Canaan, it was of peculiar importance that they should be informed that the people whose country the Lord their God had given them to possess were under a curse from the days of their first father. The particulars of this affair will appear in the sequel.

Ver. 20-23. Noah, as soon as he could get settled, betook himself to the employment of husbandry; and the first thing he did in this way was to plant a vineyard. So far all was right; man, as we have seen, was formed originally for an active, and not an idle life. Adam was ordered to keep the garden, and to dress it; and, when fallen, to till the ground whence he was taken, which now required much labour. Perhaps there is no employment more free from snares. But in the most lawful occupations and enjoyments we must not reckon ourselves out of danger. It was very lawful for Noah to partake of the fruits of his labour; but Noah sinned in drinking to excess. He might not be aware of the strength of the wine, or his age might render him sooner influenced by it: at any rate we have reason to conclude, from his general character, that it was a fault in which he was "overtaken." But let us not think lightly of the sin of drunkenness. "Who hath woe? who hath redness of eyes? They that *tarry long* at the wine." Times of festivity require a double guard. Neither age nor character is any security in the hour of temptation. Who would have thought that a man who had walked with God perhaps more than five hundred years, and who had withstood the temptations of a world, should fall alone? This was like a ship which had gone round the world being overset in sailing into port. What need for watchfulness and prayer! One heedless hour may stain the fairest life, and undo much of the good which we have been doing for a course of years! Drunkenness is a sin which involves in it the breach of the whole law, which requires love to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. The first as abusing his mercies; the second as depriving those who are in want of them of necessary support, as well as setting an ill example; and the last as depriving ourselves of reason, self-government, and common decency. It also commonly leads on to other evils. It has been said, and justly, that the name of this sin is "*Gad—a troop cometh!*"

But sinful as it was for Noah thus to expose himself, it was still more so for *Ham*, on perceiving his situation, to go out and report it with malignant pleasure to his brethren. None but a fool will make a mock at sin in any one; but for children to expose and sneer at the sin of their parents is wickedness of the most aggravated kind. It indicates a heart thoroughly depraved. The conduct of Shem and Japheth on this unhappy occasion was as commendable as the other was censurable, and as worthy of our imitation as that is of our abhorrence.

Ver. 24. When Noah came to himself, he knew what had been done by his younger son. Nothing is said of his grief for his own sin. I hope his anger did not turn merely against that of his son. Nor are we to consider what follows as an ebullition of personal resentment, but as a prophecy, which was meant to apply, and has been ever since applying, to his posterity, and that which it was not possible for human resentment to dictate. But as this prophecy is very comprehensive, and will lead us to take notice of some of the great principles of revelation, I shall reserve it for a future discourse.

DISCOURSE XV.

NOAH'S PROPHECY.

Gen. ix. 25-27.

IT was common among the patriarchs, when about to die, to pronounce a prophetic sentence on their children, which frequently bore a relation to what had been their conduct, and extended to their remote posterity. This prophecy, however, though not immediately after the flood, was probably many years before the death of Noah. I shall first attempt to ascertain its meaning, and its agreement with the great outlines of historic fact; and then endeavour to justify the ways of Providence in such dispensations.

The prophecy is introduced with a curse upon the posterity of one of Noah's sons, and concludes with a blessing upon the other two; each corresponding with his conduct on the late unhappy occasion.

"Cursed be Canaan: a servant of servants" (that is, the meanest of servants) "shall he be unto his brethren." But why is the name of Ham omitted, and the curse confined to his son Canaan? Some suppose that Canaan must have been in some way partaker in the crime; but this is uncertain. It is thought by several able critics that instead of Canaan we should read, as it is in ver. 22, "Ham the father of Canaan";* and this seems very plausible, as otherwise there is nothing said of Ham, except in the person of his son; and, what is still more, the curse of servitude actually came, though at a remote period, upon other branches of the posterity of Ham as well as Canaan. It is manifest, however, that it was directed against him *principally* in the line of Canaan; and that it was related by Moses for the encouragement of Israel in going up against his descendants, the Canaanites. Canaan is under a curse of servitude to both Shem and Japheth: the former was fulfilled in the conquest of the seven nations by Israel, and the latter in the subjugation of the Tyrians and Carthaginians (who were the remainder of the old Canaanites) by the Greeks and Romans.

So far as the curse had reference to the other descendants of Ham, it was a long time, as I have said, ere it came upon them. In the early ages of the world they flourished. They were the first who set up for empire; and so far from being subject to the descendants of Shem or Japheth, the latter were often invaded and driven into corners by them. It was Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, who founded the imperial city of Babylon; and Mizraim, another of his descendants, who first established the kingdom of Egypt. These, it is well known, were for many ages two of the greatest empires in the world. About the time of the captivity, however, God began to cut short their power. Both Egypt and Babylon within a century sunk into a state of subjection, first to the Persians, who descended from Shem, and afterwards to the Greeks and Romans, who were the children of Japheth. Nor have they ever been able to recover themselves; for to the dominion of the Romans succeeded that of the Saracens, and to theirs that of the Turks, under which they, with a great part of Africa, which is peopled by the children of Ham, have lived, and still live, in the most degraded state of

* Ainsworth says, "By Canaan may be understood or implied Canaan's father, as the Greek translation hath Ham, and as elsewhere in Scripture Goliath is named for Goliath's father, 2 Sam. xxi. 19, compared with 1 Chron. xx. 5." See also Bishop Newton on the Prophecies, Dissert. I.

subjection. To all this may be added that the inhabitants of Africa seem to be marked out as objects of slavery by the European nations. Though these things are far from excusing the conduct of their oppressors, yet they establish the fact, and prove the fulfilment of prophecy.

"Blessed be Jehovah, God of Shem!" The form of this blessing is worthy of notice. It may not seem to be pronounced on him, but on his God. But such a mode of speaking implies his blessedness no less than if it had been expressly spoken of him; for it is a principle well known in religion, that "blessed is that people whose God is Jehovah." They are blessed in his blessedness. It is in this form that Moses describes the blessedness of Israel: "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky." Shem was the ancestor of Abram, and so of Israel, who, while the descendants both of Ham and Japheth were lost in idolatry, knew and worshipped Jehovah the only true God; and "of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God, blessed for ever." It has been remarked, too, that Shem is the first person who had the honour of having the Lord styled *his* God; and that this expression denotes his being *in covenant* with him, as when he is called the God of Abram, of Isaac, and of Jacob. Noah, foreseeing, by a spirit of prophecy, that God would enter into a special covenant with the posterity of Shem, taking them to be his peculiar people, and binding himself to be their God, was affected at the consideration of so great a privilege, and breaks out into an ascription of praise to God on this account.

"God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem." If this part of the prophecy have respect to temporal dominion, it seems to refer to the posterity of Japheth being formerly *straitened*, but in the later ages of the world enabled to extend their conquests; and this exactly corresponds with history. For more than two thousand years the empire of the civilized world has in a manner been in the hands of the posterity of Japheth. First the Greeks, after them the Romans, and, since the declension of their empire, the different powers of Europe, have entered into the richest possessions of Asia, inhabited by the children of Shem. Add to this, their borders have lately been enlarged beyond the Atlantic, and bid fair to extend over the continent of America.

But as Japheth united with Shem in the act of filial respect to his father, it would seem as if the dwelling of the one in the tents of the other must be friendly, and not hostile; but as the blessing of Shem had a peculiar reference to *the church of God* among his descendants, it may be considered as prophetic of the accession of the Gentiles to it under the gospel. It is a fact that Christianity has principally prevailed among the posterity of Japheth. The Lord God of Shem is there known and honoured. The lively oracles given to the fathers of the one are possessed and prized by the other: they laboured, and we have entered into their labours. This interpretation is favoured by the marginal reading, which the very learned Ainsworth says the original word properly signifies: "God shall *persuade* Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem."

Let us proceed in the next place to offer a remark or two on the *justice* of the Divine proceeding in denouncing a curse upon children, even to remote periods, for the iniquity of their parents. It is worthy of notice, that the God of Israel thought it no dishonour to his character to declare that he would "visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children in those that hated him," any more than that he would "show mercy to those that loved him," which he did in an eminent degree to the posterity of Abram. And should any object to this, and to the Bible on this account, we might appeal

to universal fact. None can deny that children are the better or the worse for the conduct of their parents. If any man insist that neither good nor evil shall befall him, but what is the immediate consequence of his own conduct, he must go out of the world; for no such state of existence is known in it.

There is, however, an important difference between *the sin of a parent being the occasion of the prediction of a curse upon his posterity, (who were considered by Him who knew the end from the beginning as walking in his steps,) and its being the formal cause of their punishment.* The sin of Ham was the *occasion* of the prediction against the Canaanites, and the *antecedent* to the evil predicted; but it was not the *cause* of it. Its formal procuring cause may be seen in the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus. To Ham, and perhaps to Canaan, the prediction of the servitude of their descendants was a punishment; but the fulfilment of that prediction on the parties themselves was no further such than as it was connected with *their own* sin.

There is also an important difference between *the providential dispensations of God towards families and nations in the present world, and the administration of distributive justice towards individuals with respect to the world to come.* In the last judgment "every one shall give an account of himself to God, and be judged according to the deeds done in the body;" but while we are in this world we stand in various relations, in which it is impossible that we should be dealt with merely as individuals. God deals with families and nations *as such*; and in the course of his providence visits them with good and evil, not according to the conduct of individuals, but, as far as conduct is concerned, that of the general body. To insist that we should in all cases be treated as individuals is to renounce the social character.

We are informed, at the close of the chapter, that Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years, and died at the age of nine hundred and fifty. How long this was after the foregoing prophecy we are not informed; but he lived to see, in the descendants of Shem, Eber and Nahor and Terah the father of Abram.

DISCOURSE XVI.

THE GENERATIONS OF NOAH.

Gen. x.

WITHOUT this genealogy we should not have been able to ascertain the fulfilment of Noah's prophecy; but, after what has been said on that subject, I need not be particular here. The chapter contains the origin of the various nations of antiquity; and the more it is examined and compared with universal history, the more credible it will appear. All the researches of the Asiatic Society into the ancient Hindoo records go to confirm it. But it does not comport with the object of these discourses to enter minutely into such subjects; I shall therefore pass over it with only a few remarks.

1. Concerning the posterity of *Japheth*, ver. 2-5. His family was the largest, and almost every one of his sons became the father of a nation. In them we trace, among others, the names of *Madia*, the father of the Medes—of *Javan*, and his two sons, *Kittim* and *Dodanim*, the fathers of the Ionians,

or Greeks, and of the Romans. It was from Japheth that all the nations of Europe appear to have been peopled; who seem, at this early period, to have obtained the name of Gentiles; namely, *peoples*, or *nations*, ver. 5. This name was given in apostolic times to all who were not Jews; but in earlier ages it seems to have been chiefly, if not entirely, applied to the Europeans. Such at least is the meaning of "the isles of the Gentiles," in which, by a synecdoche, those places which were the nearest to the situation of the sacred writer are put for all the countries beyond them. And the Scriptures foreseeing that Europe would, from the first, embrace the gospel, and for many ages be the principal seat of its operation, the Messiah himself is introduced by Isaiah as addressing himself to its inhabitants:—"Listen, *O isles*, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from afar! Jehovah hath called me from the womb, and hath said unto me, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob—I will also give thee for a light to the *Gentiles*, that thou shouldest be my salvation to the end of the earth." Here we see not only the first peopling of our native country, but the kind remembrance of us in a way of mercy, and this though far removed from the means of salvation. What a call is this to us who occupy what is denominated "the end of the earth" to be thankful for the gospel, and to listen to the sweet accents of the Saviour's voice!

2. Concerning the posterity of *Ham*, ver. 7-20. In them we trace, among others, the names of *Cush*, the father of the Ethiopians—of *Mizraim*, the father of the Egyptians—and of *Canaan*, the father of the Canaanites.

Particular notice is taken of *Nimrod*, the son of Cush, as the first who set up for empire. He might, for any thing I know, be fond of hunting beasts; but the connexion of his character with a *kingdom* induces me to think that *men* were the principal objects of his pursuit, and that it is in reference to this that he is called "a mighty hunter," a very proper name for what modern historians would have called a hero. Thus we see, from the beginning, that things which are highly esteemed among men are held in abomination with God. This perfectly accords with the language of the prophets, in which the great conquerors of the earth are described as so many *wild beasts* pushing at one another, whose object is to seize and tear the prey.—Nimrod was a mighty hunter "before the Lord." This may denote his daring spirit, doing what he did in the face of Heaven, or in defiance of the Divine authority. Thus the inhabitants of Sodom are said to be wicked, and sinners "before the Lord." Nimrod's fame was so great that his name became proverbial. In after-times, any one who was a daring plunderer in defiance of Heaven was likened to him, just as the wicked kings of Israel were likened to "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." In short, he became the type, pattern, or father of usurpers and martial plunderers. 'Till his time government had been patriarchal; but his ambition led him to found a royal city, even that which was afterwards called Babel, or Babylon; and to add to it (for the ambition of conquerors has no bounds) "Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar." Nor was this all. Either he drove Ashur, the son of Shem, from the land of Shinar, (who, taking up his residence in Assyria, built Nineveh, and other places,) or else, as Ainsworth and the margin of our own Bibles render it, "He (Nimrod) went forth out of that land to Ashur, or Assyria, and builded Nineveh." The latter is very probably the true meaning, as the sacred writer is not here describing what was done by the posterity of Shem, which he introduces afterwards, but by that of Ham; and it perfectly accords with Nimrod's character, to go hunting from land to land, for the purpose of increasing his dominion.

From *Mizraim*, the father of the Egyptians, descended also the Philistines. Their situation was near to that of the Canaanites; but, not being of them,

their country was not given to Israel. This accounts for their not attempting to take it, though in after-times there were frequent wars between them.

Finally, Moses was very particular with regard to the Canaanites, describing not only what nations they were, but what were their boundaries, that Israel might know and be content with what the Lord their God had given them. Under this head, we see much of what pertains to this world, but that is not all. We may learn from it that men may be under the Divine curse, and yet be very successful for a time in schemes of aggrandizement. But if this be their all, woe unto them! There are instances, however, of individuals, even from among Ham's posterity, who obtained mercy. Of them were Rahab the harlot, Uriah the Hittite, Obed-edom, and Ittai, and his brethren the Gittites, and the Syrophenician woman who applied to Christ. The door of mercy is open to faith, without distinction of nations; nor was there ever a time in which the God of Israel refused even a Canaanite who repented and embraced his word.

3. Concerning the posterity of *Shem*, ver. 21-32. The account of this patriarch is introduced in rather a singular manner; it is mentioned as an appendage to his name, a kind of title of honour that was to go along with it, that he was "father of all the children of Eber, and brother of Japheth the elder." Shem had other sons as well as these, and another brother as well as Japheth; but no such special mention is made of them. When Moses would describe *the line of the curse*, he calls Ham "the father of Canaan;" and when *the line of promise*, he calls Shem "the father of all the children of Eber." And as Japheth had been the brother of Shem in an act of filial duty, his posterity shall be grafted in among them, and become fellow heirs of the same promise; yet, as in divers other instances, the younger goes before the elder.

Among Shem's other descendants we find the names of *Elam* and *Ashur*, fathers of the Persians and Assyrians, two great Asiatic nations. But these, not being of the church of God, are but little noticed in the sacred history, except as they come in contact with it.

Eber is said to have had two sons, one of whom is called Peleg, *division*; because in his days the earth was *divided*. This event took place subsequently to the confusion of tongues, which is yet to be related. It seems to refer to an allotment of different countries to different families, as Canaan was divided among the Israelites by Joshua. This division of the earth is elsewhere ascribed to the Most High, Deut. xxxii. 8. Probably it was by lot, which was of his disposing; or if by the fathers of the different families, all was subject to the direction of His providence who fixes and bounds our habitation. It is intimated in the same passage that, at the time of this division, God marked out the Holy Land as Israel's lot, so that the Canaanites were to possess it only during his minority, and that by sufferance. It was rather lent than given to them from the first.

DISCOURSE XVII.

THE CONFUSION OF TONGUES

Gen. xi. 1-9.

It has been before noticed that this story is thrown further on, on account of finishing the former. The event took place before the division of the earth in the time of Peleg; for every family is there repeatedly said to be divided *after their tongues*; which implies that at that time they spake various languages, and that this was one of the rules by which they were distinguished as nations.

Prior to the flood, and down to this period, "the whole earth was of one language." We are not told what this was. Whether it was the same which continued in the family of Eber, or whether from this time it was lost, is a matter of small account to us. But it seemed good in the sight of God hence to divide mankind into different nations, and to this end to give them each a different tongue. The occasion of this great event will appear from the following story.

The posterity of Noah, beginning to increase, found it necessary to extend their habitations. A company of them, journeying from the east, pitched upon a certain plain in the land of Shinar, by the river Euphrates. Judging it to be an eligible spot, they consulted and determined here to build a city. There was no stone, it seems, near at hand; but there was a kind of earth very suitable for bricks, and a bituminous substance which is said to ooze from certain springs in that plain, like tar or pitch, and this they used for cement. Of these materials were afterwards built the famous walls of Babylon.

Having found a good material, they proposed to build "a city and a tower" of great eminence, by which they should obtain a *name*, and avoid the evil of which they thought themselves in danger, of being scattered upon the face of the whole earth. But here they were interrupted by a Divine interposition: the Lord came down and confounded their language, so that they could not understand one another's speech.

To perceive the *reason* of this extraordinary proceeding, it is necessary to inquire into the *object*, or *design*, of the builders. If this can be ascertained, the whole passage may be easily understood. It could not be, as some have supposed, to provide against a future flood; for this would have needed no Divine interposition to prevent its having effect. God knew his own intention never to drown the world any more; and if it had been otherwise, or if they, from a disbelief of his promise, had been disposed to provide against it, they would not have been so foolish as to build for this purpose a tower upon a *plain*, which, when raised to the greatest possible height, would be far below the tops of the mountains. It could not have been said of such a scheme, "This they have begun to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do;" for it would have defeated itself.

Neither does it appear to have been designed, as others have supposed, for an *idol's temple*. At least there is nothing in the story which leads to such a conclusion. It was not for the name of a god, but for *their own name*, that they proposed to build; and that not the *tower* only, but a *city and a tower*. Nor was the confounding of their language any way adapted, that I can perceive, to defeat such a design as this. Idolatry prevailed in the world, for aught that appears, as much under a variety of languages as it would under one.

Some have imagined that it was intended merely as a monument of architectural ambition, like the pyramids of Egypt. This supposition might in a measure agree with the idea of doing it for a *name*; but it is far from harmonizing with other parts of the history. It contains no such deep-laid scheme as is intimated in the 6th verse, and given as the reason of the Divine interference; nor is it supposable that God should interpose in so extraordinary a manner, by working a miracle which should remain throughout every age of the world, or which at least has remained to this day, merely for the purpose of counteracting a momentary freak of human vanity.

There are four characters by which this design, whatever it was, is described.—1. It was founded in *ambition*; for they said, “Let us make us a *name*.”—2. It required *union*; for which purpose they proposed to build “a *city*,” that they might live together, and concentrate their strength and counsels. This is noticed by the Lord himself: “Behold, the people,” saith he, “*are one*, and have all one language;” and his confounding their language was for the express purpose of destroying this oneness, by “scattering them abroad upon the face of the earth.”—3. It required that they should be furnished with the means of *defence*; for which they proposed to add a “tower” to the city, to which the citizens might repair in times of danger; and of such a height as to bid defiance to any who should attempt to annoy them with arrows, or other missive weapons.—4. The scheme was *wisely laid*; so much so that, if God had not interposed to frustrate it, it would have succeeded: “And this they have begun to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.”

The only object which appears to accord with all these general characters, and with the whole account taken together, is that of a UNIVERSAL MONARCHY, *by which all the families of the earth, in all future ages, might be held to subjection*. A very little reflection will convince us that such a scheme must of necessity be founded in *ambition*; that it required *union*, and of course a *city*, to carry it into execution; that a *tower*, or citadel, was also necessary to repel those who might be disposed to dispute their claims; and that if these measures were once carried into effect, there was nothing in the nature of things to *prevent the accomplishment of their design*.

If there were no other reasons in favour of the supposition in question, its agreement with all these circumstances of the history might be sufficient to establish it; but to this other things may be added, by way of corroboration.

The *time* when the confusion of tongues took place renders it highly probable that the scheme which it was intended to subvert was of Nimrod's forming, or that he had a principal concern in it. It must have been a little before *the division of the earth* among the sons of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, “after their *tongues*, in their countries, and in their nations;” being that which rendered such division necessary. Now this was about the time of the birth of Peleg, who was named from that event; and this, by reckoning the genealogies mentioned in chap. xi. 10–16, will appear to have been about a hundred years after the flood. At this time, Nimrod, who was the grandson of Ham, must have been alive and in his prime. And as he was the first person who aspired to dominion over his brethren, and as it is expressly said of him that “the beginning of his kingdom was Babel,” nothing is more natural than to suppose that he was the leader in this famous enterprise, and that the whole was a scheme of his, by which to make himself master of the world.

It was also natural for an ambitious people, headed by an ambitious leader, to set up for *universal monarchy*. Such has been the object of almost all the great nations and conquerors of the earth in later periods. Babylon, though checked for the present, by this Divine interference, yet afterwards

resumed the pursuit of her favourite object; and, in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, seemed almost to have gained it. The style used by that monarch in his proclamations comported with the spirit of this idea: "To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and tongues!" Now if such has been the ambition of all Nimrod's successors, in every age, it is nothing surprising that it should have struck the mind of Nimrod himself, and his adherents. They would also have a sort of claim to which their successors could not pretend; namely, that of being the *first*, or *parent* kingdom; and the weight which men are apt to attach to this claim may be seen by the later pretensions of papal Rome, (another Babylon,) which, under the character of a *mother church*, headed by a *pope*, or pretended holy *father*, has subjected all Christendom to her dominion.

To this may be added, that the means used to counteract these builders were exactly suited to defeat the above design; namely, that of *dividing* and *scattering* them, by confounding their language. And it is worthy of notice, that though several empires have extended their territories over people of different languages, yet language has been a very common boundary of nations ever since. There is scarcely a great nation in the world but what has its own language. The dividing of languages was therefore, in effect, the dividing of nations; and so a bar to the whole world being ruled by one government. Thus a perpetual miracle was wrought, to be an antidote to a perpetual disease.

But why, it may be asked, should it be the will of God to prevent a universal monarchy, and to divide the inhabitants of the world into a number of independent nations? This question opens a wide field for investigation. Suffice it to say, at present, such a state of things contains much mercy, both to the world and to the church.

With respect to the *world*, if the whole earth had continued under one government, that government would of course, considering what human nature is, have been exceedingly despotic and oppressive. We know that in every state of society where power, or wealth, or commerce is monopolized by an individual, or confined to a few whose interests may unite them to one another, there is the greatest possible scope for injustice and oppression; and where there is the greatest scope for these evils, human nature being what it is, these they will most abound. Different nations and interests in the world serve as a balance one to the other. They are that to the world which a number of rival merchants, or smaller tradesmen, are to society; serving as a check upon each other's rapacity. Union, when cemented by *good-will to men*, is exceedingly desirable; but when self-interest and ambition are at the bottom, it is exceedingly dangerous. Union, in such cases, is nothing better than a combination against the general good.

It might be thought that if the whole world were under one government, a great number of *wars* might be prevented, which, as things now are, would be certain to take place. And it is true that one stable government, *to a certain extent*, is on this account preferable to a great number of smaller ones, which are always at variance. But this principle, if carried beyond certain limits, becomes inimical to human happiness. So far as different nations can really become one, and drop all local distinctions and interests, it is well; but if the good of the country governed be lost sight of, and every thing be done to aggrandize the city or country governing, it is otherwise. And where power is thus exercised, which it certainly would be in case of universal monarchy, it would produce as many wars as now exist, with only this difference, that instead of their being carried on between independent nations, they would consist of the risings of different parts of the empire against the government, in a way of rebellion; and by how much wars of

this kind are accompanied with less mutual respect, less quarter given and taken, and consequently more cruelty, than the other, by so much would the state of the world have been more miserable than it is at present.

The division of the world into independent nations has also been a great check on *persecution*, and so has operated in a way of mercy towards the *church*. If the whole world had been one despotic government, Israel, the people of God, must in all ages have been in the condition to which they were reduced from the times of the captivity as a punishment for their sins, a mere province of another power, which might have crushed them and hindered them, as was the case from the times of Cyrus to those of Darius. And since the coming of Christ, the only way in which he permits his followers to avoid the malice of the world, which rages against them for his sake, is this: "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another." Of this liberty millions have availed themselves, from the earliest to the latest periods of the Christian church; but if the whole world had been under one government, and that government inimical to the gospel, there had been no place of refuge left upon earth for the faithful.

The necessary watch also that governments which have been the most disposed to persecute have been obliged to keep on each other has filled their hands, so as to leave them but little time to think of religious people. Saul, when pursuing David, was withdrawn from his purpose by intelligence being brought him that the *Philistines had invaded the land*; and thus, in innumerable instances, the quarrels of bad men have been advantageous to the righteous.

The division of power serves likewise to check the spirit of persecution, not only as finding employment for persecutors to watch their rivals, but as causing them to be watched, and their conduct exposed. While the power of papal Rome extended over Christendom, persecution raged abundantly more than it has done since the Reformation, even in popish countries. Since that period, the popish powers, both ecclesiastical and civil, have felt themselves narrowly watched by protestants, and have been almost shamed out of their former cruelties. What has been done of late years has been principally confined to the secret recesses of the Inquisition. It is by communities as it is by individuals; they are restrained from innumerable excesses by the consideration of being under the eye of each other. Thus it is that liberty of conscience, being granted in one or two nations, and becoming honourable, has insensibly made its way into the councils of many others.

From the whole we may infer two things:—1. The harmony of Divine revelation with all that we know of fact. If any object to the probability of the foregoing account, and imagine that the various languages spoken in the world must have been of human contrivance, let them point us to a page in any history, ancient or modern, which gives an account of the first making of a language, dead or living. If all that man can be proved to have done towards the formation of any language be confined to changing, combining, improving, and reducing it to grammatical form, there is the greatest probability, independently of the authority of revelation, that languages themselves were originally the work of God, as was that of the first man and woman.—2. The desirableness of the universal spread of Christ's kingdom. We may see, in the *reasons* which render a universal government among men incompatible with the liberty and safety of the world, abundant cause to pray for this, and for the *union* of all his subjects under him. Here there is no danger of tyranny or oppression, nor any need of those low motives of rivalry to induce him to seek the well-being of his subjects. A union with Christ and one another embraces the best interests of mankind.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

THE GENERATIONS OF SHEM, AND THE CALL OF ABRAM.

Gen. xi. 10-32; xii. 1-4.

THE sacred historian, having given an account of the re-peopling of the earth, here takes leave of the "children of men," and confines himself to the history of the "sons of God." We shall find him all along adhering to this principle. When any of the posterity of the righteous turn their backs on God, he presently takes leave of them, and follows the true church and true religion wherever they go.

Ver. 10-26. The principal use of the genealogy of Shem to Terah, the father of Abram, may be to prove the fulfilment of all the promises in the Messiah. To this purpose it is applied in the New Testament.

Ver. 27-29 Terah, after he was seventy years of age, had three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. But the order in which they here stand does not appear to be that of seniority, any more than that of Shem, and Ham, and Japheth; for if Abram had been born when Terah was *seventy* years old, he must have been *a hundred and thirty-five* at the time of his father's death; whereas he is said to have been but *seventy-five* when, after that event, he set out for Canaan. Haran therefore appears to have been the eldest of the three sons. He died in Ur of the Chaldees; but left behind him a son and two daughters, Lot, and Milcah, and Iscah. The two surviving sons, Abram and Nahor, took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, of whose descent we are not here told; but by what he said of her in chap. xx. 12, it would seem that she was his half-sister, or his father's daughter by another wife. In those early ages nearer degrees of consanguinity were admitted than were afterwards allowed by the Divine law. Nahor married his brother Haran's eldest daughter Milcah.

Ver. 31. It is said of Terah that he took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and that they went from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan. But here is something supposed which the historian reserves till he comes to the story of Abram, who, next to God, was the first mover in the undertaking, and the principal character in the story. In chap. xii. 1, we are told that "the Lord *had* said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." Taking the whole together, it appears that God revealed himself to Abram, and called him to depart from that idolatrous and wicked country, whether any of his relations would go with him or not; that Abram told it to his father Terah, and to all the family, and invited them to accompany him; that Terah consented, as did also his grandson Lot; that Nahor and his wife Milcah were unwilling to go, and did not go at present; that, seeing they refused, the venerable Terah left them; and though not the first mover in the affair, yet, being the head of the family, he is said to have *taken* Abram, and Sarai, and Lot, and journeyed towards Canaan; that, stopping within the country of Mesopotamia, he called the place where he pitched his tent Haran, in memory of his son who died in Ur of the Chaldees; finally, that during his residence in this place he died, being two hundred and five years old.

But though Nahor and Milcah, as it should seem, refused to accompany the family at the time, yet as we find them in the course of the history settled

at Haran, and Abraham and Isaac sending to them for wives, to the rejection of the idolaters among whom they lived, we may conclude that they afterwards repented. And thus the whole of Terah's family, though they do not go to Canaan, yet are rescued from Chaldean idolatry; and, settling in Haran, maintain for a considerable time the worship of the true God.

Chap. xii. 1-3. But Abram must not stop at Haran. Jehovah, by whom he was called to depart from Ur, has another country in reserve for him; and he being the great patriarch of Israel, and of the church of God, we have here a more particular account of his call. It was fit that this should be clearly and fully stated, as it went to lay the foundation of a new order of things in the world. It was therefore like the spring of a great river; or rather like the hole of a quarry whence the first stone was taken of which a city was built. It is this which is referred to for the encouragement of the church when in a low condition, and likely to become extinct. God *called Abram alone, and blessed him, and increased him*. Hence the faithful are directed to "look to the rock whence they were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence they were digged;" and to depend upon his promise who assured them he would comfort the waste places of Zion.

How long Abram continued at Haran we are not told, but, about nine years after his departure from it, we read of his having three hundred and eighteen trained servants, who were "born in his house:" he must therefore have kept house between twenty and thirty years at least before that time, either in Haran, or in both Ur and Haran.

In the call of Abram we may observe, 1. The *grace* of it. There appears no reason to conclude that he was better than his neighbours. He did not choose the Lord, but the Lord him, and brought him out from amongst the idolaters, Neh. ix. 7. 2. Its *peremptory tone*: "Get thee out." The language very much resembles that of Lot to his sons-in-law, and indicates the great danger of his present situation, and the immediate necessity of escaping as it were for his life. Such is the condition of every unconverted sinner, and such the necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come to the hope set before us in the gospel. 3. The *self-denial* required by it. He was called to leave his country, his kindred, and even his father's house. if they refused to go with him; and no doubt his mind was made up to do so. Such things are easier to read concerning others than to practise ourselves; yet he that hateth not father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, in comparison of Christ, cannot be his disciple. We may not be called upon to part with them; but our minds must be made up to do so, if they stand between us and Christ. 4. The *implicit faith* which a compliance with it would call for. Abram was to leave all and to go . . . he knew not whither . . . *unto a land that God would show him*. If he had been told that it was a land flowing with milk and honey, and that he should be put in possession of it, there had been some food for sense to feed upon; but to go out, "not knowing whither he went," must have been not a little trying to flesh and blood. Nor was this all; that which was promised was not only in general terms, but very *distant*. God did not tell him he would *give* him the land, but merely *show* him it. Nor did he in his lifetime obtain the possession of it; he was only a sojourner in it, without so much as a place to set his foot upon. He obtained a spot it is true to lay his bones in, but that was all. In this manner were things ordered on purpose to try his faith; and his obedience to God under such circumstances was among the things which rendered him an example to future generations, even "the father of all them that believe."

Ver. 2. The promise had reference to things which could be but of small

account to an eye of sense; but faith would find enough in it to satisfy the most enlarged desires. The objects, though distant, were worth waiting for. He should be the father of "a great nation;" and, what was of greater account, and which was doubtless understood, that nation should be the Lord's. God himself would *bless him*; and this would be more than the whole world without it. God would also *make his name great*; not in the records of worldly fame, but in the history of the church; and being himself full of the blessing of the Lord, it should be his to impart blessedness to the world: "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." The great names among the heathen would very commonly arise from their being curses and plagues to mankind; but he should have the honour and happiness of being great in goodness, great in communicating light and life to his species.

This promise has been fulfilling ever since. All the true blessedness which the world is now, or shall hereafter be, possessed of, is owing to Abram and his posterity. Through them we have a Bible, a Saviour, and a gospel. They are the stock on which the Christian church is grafted. Their very dispersions and punishments have proved the riches of the world. What then shall be their recovery, but life from the dead? It would seem as if the conversion of the Jews, whenever it shall take place, will be a kind of resurrection to mankind. Such was the hope of this calling. And what could the friends of God and man desire more? Yet, as if all this were not enough, it is added—

Ver. 3. "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." This is language never used but of an object of special favour. It is declaring that he should not only be blessed himself, but that all others should be blessed or cursed as they respected or injured him. Of this the histories of Abimelech, Laban, Potiphar, both the Pharaohs, Balak, and Balaam furnish examples.

Finally, Lest what had been said of his being *made a blessing* should not be sufficiently explicit, it is added, "And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This was saying that a blessing was in reserve for all nations, and that it should be bestowed through him and his posterity, as the medium. Paul applies this to Christ, and the believing Gentiles being blessed in him; he calls it, "The gospel which was preached before unto Abraham." Peter also makes use of it in his address to those who had killed the Prince of life, to induce them to repent and believe in him. "Ye are the children of the prophets," says he, "and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. 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." As if he had said, You are descended from one whose posterity were to be blessed above all nations, and made a blessing. And the time to favour the nations being now at hand, God sent his Son *first* to you, to bless you, and to prepare you for blessing them; as though it were yours to be a nation of ministers, or missionaries to the world. But how if, instead of blessing others, you should continue accursed yourselves? You must first be blessed, ere you can, as the true seed of Abraham, bless the kindreds of the earth, and that by every one of you being turned from his iniquities.

Ver. 4. The faith of Abram operated in a way of prompt and implicit obedience. First it induced him to leave Ur of the Chaldees, and now he must leave Haran. Haran was become the place of his father's sepulchre, yet he must not stop there, but press forwards to the land which the Lord would show him. On this occasion, young Lot, his nephew, seems to have felt a cleaving to him, like that of Ruth to Naomi, and must needs go with

him; encouraged no doubt by his uncle in some such manner as Moses afterwards encouraged Hobab: "Go with me, and I will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning" Abram.

Ver. 5. We now see Abram, being seventy-five years old, and Sarai, and Lot, with all they are and have, taking a long farewell of Haran, as they had done before of Ur. "The souls that they had gotten in Haran" could not refer to children, but perhaps to some godly servants who cast in their lot with them. Abram had a religious household, who were under his government, as we afterwards read, one of whom went to seek a wife for Isaac. We also read of one "Eliezer of Damascus," who seems to have been not only his household steward, but the only man he could think of, if he died childless, to be his heir. With these he set off for the land of Canaan, which by this time he knew to be the country that the Lord would show him; and to the land of Canaan he came.

DISCOURSE XIX.

ABRAM DWELLING IN CANAAN, AND REMOVING TO EGYPT ON ACCOUNT OF THE FAMINE.

Gen. xii. 6-20.

VER. 6. Abram and his company, having entered the country at its north-eastern quarter, penetrate as far southward as *Sichem*; where meeting with a spacious plain, the plain of Moreh, they pitched their tents. This place was afterwards much accounted of. Jacob came thither on his return from Haran, and bought of the Shechemites a parcel of a field. It might be the same spot where Abram dwelt, and was perhaps selected by Jacob on that account. After this it seems to have been taken from him by the Amorites, the descendants of Hamor, of whom he had bought it; and he was obliged to recover it by the sword and by the bow. This was the portion which he gave to his son Joseph. There seems to be something in the history of this place very much resembling that of the country in general. In the grand division of the earth, this whole land was assigned to the posterity of Shem; but the Canaanites had seized on it, and, as is here noticed, "dwelt in the land." As soon therefore as the rightful owners are in a capacity to make use of the sword and the bow, they must be dispossessed of it.—See on ch. x. 25.

Ver. 7. Abram having pitched his tent at *Sichem*, the Lord renews to him the promise of the whole land, or rather to his seed after him; for, with respect to himself, he was never given to expect any higher character than that of a sojourner. But considering the great ends to be answered by his seed possessing it, he is well satisfied, and rears an altar to Jehovah. One sees here the difference between the conduct of the men of this world and that of the Lord's servants. The former no sooner find a fruitful plain than they fall to building a city and a tower, to perpetuate their fame. The first concern of the latter is to raise an altar to God. It was thus that the new world was consecrated by Noah, and now the Land of Promise by Abram. The rearing of an altar in the land was like taking possession of it, in right, for Jehovah.

Ver. 8, 9 The patriarchs seldom continued long at a place, for they were sojourners. Abram removes from the plain of Moreh, to a mountain on the

east of what was afterwards called Beth-el; and here he built an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord. This place was also much accounted of in after-times. It was not far hence that Jacob slept and dreamed, and anointed the pillar. We may on various occasions change places, provided we carry the true religion with us: in this we must never change.

Ver. 10-20. Abram was under the necessity of removing again, and that on account of a grievous famine in the land. He must now leave Canaan for a while, and journey into Egypt, where corn, it seems, was generally plentiful, even when it was scarce in other countries, because that country was watered not so much by rain as by the waters of the Nile. Hither therefore the patriarch repaired with his little company. And here we see new trials for his faith. Observe,

1. The famine itself being in *the Land of Promise* must be a trial to him. Had he been of the spirit of the unbelieving spies, in the times of Moses, he would have said, Would God we had stayed at Haran, if not at Ur! Surely this is a land that eateth up the inhabitants.—But thus far Abram sinned not.

2. The beauty of Sarai was another trial to him; and here he fell into the sin of dissimulation, or at least of equivocation. She was half-sister to him, it seems (see on chap. xi. 27-29); but not in such a sense as he meant to convey. This was one of the first faults we read of in Abram's life; and the worst of it is that it was repeated, as we shall see hereafter. It is remarkable that there is only one faultless character on record; and more so that, in several instances of persons who have been distinguished for some one excellence, their principal failure has been in that particular. Thus Peter, the bold, sins through fear; Solomon, the wise, by folly; Moses, the meek, by speaking unadvisedly with his lips; and Abram, the faithful, by a kind of dissimulation arising from timid distrust. Such things would almost seem designed of God to stain the pride of all flesh, and to check all dependence upon the most eminent or confirmed habits of godliness.

3. Yet from these trials, and from the difficulties into which he had brought himself by his own misconduct, the Lord mercifully delivered him. He feared they would kill him for his wife's sake; but God, by introducing plagues among them, inspired them with fear, and induced them to send him and his wife away in safety. It was thus that he rebuked kings for their sakes, and suffered no man to hurt them. In how many instances has God, by his kind providence, extricated us from situations into which our own sin and folly had plunged us!

DISCOURSE XX.

THE SEPARATION OF ABRAM AND LOT.

Gen. xiii.

VER. 1-4. Till now we have heard nothing of Lot, since he left Haran; but he appears to have been one of Abram's family, and to have gone with him whithersoever he went. Here we find him returning with him from Egypt, first to the south of Canaan, and afterwards to Beth-el, the place of his second residence, where he had before built an altar. The manner in which "the place of the altar" is mentioned seems to intimate that he chose to go thither, in preference to another place, on this account. It is very natural that he should do so; for the places where we have called upon the

name of the Lord, and enjoyed communion with him, are, by association, endeared to us above all others. There Abram again called on the name of the Lord, and the present exercises of grace, we may suppose, were aided by the remembrance of the past. It is an important rule, in choosing our habitations, to have an eye to the place of the altar. If Lot had acted upon this principle, he would not have done as is here related of him.

Ver. 5, 6. We find by the second verse that Abram was very rich; and here we see that Lot also had "flocks, and herds, and tents;" so that "the land was not able to bear them, that they should dwell together." It is pleasing to see how the blessing of the Lord attends these two sojourners; but it is painful to find that prosperity should become the occasion of their separation. It is pity that those whom grace unites, and who are fellow heirs of eternal life, should be parted by the lumber of this world. Yet so it is. A clash of worldly interest has often separated chief friends, and been the occasion of a much greater loss than the greatest earthly fulness has been able to compensate. It is not thus with the riches of grace, or of glory; the more we have of them, the closer we are united.

Ver. 7. 'The first inconvenience which arose from the wealth of these two good men appeared in strifes between their herdmen.—It was better to be so, than if the masters had fallen out; but even this is far from pleasant. Those of each would tell their tale to their masters, and try to persuade them that the others had used them ill; and the best of men, hearing such tales frequently repeated, would begin to suspect that all was not fair. What can be done? "The Canaanite and the Perizzite also dwelt in the land." Now Abram and Lot, having never joined in the idolatries and other wickednesses of the country, must needs have been marked as a singular kind of men, and passed as worshippers of the invisible God. If therefore they fall out about worldly matters, what will be thought and said of their religion? "See how these religious people love one another!"

Ver. 8, 9. Abram's conduct in this unpleasant business was greatly to his honour. To form a just judgment of any character, we must follow him through a number of different situations and circumstances, and observe how he acts in times of trial. We have seen Abram in his first conversion from idolatry; we have noticed the strength of his faith, and the promptness of his obedience to the heavenly call; we have admired his godly and consistent conduct in every place where he has sojourned, one instance only excepted; but we have not yet seen how he would act in a case of approaching difference with a friend, a brother. Here then we have it. Observe,

1. He foresees the danger there is of a falling-out between himself and Lot. It is likely he perceived that his countenance was not towards him as heretofore, and that he discovered an uneasiness of mind. This would excite a becoming apprehension, lest that which begun with the servants should end with the masters, and be productive of great evil to them both.

2. He deprecates it in the frankest, most pacific, and most affectionate manner. "Let there be no strife between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we are brethren." Yes, brethren, not only in the flesh, but in the Lord.

3. He makes a most wise and generous proposal. "The whole land is before us: separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt go to the left hand, I will go to the right; or if thou wilt go to the right hand, then I will go to the left." As the elder man, Abram might have insisted upon the right of choosing his part of the country first; and especially as he was the principal, and Lot only accompanied him; he might have told him that if he was not contented to live with him, he might go whither he would; but thus did not Abram. No, he would rather forego his civil rights than

invade religious peace. What a number of bitter animosities in families, in churches, and I may say in nations, might be prevented, if the parties could be brought to act towards one another in this open, pacific, disinterested, and generous manner. There are cases in which it becomes necessary for very worthy and dear friends to separate: it were better to part than live together at variance. Many may be good neighbours who could not live happily in the same family. Abram and Lot could love and pray for one another when there was nothing to ruffle their feelings; and Saul and Barnabas could both serve the cause of Christ, though unhappily, through a third person, they cannot act in close concert. In all such cases, if there be only an upright, pacific, and disinterested disposition, things will be so adjusted as to do no material injury to the cause of Christ. In many instances it may serve to promote it. In a world where there is plenty of room to serve the Lord, and plenty of work to be done, if those who cannot continue together be disposed to improve their advantages, the issue may be such as shall cause the parties to unite in a song of praise.

Ver. 10, 11. But how does young Lot conduct himself on this occasion? He did not, nor could he, object to the pacific and generous proposal that was made to him; nor did he choose Abram's situation, which, though lovely in the one to offer, it would have been very unlovely in the other to have accepted; and I hope, though nothing is said of his making any reply, it was not from a spirit of sullen reserve. But, in the choice he made, he appears to have regarded temporal advantages only, and entirely to have overlooked the danger of his situation with regard to religion. "He lifted up his eyes, and beheld a well-watered plain;" and on this he fixed his choice, though it led him to take up his abode in Sodom. He viewed it, as we should say, merely with a grazier's eye. He had better have been in a wilderness than there. Yet many professors of religion, in choosing situations for themselves and for their children, continue to follow his example. We shall perceive, in the sequel of the story, what kind of a harvest his well-watered plain produced him!

Ver. 12, 13. It is possible, after all, that his principal fault lay in pitching his tent in the place he did. If he could have lived on the plain, and preserved a sufficient distance from that infamous place, there might have been nothing the matter; but perhaps he did not like to live alone, and therefore dwelt *in the cities* of the plain, and pitched his tent *towards Sodom*. The love of society, like all other natural principles, may prove a blessing or a curse; and we may see, by this example, the danger of leaving religious connexions; for as man feels it not good to be alone, if he forego these he will be in a manner impelled by his inclinations to take up with others of a contrary description. It is an awful character which is here given of Lot's new neighbours. All men are sinners; but they were "wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." When Abram went to a new place, it was usual for him to rear an altar to the Lord; but there is no mention of any thing like this when Lot settled in or near to Sodom. But to return to Abram—

Ver. 14–17. From the call of this great man to the command to offer up his son, a period of about fifty years, he was often tried, and the promise was often renewed. It was the will of God that he should live by faith. Its being renewed at this time seems to have been on occasion of Lot's departure from him, and the disinterested spirit which he had manifested on that occasion. Lot had lifted up *his* eyes and beheld the plain of Jordan; and being gone to take possession of it, God saith unto Abram, Lift up now *thine* eyes, and look northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to *thee* will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

Thus he who sought this world lost it; and he who was willing to give up any thing for the honour of God and religion found it.

Ver. 18. After this, Abram removed to "the plain of Mamre, which is Hebron," where he continued many years. It was here, a long time after, that Sarah died. It lay about two and twenty miles south of Jerusalem. This removal might possibly arise from regard to Lot, that he might be nearer to him than he would have been at Beth-el, though not so near as to interfere with his temporal concerns. Of this we are certain, he was able, from a place near where he lived, to descry the plains of Sodom; and when the city was destroyed, saw the smoke ascend like that of a furnace. Here, as usual, Abram built an altar unto Jehovah.

DISCOURSE XXI.

ABRAM'S SLAUGHTER OF THE KINGS.

Gen. xiv.

It had been already observed, that, to form a just judgment of character, we must view men in divers situations: we should not have expected, however, to find Abram in the character of a warrior. Yet so it is: for once in his life, though a man of peace, he is constrained to take the sword. We have seen in him the friend of God, and the friend of a good man; now we shall see in him the *friend of his country*, though at present only a sojourner in it. The case appears to have been as follows:—

Ver. 1-7. *Elam* and *Shinar*, or Persia and Babylon, and the country about them, being that part of the world where the sons of Noah began to settle after they went out of the ark, it was there that population and the art of war would first arrive at sufficient maturity to induce them to attempt the subjugation of their neighbours. Nimrod began this business in about a century after the flood, and his successors were no less ambitious to continue it. The rest of the world, emigrating from those countries, would be considered as colonies which ought to be subject to the parent states. Such, it seems, were the ideas of *Chedorlaomer*, who was at this time king of Elam, or Persia. About three or four years before Abram left Chaldea he had invaded Palestine; which being divided into little kingdoms, almost every city having its king, and having made but little progress in the art of war in comparison of the parent nations, fell an easy prey to his rapacity. In this humiliating condition they continued twelve years; but being by that time weary of the yoke, five of these petty kings, understanding one another, thought they might venture to throw it off. Accordingly, the next year they refused to pay him tribute, or to be subject to the authority under which he had placed them.

Chedorlaomer hearing of this, calls together his friends and allies among the first and greatest nations; who consent to join their forces, and go with him to reduce these petty states to obedience. Four kings and their armies engage in this expedition. If each one only brought five hundred men with him, they would form a great host for that early age of the world, and capable of doing a great deal of mischief. This they did: for, not content with marching peaceably through the country till they arrived at the cities which had rebelled, they laid all places waste which they came at; smiting

in their way, first the *Rephaims*, the *Zurims*, and the *Emims*; then the *Horites* of Mount Seir; and after them the *Amalekites* and the *Amorites*.

Ver. 8-10. By this time Abram's neighbours, the kings of *Sodom*, *Admah*, *Zeboim*, and *Bela*, must have been not a little alarmed. They and their people, however, determine to fight—and fight they did. The field of action was “the vale of Siddim.” Unhappily, the ground was full of slime pits, or pits of bitumen, much like those on the plains of Shinar; and their soldiers being but little skilled in the art of war could not keep their ranks, and so were foiled, routed, and beaten, by the superior discipline of the invaders. Many were slain in the pits, and those that escaped fled to a neighbouring mountain, which, being probably covered with wood, afforded them a shelter in which to hide themselves.

Ver. 11, 12. The conquerors, without delay, betake themselves to the spoil. They take all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the victuals; and what few people are left they take for slaves. Among these was Lot, Abram's brother's son, his friend, and the companion of his travels, with all his family and all his goods; and this, notwithstanding he was only a sojourner, but lately come among them, and seems to have taken no part in the war. O Lot, these are the fruits of taking up thy residence in Sodom; or rather the first-fruits of it: the harvest is yet to come!

Ver. 13. Among those who fled from the drawn sword, and the fearfulness of war, there was one who reached the plain of Mamre, and told the sad tale to Abram. Abram feels much; but what can he do? Can he raise an army wherewith to spoil the spoilers and deliver the captives? He will try. Yes, from his regard to Lot, whose late faults would be now forgotten, and his former love recur to mind; and if he succeed, he will not only deliver him, but many others. The cause is a just one; and God has promised to *bless Abram, and make him a blessing*. Who can tell but he may prove in this instance a blessing to the whole country, by delivering it from the power of a cruel foreign oppressor?

Now we shall see how the Lord hath blessed Abram. Who would have thought it? He is able to raise three hundred and eighteen men in his own family; men well instructed too, possessing skill, principle, and courage. Moreover, Abram was so well respected by his neighbours, *Mamre*, *Eshcol*, and *Ancr*, that they had already formed a league of confederacy with him, to defend themselves, perhaps, against this blustering invader, whose coming had been talked of more than a year ago; and they, with all the forces they can muster, consent to join with Abram in the pursuit.

Ver. 15, 16. By prompt movements, Abram and his troop soon come up with the enemy. It was in the dead of night. The conquerors, it is likely, were off their guard, thinking, no doubt, that the country was subdued, and that scarcely a dog was left in it that dare move his tongue against them. But when haughty men say, Peace, peace,—lo, sudden destruction cometh! Attacked after so many victories, they are surprised and confounded; and it being in the night, they could not tell but their assailants might be ten times more numerous than they were. So they flee in confusion, and are pursued from Dan even to Hobah in Syria, a distance, it is said, of fourscore miles. In this battle, Chedorlaomer, and the kings who were with him, were all slain. Abram's object, however, was the recovery of Lot and his family; and having accomplished this, he is satisfied. It is surprising that amidst all this confusion and slaughter their lives should be preserved; yet so it was: and he with his property and family, and all the other captives taken with him, are brought safe back again. It was ill for Lot to be found among the men of Sodom; but it was well for them that he was so, else they had been ruined before they were.

Ver. 17-24. This expedition of Abram and his friends excited great attention among the Canaanites. At the very time when all must have been given up for lost, lo, they are, without any effort of their own, recovered, and the spoilers spoiled! The little victorious band, now returning in peace, are hailed by every one that meets them; nay, the kings of the different cities go forth to congratulate them, and to thank them as the deliverers of the country. If Abram had been of the disposition of those marauders whom he had defeated, he would have followed up his victory, and made himself master of the whole country; which he might probably have done with ease in their present enfeebled and scattered condition. But thus did not Abram, because of the fear of God.

In the valley of *Shaveh*, not far from Jerusalem, he was met and congratulated by the king of Sodom, who by some means had escaped in the day of battle, when so many of his people were slain. He was also met in the same place, and at the same time, by another king, of high character in the Scriptures, though but rarely mentioned, namely, "Melchisedek, king of Salem." He came, not only to congratulate the conquerors, but brought forth "bread and wine" to refresh them after their long fatigues.

The sacred historian, having here met with what I may call a lily among thorns, stops, as it were, to describe it. Let us stop with him, and observe the description. Mention is made of this singular man only in three places; viz. here, in the 110th Psalm, and in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He is held up in the two latter places as a type of the Messiah. Three things may be remarked concerning him:—1. He was doubtless a very holy man; and if a Canaanite by descent, it furnishes a proof, among many others, that the curse on Canaan did not shut the door of faith upon his individual descendants. There never was an age or country in which he that feared God and worked righteousness was not accepted. 2. He was a personage in whom were united the kingly and priestly offices; and, as such, he was a type of the Messiah, and greater than Abram himself. Under the former of these characters, he was by interpretation "king of righteousness, and king of peace;" and, under the latter, was distinguished as the "priest of the most high God." This singular dignity conferred upon a descendant of Canaan shows that God delights, on various occasions, to put more abundant honour upon the part that lacketh. 3. He was what he was, considered as a priest, *not by inheritance*, but *by an immediate Divine constitution*. Though as a man he was born like other men, yet as a priest he was "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abiding a priest continually." That is, neither his father nor his mother was of a sacerdotal family; he derived his office from no predecessor, and delivered it up to no successor, but was himself an order of priesthood. It is in this respect that he was "made like unto the Son of God;" who also was a priest, not after the manner of the sons of Aaron, by descent from their predecessors (for he descended from Judah, of which tribe Moses said nothing concerning priesthood); but after the similitude of Melchisedek, that is, by an immediate Divine constitution; or, as the New Testament writer expresses it, "by the word of the oath;" and, "continuing ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood."

Ver. 19, 20. Melchisedek being "priest of the most high God," he in that character blessed Abram. It belonged to the priest, by Divine appointment, to bless the people. In this view the blessing of Melchisedek would contain more than a personal well-wishing; it would be prophetic. In pronouncing it, he would set his official seal to what God had done before him. It is not unlikely that he might know Abram previously to this, and be well

acquainted with his being a favourite of Heaven, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, and to whose posterity God had promised the land of the Canaanites; and if so, his blessing him in so solemn a manner implies his acquiescence in the Divine will, even though it would be at the expense of his ungodly countrymen. His speaking of the most high God as "possessor of heaven and earth" would seem to intimate as much as this; as it recognizes the *principle* on which the right of Abram's posterity to possess themselves of Canaan depended. There is much heart in the blessing. We see the good man, as well as the priest of the most high God, in it; from blessing Abram it rises to the blessing of Abram's God, for all the goodness conferred upon him.

In return for this solemn blessing, Abram "gave him tithes of all." This was treating him in character, and, in fact, presenting the tenth of his spoils as an offering to God.

Ver. 21. All this time the king of Sodom stood by, and heard what passed; but it seems without feeling any interest in it. What passed between these two great characters appears to have made no impression upon him. He thought of nothing, and cared for nothing, but what respected himself. He could not possibly claim any right to what was recovered, either of persons or things; yet he asks for the former, and speaks in a manner as if he would be thought not a little generous in relinquishing the latter.

Ver. 22, 23. Abram knew the man and his communications; and, perceiving his affected generosity, gave him to understand that he had already decided, and even sworn, in the presence of the most high God, what he would do in respect of that part of the spoils which had previously belonged to him. Abram knew full well that the man who affected generosity in relinquishing what was not his own would go on to boast of it, and to reflect on him as though he shone in borrowed plumes. No, says the patriarch, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet that which was thine, save that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men that went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre."

In this answer of Abram we may observe, besides the above, several particulars:—

1. *The character* under which he had sworn to God: "*Jehovah*, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth." The former of these names was that by which God was made known to Abram, and still more to his posterity.* The latter was that which had been just given to him by Melchisedek, and which appears to have made a strong impression on Abram's mind. By uniting them together, he, in a manner, acknowledged Melchisedek's God to be his God; and, while reproving the king of Sodom, expressed his love to him as to a brother.

2. His having decided the matter *before* the king of Sodom met him, as it seems he had, implies something highly dishonourable in the character of that prince. He must have been well known to Abram, as a vain, boasting, unprincipled man, or he would not have resolved in so solemn a manner to preserve himself clear from the very shadow of an obligation to him. And, considering the polite and respectful manner in which it was common for

* What Moses says, in Exod. vi. 3, that God appeared to "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by the name of *God Almighty*," but that by his name "*JEHOVAH*," he was not known to them, cannot be understood absolutely. It does not appear, however, to have been used among the patriarchs in so peculiar a sense as it was after the times of Moses among the Israelites. Thence it seems very generally to denote the specific name of the God and King of Israel. In this view we perceive the force and propriety of such language as the following:—"Jehovah is our Judge, *Jehovah* is our Lawgiver, *Jehovah* is our King."—"O *Jehovah*, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

this patriarch to conduct himself towards his neighbours, there must have been something highly offensive in this case to draw from him so cutting and dismaying an intimation. It is not unlikely that he had thrown out some malignant insinuations against Lot and his old wealthy uncle, on the score of their religion. If so, Abram would feel happy in an opportunity of doing good against evil, and thus of heaping coals of fire upon his head.

The reason why he would not be under the shadow of an obligation, or any thing which might be construed an obligation, to him, was not so much a regard to his own honour as the honour of HIM *in whose name he had sworn*. Abram's God had blessed him, and promised to bless him more, and make him a blessing. Let it not be said by his enemies, that, with all his blessedness, it is of our substance that he is what he is. No, Abram can trust in "the possessor of heaven and earth" to provide for him, without being beholden to the king of Sodom.

3. His excepting the portion of the young men who were in league with him shows a just sense of propriety. In giving up our own right, we are not at liberty to give away that which pertains to others connected with us.

Upon the whole, this singular undertaking would raise Abram much in the estimation of the Canaanites, and might possibly procure a little more respect to Lot. It had been better in the latter, however, if he had taken this opportunity to have changed his dwelling-place.

DISCOURSE XXII.

ABRAM JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.

Gen. xv. 1-6.

ABRAM was the father of the faithful, the example or pattern of all future believers; and perhaps no man, upon the whole, had greater faith. It seems to have been the design of God, in almost all his dealings with him, to put his faith to the trial. In most instances it appeared unto praise, though in some it appeared to fail him.

Ver. 1. Several years had elapsed, perhaps eight or nine, since God had first made promise to him concerning his *seed*; and now he is about eighty years old, and Sarai is seventy, and he has no child. He must yet live upon assurances and promises, without any earthly prospects. He is indulged with a vision, in which God appears to him, saying, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." This is certainly very full and very encouraging. If, after having engaged the kings, he had any *fears* of the war being renewed, this would allay them. Who shall harm those to whom Jehovah is a *shield*? Or if, on having no child, he had *fears* at times lest all should prove a blank, this would meet them. What can be wanting to those who have God for their "exceeding great reward?" Abram had not availed himself of his late victory to procure in Canaan so much as a place to set his foot on; but he shall lose nothing by it. God has something greater in reserve for him: God himself will be his reward; not only as he is of all believers, but in a sense peculiar to himself: he shall be the father of the church, and the *heir of the world*.

Ver. 2, 3. Who would have thought, amidst these exceeding great and precious promises, that Abram's faith should seem to fail him? Yet so it is. The promise, to be sure, is great and full; but he has heard much the

same things before, and there are no signs of its accomplishment. This works within him in a way of secret anguish, which he presumes to express before the Lord, almost in the language of objection: "Lord God, what wilt thou *give* me?" "Thou speakest of *giving* thy servant this and that but I shall soon be past receiving it I go childless. This Eliezer of Damascus is a good and faithful servant; but that is all Must I make him my heir; and are the promises to be fulfilled at last in an adopted son?"

Ver. 4-6. God, in mercy to the patriarch, condescends to remove his doubts on this subject, assuring him that his heir should descend from his own body; yet he must continue to live upon *promises*. These promises, however, are confirmed by a sign. He is led abroad from his tent in the night time, and shown the stars of heaven; which when he had seen, the Lord assured him, "So shall thy seed be." And now his doubts are removed. He is no longer weak, but strong in faith; he staggers not through unbelief, but is fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able to perform. And therefore "it was imputed to him for righteousness."

Much is made of this passage by the apostle Paul, in establishing the doctrine of justification by faith; and much has been said by others, as to the meaning of both him and Moses. One set of expositors, considering it as extremely evident that by faith is here meant *the act of believing*, contend for this as our justifying righteousness. Faith, in their account, seems to be imputed to us for righteousness by a kind of gracious compromise, in which God accepts of an imperfect instead of a perfect obedience. Another set of expositors, jealous for the honour of free grace, and of the righteousness of Christ, contend that the faith of Abram is here to be taken *objectively*, for the righteousness of Christ believed in. To me it appears that both these expositions are forced. To establish the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ, it is not necessary to maintain that the faith of Abram means Christ in whom he believed. Nor can this be maintained; for it is manifestly the same thing, in the account of the apostle Paul, as *believing*, (Rom. iv. 5,) which is very distinct from the object believed in. The truth appears to be this: It is faith, or believing, that is counted for righteousness; not however as a righteous act, or on account of any inherent virtue contained in it, but *in respect of Christ, on whose righteousness it terminates*.*

That we may form a clear idea, both of the text and the doctrine, let the following particulars be considered.

1. Though Abram believed God when he left Ur of the Chaldees, yet his faith in that instance is not mentioned *in connexion with his justification*; nor does the apostle, either in his Epistle to the Romans or in that to the Galatians, argue that doctrine from it, or hold it up as an example of justifying faith. I do not mean to suggest that Abram was then in an unjustified state; but that the instance of his faith, which was thought proper by the Holy Spirit to be selected as the model for believing for justification was not this, nor any other of the kind; but those only in which there was an *immediate respect had to the person of the Messiah*. The examples of faith referred to in both these Epistles are taken from his believing the promises relative to his *seed*; in which seed, as the apostle observes, *Christ* was included, Rom. iv. 11; Gal. iii. 16. Though Christians may believe in God with respect to the common concerns of this life, and such faith may ascertain their being in a justified state; yet this is not, strictly speaking, the faith by which they are justified, which invariably *has respect to the person and work of Christ*. Abram believed in God as *promising Christ*; they

* Calvin's Institutes, Book III. Chap. XI. § 7.

believe in him as having "raised him from the dead." "By him, all that believe (that is, *in him*) are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." It is through *faith in his blood* that they obtain remission of sins. He "is just, and the justifier of him that *believeth in Jesus*."

2. This distinction, so clearly perceivable both in the Old and New Testament, sufficiently decides in what sense faith is considered as justifying. Whatever other properties the magnet may possess, it is as pointing invariably to the north that it guides the mariner; so, whatever other properties faith may possess, it is as *pointing to Christ*, and bringing us into union *with him*, that it justifies, Rom. viii. 1; 1 Cor. i. 30; Phil. iii. 9. It is not that *for the sake of which* we are accepted of God; for if it were, justification by faith could not be opposed to justification by works; nor would boasting be excluded; neither would there be any meaning in its being said to be by faith, *that it might be of grace*: but, believing in Christ, we are considered by the Lawgiver of the world as one with him, and so are forgiven and accepted *for his sake*. Hence it is that to be justified by faith is the same thing as to be justified *by the blood of Christ*, or made righteous *by his obedience*, Rom. v. 9, 19. Faith is not the grace wherein we stand, but that by which we *have access* to it, Rom. v. 2. Thus it is that the healing of various maladies is ascribed in the New Testament to faith: not that the virtue which caused the cures proceeded from this as its proper cause; but this was a necessary concomitant to give the parties *access* to the power and grace of the Saviour, by which only they were healed.

3. The phrase "counted it for righteousness" does not mean that God thought it to be what it was, which would have been merely an act of justice; but his graciously reckoning it what in itself it was not, viz. a ground for the bestowment of covenant blessings. Even in the case of Phinehas, of whom the same phrase is used in reference to his zeal for God, it has this meaning; for one single act of zeal, whatever may be said of it, could not entitle him and his posterity after him to the honour conferred upon them, Psal. cvi. 30, 31, comp. Numb. xxv. 11-13. And, with respect to the present case, "The phrase, as the apostle uses it," says a great writer, "manifestly imports that God, of his sovereign grace, is pleased, in his dealings with the sinner, to take and regard that which indeed is not righteousness, and in one who has no righteousness, so that the consequence shall be the same as if he had righteousness, and which may be from the *respect which it bears* to something which is indeed righteousness."* The faith of Abram, though of a holy nature, yet contained nothing *in itself* fit for a justifying righteousness: all the adaptedness which it possessed to that end was the respect which it had to the Messiah, on whom it terminated.†

4. Though faith is not our justifying righteousness, yet it is a necessary concomitant and means of justification; and being the grace which above all others honours Christ, it is that which above all others God delights to honour. Hence it is that justification is ascribed to it, rather than to the

* President Edwards's *Sermons on Justification*, Disc. I.

† From the above remarks, we may be able to solve an apparent difficulty in the case of Cornelius. He "feared God," and "his alms and prayers came up for a memorial before God." He must therefore have been at that time in a *state of salvation*. Yet after this he was directed to send for Peter, who should *tell him words by which he and all his house SHOULD BE SAVED*, Acts x. 2, 4; xi. 14. What Abram was in respect of justification, before he heard and believed what was promised him concerning the Messiah, Cornelius was in respect of salvation before he heard and believed the words by which he was to be saved. Both were the *subjects* of faith according to their light. Abram believed from the time that he left Ur of the Chaldees; and Cornelius could not have *feared God* without believing in him; but the *object* by which they were justified and saved was not from the first so clearly revealed to them as it was afterwards.

righteousness of Christ without it. Our Saviour might have said to Bartimeus, Go thy way, *I* have made thee whole. This would have been truth, but not the whole of the truth which it was his design to convey. The necessity of faith in order to healing would not have appeared from this mode of speaking, nor had any honour been done or encouragement given to it; but by his saying, "Go thy way, *thy faith* hath made thee whole," each of these ideas is conveyed. Christ would omit mentioning his own honour, as knowing that faith, having an immediate respect to him, amply provided for it.

DISCOURSE XXIII.

RENEWAL OF PROMISES TO ABRAM.

Gen. xv. 7-21.

VER. 7. The Lord, having promised Abram a numerous offspring, goes on to renew the promise of the land of Canaan for an inheritance; and this by a reference to what had been said to him when he first left the land of the Chaldees. It is God's usual way, in giving a promise, to refer to former promises of the same thing, which would show him to be of one mind, and intimate that he had not forgotten him, but was carrying on his designs of mercy towards him.

Ver. 8. Abram, however, ventures to ask for a sign by which he may know that by his posterity he shall inherit the land. This request does not appear to have arisen from unbelief; but having lately experienced the happy effects of a sign, he hopes thereby to be better armed against it.

Ver. 9. The purport of the answer seems to be, Bring me an offering, which I will accept at thy hand, and this shall be the sign. It is in condescension to our weakness that, in addition to his promises, the Lord has given us sensible signs, as in the ordinances of baptism and the supper. If it were desirable to Abram to know that he should inherit the earthly Canaan, it must be much more so to us to know that we shall inherit the heavenly Canaan; and God is willing that the heirs of promise should on this subject have strong consolation, and therefore has confirmed his word with an oath.

10. Abram, obedient to the Divine command, takes of the first and best of his animals for a sacrifice. Their being *divided* in the midst was the usual form of sacrificing when a *covenant* was to be made. Each of the parties passed between the parts of the animals: q. d. Thus may I be cut asunder if I break this covenant! This was called *making a covenant by sacrifice*, Jer. xxxiv. 18, 19; Psal. l. 5. This process therefore, it appears, was accompanied with a solemn covenant between the Lord and his servant Abram.

Ver. 11. Having made ready the sacrifices, he waited perhaps for the fire of God to consume them, which was the usual token of acceptance; but meanwhile the birds of prey came down upon them, which he was obliged to drive away. Interruptions, we see, attend the father of the faithful in his most solemn approaches to God; and interruptions of a different kind attend believers in theirs. How often do intruding cares, like unclean birds, seize upon that time and those affections which are devoted to God! Happy is it for us, if by prayer and watchfulness we can drive them away, so as to worship him without distraction.

Ver. 12-16. By the account taken together, it appears as if this was a day which Abram dedicated wholly to God. His first vision was before daylight, while the stars were yet to be seen; in the morning he prepares the sacrifices; and while he is waiting the sun goes down, and no immediate answer is given him. At this time he falls into a deep sleep, and now we may expect that God will answer him, as he had done before, *by vision*. But what kind of vision is it? Not like that which he had before; but "lo, a horror of great darkness falls upon him." This might be designed in part to impress his mind with an awful reverence of God; for those who rejoice in him must rejoice with trembling: and partly to give him what he asked for, a *sign*; not merely that he should inherit the land, but of the way in which this promise should be accomplished, namely, by their first going down and enduring great affliction in Egypt. The light must be preceded by darkness. Such appears to be the interpretation given of it in the words which follow: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years."* Egypt is not named; for prophecy requires to be delivered with some degree of obscurity, or it might tend to defeat its own design; but the thing is certain, and God will in the end avenge their cause. It is remarkable how the prophecies gradually open and expand, beginning with what is general, and proceeding to particulars. Abram had never had so much revealed to him before, as to times and circumstances. He is given to understand that these things shall not take place in his day; but that he should first "go to his fathers," and that "in peace, and be buried in a good old age;" but that "in the fourth generation" after their going down they should return. It is enough to die such a death as this, though we see not all the promises fulfilled. The reason given for their being so long ere they were accomplished is, that "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full." There is a fitness in all God's proceedings, and a wonderful fulness of design, answering many ends by one and the same event. The possession of Canaan was to Israel a promised good, but to the Canaanites a threatened evil. It is deferred towards both till each be prepared for it. As there is a time when God's promises to his people are ripe for accomplishment, so there is a time when his forbearance towards the wicked shall cease; and they often prove to be the same. The fall of Babylon was the deliverance of Judah: and the fall of another Babylon will be the signal for the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.

Ver. 17. After this, when the sun was set, and it was dark, Abram, perhaps still in vision, has the sign repeated in another form. He sees "a smoking furnace," and "a burning lamp." The design of these, as well as the other, seems to be to show him what should take place hereafter. The former was an emblem of the affliction which his posterity should endure in Egypt, that "iron furnace" (Deut. iv. 20); and the latter might denote the light that should arise to them in their darkness. If, like the pillar of fire in the wilderness, it was an emblem of the Divine Majesty, its *passing through* the parts of the Divine sacrifices would denote God's entering into covenant with his servant Abram, and that all the mercy which should come upon his posterity would be in virtue of it.

Ver. 18. That which had been hinted under a figure is now declared in express language. "The same day Jehovah made a *covenant* with Abram;" making over to his posterity, as by a solemn deed or gift, the whole land in

* These four hundred years are reckoned by Ainsworth to have commenced from the time of Isaac's being weaned, when the son of Hagar the Egyptian mocked. So that as soon as Abram's seed, according to the promise, was born, he began to be *afflicted*, and that by one of *Egyptian* extraction.

which he then was, defining with great accuracy its exact boundaries; and this notwithstanding the afflictions which they should undergo in Egypt. Thus the burning lamp would succeed and dispel the darkness of the smoking furnace.

DISCOURSE XXIV.

SARAI'S CROOKED POLICY FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PROMISE

Gen. xvi.

VER. 1-3. We have had several renewals of promises to Abram; but as yet no performance of them. Ten years had elapsed in Canaan, and things remained as they were. Now though Abram's faith had been strengthened, yet that of Sarai fails. At her time of life, she thinks, there is no hope of seed in the ordinary way; if therefore the promise be fulfilled, it must be in the person of another. And having a handmaid whose name was Hagar, she thinks of giving her to Abram to wife. Unbelief is very prolific of schemes; and surely this of Sarai is as carnal, as foolish, and as fruitful of domestic misery as almost any that could have been devised. Yet such was the influence of evil counsel, especially from such a quarter, that "Abram hearkened to her voice." The father of mankind sinned by hearkening to his wife, and now the father of the faithful follows his example. How necessary for those who stand in the nearest relations to take heed of being snares, instead of helps, one to another! It was a double sin: first, of distrust; and, secondly, of deviation from the original law of marriage; and seems to have opened a door of polygamy. We never read of two wives before, except those of Lamech, who was of the descendants of Cain; but here the practice is coming into the church of God. Two out of three of the patriarchs go into it; yet neither of them of his own accord. There is no calculating in how many instances this ill example has been followed, or how great a matter this little fire kindled. The plea used by Sarai in this affair shows how easy it is to err by a misconstruction of providence, and following that as a rule of conduct, instead of God's revealed will. "The Lord," says she, "hath restrained me from bearing;" and therefore I must contrive other means for the fulfilment of the promise! But why not inquire of the Lord? As in the crowning of Adonijah, the proper authority was not consulted.

Ver. 4, 5. The consequence was what might have been expected: the young woman is elated with the honour done her, and her mistress is despised in her eyes. And now, when it is too late, Sarai repents, and complains to her husband; breaking out into intemperate language, accusing him as the cause, as though he must needs have secretly encouraged her: "My wrong be upon thee!" Nor did she stop here; but, taking it for granted that her husband would not hear her, goes on to appeal to God himself; "The Lord judge between me and thee!" Those who are first in doing wrong are often first in complaining of the effects, and in throwing the blame upon others. Loud and passionate appeals to God, instead of indicating a good cause, are commonly the marks of a bad one.

Ver. 6. Abram on this vexing occasion is meek and gentle. He had learned that a soft answer turneth away wrath; and therefore he refrained from upbraiding his wife, as he might easily have done; preferring domestic

peace to the vindication of himself, and the placing of the blame where it ought to have lain. It is doubtful, however, whether he did not yield too much in this case; for though, according to the custom of those times, Hagar was his wife only with respect to cohabitation, and without dividing the power with Sarai, yet she was entitled to protection, and should not have been given up to the will of one who on this occasion manifested nothing but jealousy, passion, and caprice. But he seems to have been brought into a situation wherein he was at a loss what to do; and thus, as Sarai is punished for tempting him, he also is punished with a disordered house for having yielded to the temptation. And now Sarai, incited by revenge, deals hardly with Hagar; much more so, it is likely, than she ought; for though the young woman might have acted vainly and sinfully, yet her mistress is far from being a proper judge of the punishment which she deserved. The consequence is, as might be expected, she leaves the family, and goes into a wilderness. Indeed it were "better to dwell in a wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman." But as Sarai and Abram had each reaped the fruits of their sin, Hagar, in her turn, reaps the fruit of hers. If creatures act disorderly, God will act orderly and justly in dealing with them.

Ver. 7, S. Hagar, however, though an Egyptian, shall reap advantage from her connexion with Abram's family. Other heathens might have brought themselves into trouble, and been left to grapple with it alone: but to her an angel from heaven is sent to afford direction and relief. Bending her course towards Egypt, her native country, and finding a spring of water in the wilderness, she sat down by it to refresh herself. While in this situation she hears a voice, saying, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence comest thou; and whither wilt thou go?" She would perceive, by this language, that she was known, and conclude that it was no common voice that spoke to her. He that spoke to her is called "the angel of the Lord;" yet he afterwards says, *I* will multiply thy seed exceedingly. It seems therefore not to have been a created angel, but the same Divine personage who frequently appeared to the fathers. In calling Hagar *Sarai's maid*, he seems tacitly to disallow of the marriage, and to lead her mind back to that humble character which she had formerly sustained. The questions put to her were close, but tender, and such as were fitly addressed to a person fleeing from trouble. The former might be answered, and was answered: "I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai." But with respect to the latter she is silent. We know our present grievances, and so can tell *whence we came*, much better than our future lot, or *whither we are going*. In many cases, if the truth were spoken, the answer would be from bad to worse. At present, this poor young woman seems to have been actuated by merely natural principles. In all her trouble there appears nothing like true religion, or committing her way to the Lord; yet she is sought out of him whom she sought not.

Ver. 9, 10. The counsel of God here was to return and submit. Wherefore? She had done wrong in despising her mistress, and must now be humbled for it. Hard as this might appear, it was the counsel of wisdom and mercy: a connexion with the people of God, with all their faults, is far preferable to the best of this world, where God is unknown. If we have done wrong, whatever temptations or provocations we may have met with, the only way to peace and happiness is to retrace our footsteps in repentance and submission. For her encouragement, she is given to expect a portion of Abram's blessing, of which she must have often heard; namely, a numerous offspring. And by the manner in which this was promised,—"*I* will multiply thy seed,"—she would perceive that the voice which spake to her was no other than that of Abram's God.

Ver. 11. With respect to the child of which she was then pregnant, it is

foretold that it should be a son, and that his name should be called *Ishmael*, or, *God shall hear*, from the circumstance of God having "heard her affliction." God is not said to have heard her prayer; for it does not appear that she had as yet ever called upon his name; she merely sat bewailing herself, as not knowing what would become of her. Yet, lo, the ear of mercy is open to affliction itself! The groans of the prisoner are heard of God: not only theirs who cry unto him, but, in many cases, theirs who do not.

Ver. 12. The child is also characterized as *a wild man*, a bold and daring character, living by his bow in the wilderness, and much engaged in war; his hand being, as it were, "against every man, and every man's hand against him;" yet that he should maintain his ground notwithstanding, "dwelling in the presence of all his brethren," and dying at last in peace. See chap. xxv. 17, 18. Nor was this prophecy merely intended to describe Ishmael, but his posterity. Bishop Newton, in his *Dissertations on the Prophecies*, has shown that such has been the character of the Arabians, who descended from him, in all ages; a wild and warlike people, who, under all the conquests of other nations by the great powers of the earth, remained unsubdued.

Ver. 13, 14. The effect of this Divine appearance on Hagar was to bring her to the knowledge and love of God; at least the account wears such an aspect. She who, for any thing that appears, had never prayed before, now addresses herself to the angel who spoke to her, and whom she considers as *Jehovah*, calling him by an endearing name, the meaning of which is, *Thou God seest me*. She did not mean by this to acknowledge his omniscience, so much as his mercy, in having *beheld* and pitied her affliction. On his withdrawing, she seems to have *looked after him*, with faith, and hope, and affectionate desire; and, reflecting upon what had passed, is overcome with the goodness of God towards her, exclaiming, "Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" It was great mercy for God to have *looked* on her, and heard her afflictive moans; but it was greater to draw her heart to *look after him*; and greater still that he should do it *here*, in the wilderness, when she had lived so many years where prayer was wont to be made in vain. Under the influence of these impressions, she calls the well by which she sat down *Beer-lahai-roi*, a name which would serve as a memorial of the mercy. Let this well, as if she had said, be called Jehovah's well, *the well of him that liveth and seeth me!* Thus God, in mercy, sets that right which, through human folly, had been thrown into disorder. Hagar returns and submits; bears Abram a son when he is fourscore and six years old; and Abram, on being informed of the prophecy which went before, called his name Ishmael.

DISCOURSE XXV.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM AND HIS SEED.

Gen. xvii.

THIRTEEN years elapse, of which nothing is recorded. Hagar is submissive to Sarai, and Ishmael is growing up; but as to Abram, things after all wear a doubtful aspect. It is true, God hath given him a son; but no intimations of his being the son of promise. No Divine congratulations attend his birth; but, on the contrary, Jehovah, who had been used to manifest himself with frequency and freedom, now seems to carry it reservedly to his servant. It is something *like* the thing which he had believed in; but not *the thing*

itself. He has seen, as it were, a wind, a fire, and an earthquake; but the Lord is not in them.

Ver. 1. After this, when he was ninety-nine years old, the Lord again appeared to him, and reminded him of a truth which he needed to have reïmpressed; namely, his *almighty power*. It was for want of considering this that he had had recourse to crooked devices in order to accomplish the promise. This truth is followed by an admonition—"Walk before me, and be thou perfect;" which admonition implies a serious reproof. It was like saying, "Have recourse no more to unbelieving expedients; keep thou the path of uprightness, and leave me to fulfil my promise in the time and manner that seem good to me!" What a lesson is here afforded us, never to use unlawful means under the pretence of being more useful, or promoting the cause of God! Our concern is to walk before him, and be upright, leaving him to bring to pass his own designs in his own way.

Ver. 2, 3. Abram having been admonished, the promise is renewed to him; and, the time drawing near in which the seed should be born, the Lord declares his mind to make a solemn *covenant* with him, and to multiply him exceedingly. Such language denotes great kindness and condescension, with large designs of mercy. Abram was so much affected with it as to *fall on his face*, and in that posture "the Lord talked with him."

Ver. 4-6. It is observable that the last time in which mention is made of a covenant with Abram (chap. xv. 18) God made over to his posterity the land of Canaan for a possession; but the design of this is more extensive, dwelling more particularly on their being *multiplied* and *blessed*. The very idea of a covenant is expressive of peace and good will; and, in this and some other instances, it is not confined to the party, but extends to others for his sake. Thus, as we have seen, God made a covenant of peace, which included the preservation of the world; but it was with one man, even Noah, and the world was preserved for his sake. And the covenant in question is one that shall involve great blessings to the world in all future ages; yet it is not made with the world, but with Abram. God will give them blessings, but it shall be through him. Surely these things were designed to familiarize the great principle on which our salvation should rest. It was the purpose of God to save perishing sinners; yet his covenant is not originally with them, but with Christ. With him it stands fast; and for his sake they are accepted and blessed. Even the blessedness of Abram himself, and all the rewards conferred on him, were for his sake. He was justified, as we have seen, not by his own righteousness, but by faith in the promised Messiah.

Moreover, a covenant being a solemn agreement, and indicating a design to walk together in amity, it was proper there should be an understanding, as we should say, between the parties. When Israel came to have a king, "Samuel told them the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord." Thus, as Abram is about to commence the father of a family, who were to be God's chosen people, it was fit at the outset that he should not only be encouraged by promises, but directed how he and his descendants should conduct themselves.

The first promise in this covenant is, that he shall be "the father of many nations;" and, as a token of it, his name in future is to be called ABRAHAM. He had the name of a *high*, or eminent, *father*, from the beginning; but now it shall be more comprehensive, indicating a very large progeny. By the exposition given of this promise in the New Testament (Rom. iv. 16, 17) we are directed to understand it, not only of those who sprang from Abram's body, though these were many nations; but also of all that should be of the FAITH of Abraham. It went to make him the father of the church of God in all future ages; or, as the apostle calls him, "the heir of the

world." In this view he is the father of many, even of *a multitude of nations*. For all that the Christian world enjoys, or ever will enjoy, it is indebted to Abraham and his seed. A high honour this, to be the father of the faithful, the stock from which the Messiah should spring, and on which the church of God should grow. It was this honour that Esau despised, when he sold his birth-right; and here lay the *profaneness* of that act, which involved a contempt of the most sacred of all objects—the Messiah, and his everlasting kingdom!

Ver. 7–14. The covenant with Abraham, as has been observed already, was not confined to his own person, but extended to his posterity after him in their generations. To ascertain the meaning of this promise, we can proceed on no ground more certain than fact. It is fact that God in succeeding ages took the seed of Abraham to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all other nations; not only giving them "the land of Canaan for a possession," but himself to be *their God, King, or temporal Governor*. Nor was this all: it was among them that he set up his *spiritual* kingdom; giving them his lively oracles, sending to them his prophets, and establishing among them his holy worship; which great advantages were, for many ages, in a manner confined to them; and, what was still more, the great body of those who were eternally saved, previously to the coming of Christ, were saved from among them. These things, taken together, were an immensely greater favour than if they had all been literally made kings and priests. Such then being the *facts*, it is natural to suppose that such was the meaning of the promise.*

* As an Antipædobaptist, I see no necessity for denying that spiritual blessings were promised, *in this general way*, to the natural seed of Abraham; nor can it I think be fairly denied. The Lord engaged to do that which he actually did; namely, to take out of them, rather than other nations, a people for himself. This, I suppose, is the *seed* promised to Abraham, to which the apostle refers when he says, "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the *SEED*," Rom. ix. 8. By "the children of the promise" he did not mean the elect in general, composed of Jews and Gentiles, but the elect from among the Jews. Hence he reckons himself "an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, and the tribe of Benjamin," as a living proof that "God had not cast away his people whom he foreknew," Rom. xi. 1, 2.

But I perceive not how it follows hence that God has promised to take a people from among the natural descendants of believers, in distinction from others. What was promised to Abraham was neither promised nor fulfilled to every good man. Of the posterity of his kinsman, Lot, nothing good is recorded. It is true the labours of those parents who bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" are ordinarily blessed to the conversion of some of them; and the same may be said of the labours of faithful ministers, wherever Providence stations them.—But, as it does not follow in the one case that the graceless inhabitants are more in covenant with God than those of other places, neither does it follow in the other that the graceless offspring of believers are more in covenant with God than those of unbelievers. "New Testament saints have nothing more to do with the Abrahamic covenant than the Old Testament believers who lived prior to Abraham."

I am aware that the words of the apostle, in Gal. iii. 14, "The blessing of Abraham is come on the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ," are alleged in proof of the contrary. But the meaning of that passage, I conceive, is not that through Jesus Christ every believer becomes an Abraham, a *father* of the faithful; but that he is reckoned among his *children*: not a *stock*, on which the future church should grow; but a *branch*, partaking of the root and fatness of the olive tree. So, at least, the context appears to explain it: "They which are of faith are the *children* of faithful Abraham," ver. 7.

But if it were granted that the blessing of Abraham is so come on the believing Gentiles as not only to render them blessed as his spiritual children, but to insure a people for God from among their natural posterity rather than from those of others, yet it is not as their natural posterity that they are individually entitled to any one spiritual blessing; for this is more than was true of the natural seed of Abraham. Nor do I see how it follows hence that we are warranted to baptize them in their infancy. Abraham, it is true, was commanded to circumcise his male children; and if we had been commanded to baptize our males, or females, or both, or any example of the kind had been left in the New Testament, we should be as much obliged to comply in the one case as he was in the other. But we do not think ourselves warranted to reason from circumcision to baptism; from the circumcision of males to the baptism of males and females; and from the circumcision of the

As a sign or token of this solemn covenant with Abraham and his posterity, "every man child among them" was required to be "circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin;" and not only their own children, but those of their "servants born in their house, or bought with their money." This ordinance was the mark by which they were distinguished as a people in covenant with Jehovah, and which bound them by a special obligation to obey him. Like almost all other positive institutions, it was also prefigurative of mental purity, or "putting off the body of the sins of the flesh." A neglect of it subjected the party to a being cut off from his people, as having broken God's covenant.

Ver. 15, 16. As Abram's name had been changed to Abraham, a similar honour is conferred on Sarai, who in future is to be called *Sarah*. The difference of these names is much the same as those of her husband, and corresponds with what had been promised them both on this occasion. The former meant, *My princess*, and was expressive of *high* honour in her own family; but the latter, *A princess*, and denoted more *extensive* honour, as it is here expressed, "A mother of nations." This honour conferred on Sarai would correct an important error into which both she and her husband had fallen; imagining that all hope was at an end of a child being born of her, and therefore that if the promise were fulfilled, it must be in Ishmael. But not only must Abram become Abraham, "the father of many nations;" but Sarai Sarah, "the mother of many nations;" and this not by her handmaid, as she had vainly imagined; but God would give him a son also "of her," and kings of people should be "of her."

Ver. 17, 18. The effect of this unexpected promise on Abraham was that he "fell on his face and laughed." The term does not here indicate lightness, as we commonly use it; but joy, mingled with wonder and astonishment. "Shall a child be born," saith he, "unto him that is a hundred years old? and Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" In another case, (chap. xviii. 12, 13,) laughter implied a mixture of doubting; but not in this. Abraham believed God, and was overcome with joyful surprise. But a doubt immediately occurs which strikes a damp upon his pleasure: The promise of another son destroys all my expectations with respect to him who is already given! Perhaps he must die to make room for the other, or if not, he may be another Cain, who went out from the presence of the Lord. To what drawbacks are our best enjoyments subject in this world; and, in many cases, owing to our going before the Lord in our hopes and schemes of happiness! When his plan comes to be put in execution, it interferes with ours, and there can be no doubt, in such a case, which must give place. If Abraham had waited God's time for the fulfilment of the promise, it would not have been accompanied with such an alloy; but having failed in this, after all his longing desires after it, it becomes in a manner unwelcome to him! What can he do or say in so delicate a situation? Grace would say, Accept the Divine promise with thankfulness. But nature struggles: the bowels of the father are troubled for Ishmael. In this state of mind he presumes to offer up a petition to Heaven: "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!" Judging of the import of this petition by the answer, it would seem to mean, either that God would condescend to withdraw his promise of another son, and let Ishmael be the person, or if that could not

children of a nation, (the greater part of whom were unbelievers,) and of "servants born in the house, or bought with money," to the baptism of the children of believers. In short, we do not think ourselves warranted, in matters of positive institution, to found our practice on analogies, whether real or supposed; and still less on one so circuitous, dissonant, and uncertain as that in question. Our duty, we conceive, is, in such cases, to follow the precepts and examples of the dispensation under which we live.

be, that his life might be spared, and himself and his posterity be among the people of God, sharing the blessing, or being *heir with him* who should be born of Sarah. To *live*, and to live *before God*, according to the usual acceptation of the phrase, could not, I think, mean less than one or the other of these things. It was very lawful for him to desire the temporal and spiritual welfare of his son, and of his posterity after him, in submission to the will of God; but in a case wherein natural affection appeared to clash with God's revealed designs, he must have felt himself in a painful situation; and the recollection that the whole was owing to his own and Sarah's unbelief would add to his regret.

Ver. 19-27. As Abraham's petition seemed to contain an implied wish that it would please God to withdraw his promise of another son, the answer to it contains an implied but peremptory denial, with a tacit reflection on him for having taken Hagar to be his wife: "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son *indeed*." As if he should say, She is thy wife, and ought to have been thine only wife, and verily it shall be in a son born of her that the promise shall be fulfilled.—It is also intimated to him that this should be no grief to him; but that he should call his name Isaac, that is, *laughter* or *gladness*, on account of the joy his birth should occasion. And as Abraham's petition seemed to plead that Ishmael and his posterity might at least be *heir with Isaac*, so as to be ranked among God's covenant people, this also by implication is denied him. "I will establish my covenant *with him* for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." Ishmael, while he is in Abraham's family, shall be considered as a branch of it, and as such be circumcised; but the covenant of peculiarity should not be established with him and his descendants, but with Isaac exclusively. As many, however, who were included in this covenant had no share of eternal life, so many who were excluded from it might, notwithstanding, escape eternal death. The door of mercy was always open to every one that believed. In every nation, and in every age, he that feared God and wrought righteousness was accepted of him.

But shall no part of this petition be granted? Yes. "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee; Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation . . . but my covenant will I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear unto thee." And having said thus much, the very time of his birth is now particularly named; it shall be "at this set time in the next year." Here ended the communications of this kind between the Lord and his servant Abraham; and it appears that from this time he was satisfied. We hear nothing more like an objection to the Divine will, nor any wish to have things otherwise than they were. On the contrary, we find him immediately engaged in an implicit obedience to the command of circumcision. His conduct on this occasion furnishes a bright example to all succeeding ages of the manner in which Divine ordinances should be complied with. There are three things in particular in the obedience of Abraham worthy of notice. 1. It was *prompt*. "In the self-same day that God had spoken unto him" the command was put in execution. This was "making haste, and delaying not to keep his commandments." To treat the Divine precepts as matters of small importance, or to put off what is manifestly our duty to another time, is to trifle with supreme authority. So did not Abraham. 2. It was *punctilious*. The correspondence between the command of God and the obedience of his servant is minutely exact. The words of the former are, "*Thou shalt keep my covenant, and thy seed after thee . . . and he that is born in thy house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.*" With this agrees the account of

the latter: "In the self-same day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son; and all the men of his house, born in the house and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him." A rigid regard to the revealed will of God enters deeply into true religion; that spirit which dispenses with it, though it may pass under the specious name of liberality, is antichristian. 3. It was yielded in *old age*, when many would have pleaded off from engaging in any thing new, or different from what they had before received; and when, as some think, it would be a further trial to his faith as to the fulfilment of the promise. "Ninety and nine years old was Abraham when he was circumcised." It is one of the temptations of old age to be tenacious of what we have believed and practised from our youth; to shut our eyes and ears against every thing that may prove it to have been erroneous or defective, and to find excuses for being exempted from hard and dangerous duties. But Abraham to the last was ready to receive further instruction, and to do as he was commanded, leaving consequences with God. This shows that the admonition to "walk before him, and be perfect," had not been given him in vain.

DISCOURSE XXVI.

ABRAHAM ENTERTAINING ANGELS, AND INTERCEDING FOR SODOM.

Gen. xviii.

VER. 1-3. The time drawing nigh that the promise should be fulfilled, God's appearances to Abraham are frequently repeated. That which is here recorded seems to have followed the last at a very little distance. Sitting one day in a kind of porch, at his tent door, which screened him from the heat of the sun, "he lift up his eyes, and lo, three men" stood at a little distance from him. To him they appeared to be three strangers on a journey, and as such he treated them. His conduct on this occasion is held up in the Epistle to the Hebrews as an example of *hospitality*; and an admirable example it affords. His generosity on this occasion is not more conspicuous than the amiable manner in which it was expressed. The instant he saw them he rises up, as by a kind of instinctive courtesy, to bid them welcome to his tent, and that in the most respectful manner. Though an old man, and they perfect strangers to him, he no sooner saw them than he "ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground;" and observing one of them, as it should seem, presenting himself to him before the other, he said to him, "My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant."

Ver. 4, 5. And whereas they were supposed to be weary, and overcome with the heat, he persuades them to wash their feet, and sit down under the shade of the spreading oak near his tent, and take a little refreshment, though it were but a morsel of bread, to comfort their hearts; after which they might go forward on their journey. Something may be said of the customs of those times and countries, and of there being then but few, if any, inns for the accommodation of strangers; but it certainly affords a charming specimen of patriarchal urbanity, and an example of the manner in which kindness and hospitality should be shown. To impart relief in an ungracious and churlish manner destroys the value of it. We see also in this conduct the genuine fruits of true religion. That which in worldly

men is mere complaisance, dictated often by ambition, in Abraham was kindness, goodness, sympathy, and humbleness of mind. It is to the honour of religion that it produces those amiable dispositions which the worst of men are constrained, for their own reputation, to imitate. If such dispositions and such behaviour were universal, the world would be a paradise.

Ver. 6-8. The supposed strangers having consented to accept the invitation, the good old man, as full of pleasure as if he had found a prize, resolves to entertain them with something better than "a morsel of bread," though he had modestly used that language. Hastening to Sarah, he desires her to get three measures of fine meal, and bake cakes upon the hearth; while he, old as he was, runs to the herd, and fetches a calf, tender and good, and gives it to one of his young men, with orders to kill and dress it immediately. And now, the table being spread beneath the cooling shade of the oak, the veal, with butter and milk to render it more palatable, is placed upon it, and Abraham himself waits on his guests. Such was the style of patriarchal simplicity and hospitality. As yet Abraham does not appear to have suspected what kind of guests he was entertaining. He might probably be struck from the first with their mien and appearance, which seem to have excited his highest respect; yet he considered them merely as strangers, and as such entertained them. It was thus that he "entertained angels unawares."

Ver. 9, 10. But while they sat at dinner under the tree, inquiry was made after Sarah his wife. Abraham answered, "Behold, she is in the tent." This inquiry must excite some surprise; for how should these strangers know the name of Abraham's wife, and her new name too; and why should they inquire after her? But if the inquiry must strike Abraham with surprise, what followed must have a still greater effect. He who was the first in the train on their arrival, and whom he had addressed in terms of the highest respect, now adds, "I will certainly return unto thee, according to the time of life, and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." This language must remind him of the promise which he had so lately received, and convince him that the speaker was no other than Jehovah, under the appearance of a man. In the progress of the Old Testament history we often read of similar appearances; particularly to Jacob at Peniel, to Moses at the bush, and to Joshua by Jericho. The Divine personage who in this manner appeared to men must surely have been no other than the Son of God, who thus occasionally assumed the form of that nature which it was his intention, in the fulness of time, actually to take upon him. It was thus that, "being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God;" that is, he spake and acted all along *as God*, and did not consider himself in so doing as arrogating any thing which did not properly belong to him.

Ver. 11-15. Sarah having overheard what was said concerning her, and knowing that according to the ordinary course of things she was too old to have a son, laughed within herself at the saying. She supposed, however, that as it was to herself the whole was unknown; but it was not. The same word is used as was before used of Abraham, but it was not the same thing. His laughter was that of joy and surprise; hers had in it a mixture of unbelief, which called forth the reproof of Jehovah. "Jehovah," the same personage who is elsewhere called an angel and a man, "said unto Abraham," in the hearing of his wife, "Wherefore did Sarah laugh?" And to detect the sinfulness of this laughter, he points out the principle of it—it was saying, "Shall I of a surety bear a child, who am old?" which principle he silences by asking, "Is any thing too hard for Jehovah?" And then he solemnly repeats the promise, as that which ought to suffice: "At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah

shall have a son." This language, while it proved that he who uttered it was a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, covered Sarah's face with confusion. In her fright, she denies having laughed; but the denial was in vain. He who knew all things replied, "Nay, but thou didst laugh." We may imagine that what merely passes in our own minds has in a manner no existence, and may almost persuade ourselves to think we are innocent; but in the presence of God all such subterfuges are no better than the fig-leaves of our first parents. When he judgeth, he will overcome.

Ver. 16-19. *The men*, as they are called, according to their appearance, now take leave of the tent, and go on their way towards Sodom. Abraham, loth to part with them, went in company, as if to bring them on their way. While they were walking together, Jehovah, in the form of a man, said unto the other two, (who appear to have been created angels,) "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do?" Two reasons are assigned for the contrary. First, The importance of his character. He was not only the friend of God, but the father of "a great nation," in which God would have a special interest, and through which *all other nations should be blessed*. Let him be in the secret. Secondly, The good use he would make of it. Being previously disclosed to him, he would be the more deeply impressed by it; and, according to his tried and approved conduct as the head of a family, would be concerned to impart it as a warning to his posterity in all future ages. As the wicked extract ill from good, so the righteous will extract good from ill. Sodom's destruction shall turn to Abraham's salvation; the monument of just vengeance against their crimes shall be of perpetual use to him and his posterity, and contribute even to the *bringing of that good upon them which the Lord had spoken concerning them*. The special approbation with which God here speaks of family religion stamps a Divine authority upon it, and an infamy upon that religion, or rather irreligion, which dispenses with it.

Ver. 20, 21. JEHOVAH, having resolved to communicate his design to Abraham, proceeds to inform him as follows: "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." This language, though spoken after the manner of men, contains much serious and important instruction. It teaches us that the most abandoned people are still the subjects of Divine government, and must sooner or later give an account; that impiety, sensuality, and injustice are followed with a *cry* for retribution; that this cry is often disregarded by earthly tribunals; that where it is so, the prayers of the faithful, the groans of the oppressed, and the blood of the slain, constitute a cry which ascendeth to heaven, and entereth into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth; and finally, that in executing judgment, though God will regard these cries, especially where they wax greater and greater, as this is afterward said to have done; yet, as they may be partial and erroneous, he will not proceed by them as a rule, but will avail himself of his own omniscience, that the worst of characters may have no cause to complain of injustice.

Ver. 22-33. It is natural to suppose that the mind of Abraham must be forcibly impressed with this intimation. He would feel for his poor ungodly neighbours; but especially for Lot, and other righteous men whom he might hope would be found among them. At this juncture *the men*, that is, two out of the three, (chap. xix. 1,) went towards Sodom; but the third, who is called *Jehovah*, continued to converse with Abraham. The patriarch standing before him, and being now aware that he was in the presence of the Most High, addressed him in the language of prayer, or intercession. A

remarkable intercession it is. We remark, 1. Abraham makes a good use of his previous knowledge. Being made acquainted with the evil coming upon them, he stands in the gap, and labours all he can to avert it. They knew nothing; and if they had, no cries, except the shrieks of desperation, would have been heard from them. It is good to have such a neighbour as Abraham; and still better to have an Intercessor before the throne who is always heard. The conduct of the patriarch furnishes an example to all who have an interest at the throne of grace, to make use of it on behalf of their poor ungodly countrymen and neighbours. 2. He does not plead that the wicked may be spared for their own sake, or because it would be too severe a proceeding to destroy them; but *for the sake of the righteous who might be found among them*. Had either of the other pleas been advanced, it had been siding with sinners against God, which Abraham would never do. Wickedness shuts the mouth of intercession; or if any should presume to speak, it would be of no account. Though Noah, Daniel, and Job should plead for the ungodly, they would not be heard. Righteousness only will bear to be made a plea before God. But how then, it may be asked, did Christ make intercession for *transgressors*? Not by arraigning the Divine law, nor by alleging aught in extenuation of human guilt; but by pleading his own obedience unto death. 3. He charitably hopes the best with respect to the number of righteous characters even in Sodom. At the outset of his intercession, he certainly considered it as a possible case, at least, that there might be found in that wicked place fifty righteous; and though in this instance he was sadly mistaken, yet we may hope hence that in those times there were many more righteous people in the world than those which are recorded in Scripture. The Scriptures do not profess to be a book of life, containing the names of all the faithful; but intimate, on the contrary, that God *reserves* to himself a people, who are but little known even by his own servants. 4. God was willing to spare the worst of cities for the sake of a few righteous characters. This truth is as humiliating to the haughty enemies of religion as it is encouraging to its friends; and furnishes an important lesson to civil governments, to beware of undervaluing, and still more of persecuting and banishing, men whose concern it is to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world.* Except the Lord of hosts had left *us* a remnant of such characters, we might ere now have been as Sodom, and made like unto Gomorrah! If ten righteous men had been found in Sodom, it had been spared for their sakes; but, alas, there is no such number! God called Abraham to Haran, and when he left that place, mention is made, not only of "the substance which he had gathered," but of "the souls which he had gotten." But Lot, who went to Sodom of his own accord, though he also gathered substance, yet seems not, by his residence in the place, to have won a single soul to the worship of the true God.

* Chap. vi. 11

DISCOURSE XXVII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

Gen. xix.

VER. 1, 2. The two angels who left Abraham communing with Jehovah went on their way till they came to Sodom. Arriving at the city in the evening, the first person whom they saw appears to have been Lot, who was sitting alone, it should seem, at the gate of the city. They had found Abraham also sitting alone, but it was at his own tent door. Lot, whose house was in the city, had probably no place where he could be out of the hearing of those whose conversation vexed his righteous soul: he therefore took a walk in the evening, and sat down without the city gate, where he might spend an hour in retirement. Seeing two strangers coming up to him, he behaved in much the same courteous and hospitable manner as Abraham had done. Bowing himself with his face toward the ground, he said, "Behold now, my lords; turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways." This was lovely; and the contrast between this and the conduct of his neighbours shows, what was suggested in the former chapter, the genuine fruits of true religion. What is said to be the customary hospitality of the age and country was far from being practised by the other inhabitants of Sodom. But though Lot had given them so kind an invitation, they seem determined not to accept of it—"Nay," say they, "but we will abide in the street all night." This might be either for the purpose of being eye-witnesses of the conduct of the citizens, or to express their abhorrence of the general character of the city; as when the prophet of Judah was sent to Beth-el, he was forbidden either "to eat bread or drink water in that place," 1 Kings xiii. 8-17.

Ver. 3. After being *greatly pressed*, however, by Lot, they yielded to his importunity, and entered into his house; where he made them a feast, as Abraham had done, and they did eat.

Ver. 4, 5. But while things were going on well with respect to Lot, the baseness of his neighbours soon betrayed itself. A little before bed-time they beset the house; not for the purpose of robbing, or insulting them in any of the ordinary ways of brutal outrage—this had been bad enough, especially to strangers—but to perpetrate a species of crime too shocking and detestable to be named; a species of crime which indeed has no name given it in the Scriptures but what is borrowed from this infamous place.

Ver. 6-9. The conduct of Lot, in going out and expostulating with them, was in several respects praiseworthy. His shutting the door after him expressed how delicately he felt for his guests, though at present he does not appear to have considered them in any other light than that of strangers. It was saying, in effect, Let not their ears be offended with what passes abroad; whatever is scurrilous, obscene, or abusive, let me hear it, but not them.—His gentle and respectful manner of treating this worst of mobs is also worthy of notice. He could not respect them on the score of character; but he would try and do so, as being still his fellow creatures and near neighbours. As such he calls them *brethren*, no doubt hoping, by such conciliating language, to dissuade them from their *wicked* purpose. But when, to turn off their attention from his guests, he proposes the bringing out of his daughters to them, he appears to have gone too far. It is not for

us to go into a less evil, in the hope of preventing a greater; but rather to consent to no evil. It might be owing to the perturbation of his mind; but probably, if he had not lived in Sodom till his mind was almost familiarized to obscenity, he would not have made such a proposal. Nor had it any good effect. He only got himself more abused for it; and even his gentle remonstrance was perversely construed into obtrusive forwardness, and setting himself up for a judge, who was merely *a sojourner* among them. Persuasion has no force with men who are under the dominion of their lusts. So now their resentment burns against him, and they will be revenged on him. They will not be contented now with having the men brought out, but will go in unto them, and break the door open, to effect their purpose.

Ver. 10, 11. Such an attempt, and such a perseverance in it, must have been proof sufficient to the heavenly messengers that the cry of Sodom had not exceeded the truth. Putting forth their hands, therefore, they pulled Lot into the house to them, shut to the door, and smote the people without with blindness. The power and indignation displayed in these acts would convince him that they were no common strangers; and, one would have thought, might have struck them with awe, and caused them to desist from their horrid purpose: but they are infatuated. Though supernaturally smitten with blindness, they must still "weary themselves to find the door." Such daring presumption, in the face of Heaven, must have filled up the measure of their crimes, and rendered them ripe for destruction.

Ver. 12, 13. Things are now hastening to their awful crisis; but mark the mercy of Divine proceedings. Ten righteous men would have saved the city; but there seems to have been only one. Well, not only shall that one escape, but all that belong to him shall be delivered for his sake; or, if otherwise, it shall be their own fault. Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or whatever he had, are directed to be brought out of this place; for, said they, as it were opening their commission and reading it to Lot, "We will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of Jehovah, and Jehovah hath sent us to destroy it."

Ver. 14. Giving full credit to the Divine threatening, and being deeply impressed with it, Lot went forth to warn his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters. We do not read till now that Lot had a family. It looks as if he had taken his wife from Sodom, soon after he had parted from Abraham; and as he must have been there about twenty years, he had daughters, some of whom were married, and two remained with him single. No mention is made of his married daughters being alive at this time; but by the manner in which the others are spoken of, in verse 15, "Thy two daughters which are *HERE*," it is probable *they were elsewhere*; viz. along with their husbands, and perished with them in the overthrow. The warning given to his sons-in-law was abrupt and pointed? "Up, get ye out of this place; for Jehovah will destroy this city! But he seemed to them as one that mocked," or who was in jest. He believed, and therefore spake; but they disbelieved, and therefore made light of it. A striking example this of the ordinary effect of truth upon the minds of unbelievers.

Ver. 15, 16. All this had taken place in one night. Early in the morning, Lot is hastened away from the devoted spot. And as his sons-in-law, and it seems their wives with them, would not hear, he is commanded to leave them; and, without further delay, to take his wife, and his two daughters who were with him, lest he should be consumed in the overthrow of the city. The threatening part of this language would probably not have been addressed to him, had he not discovered a reluctance to depart. I hope it was not his worldly substance that clave to him, much less any attachment to that wicked city; but rather that it was his daughters and their husbands,

who could not be persuaded to accompany him, that occasioned this strong conflict. It was on this account, I suppose, that he is said to have *lingered*; and his deliverers were at last obliged to lay hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters, and (Jehovah being merciful unto him) by force, in a manner, to set them without the city. Such has been the struggle in many minds, when called to leave all and flee from the wrath to come; and such the mercy of God towards them.

Ver. 17. Having been so far saved, almost in spite of himself, he is now solemnly charged to "escape for his life," not so much as to look behind him, nor stay in all the plain; but to "escape to the mountain," lest he should be "consumed." This was continuing to be mercifully severe; and such are our Lord's commands which require us to deny self, take up the cross, and follow him. It was better for Lot to be thus warned off the ground, than to be consumed upon it; and we had better cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye, than be cast into hell.

Ver. 18-22. Lot was certainly a righteous man; but in times of trial his graces do not appear to the best advantage. He is directed to flee to the mountain, and he had better have been there all his days than where he was; but he pleads hard to live in a city, and hopes he may be excused in this desire, seeing it was "a little one." Had he properly confided in God, he would have gone to the mountain without hesitation; but his faith is weak, and his fears prevail, that if he go thither "some evil will take him, and he shall die." This his imbecility, however, is graciously passed over; his request is granted, and the city spared for his sake. Nor was this all. The angel kindly hastens his escape to this city, formally called Bela, but henceforward Zoar, that is, *little*; for that he could do nothing till he should have come thither. All this was merciful, very merciful; and proves not only that the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, but also that their blood is precious in his sight.

Ver. 23-25. By the time that Lot entered into Zoar, the sun had risen upon the earth. It promised perhaps to be a fine day; and the inhabitants of Sodom, after their night's revel, would be going forth to do as at other times. But lo, on a sudden, floods of fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven descend upon this and the neighbouring city of Gomorrah, utterly consuming them, and all their inhabitants! Some have supposed this tremendous judgment to have been effected by a volcanic eruption in the neighbourhood, the lava of which, first ascending high into the atmosphere, and then descending upon the devoted cities, destroyed them. If so it were, God's hand was in it, directing and timing its operations, no less than if it were accomplished without the interference of any second cause.

Ver. 26. The Lord delivered just Lot; and his whole family, as we have seen, had much mercy shown them for his sake. But favour may be shown to the wicked, yet will they not learn righteousness. Some refused to go with him, and those that did go proved to him a grief and a snare. His wife is said to have "looked back from behind him" during their journey, and was instantly struck dead, and remained upon the spot a petrified monument of Divine vengeance. It may be thought a hard fate for a mere glance of the eye; but that glance, no doubt, was expressive of unbelief, and a lingering desire to return. Probably she was of much the same mind as her sons-in-law, and attributed the whole to the resentment of the strangers, whom her husband was weak enough to believe. It is certain that her example is held up by our Lord as a warning against "turning back," which intimates that such was the meaning of her look.

Ver. 27-29. Abraham having made intercession, though the issue of it gave him but little hope of success, yet is anxious to see what will be the end of

these things. Unable, it seems, to rest in his bed, he arose early the next morning, and went to the place where he had stood before the Lord. From having a view of the plain, he beheld, and lo the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. He had not mentioned Lot by name, in his intercession, though doubtless it had respect to him; and the Lord so far hearkened to his prayer as to deliver that good man in answer to it. Lot could not pray for himself, for he was not aware of his danger till it in a manner came upon him. What a mercy it is to have an Intercessor who knows all the evils which are coming upon us, and prays for us that our strength fail not! But to return to Lot—

Ver. 30. On leaving Sodom he was very earnest to have Zoar granted him for a refuge, and to be excused from going to dwell in the mountain; yet now, all on a sudden, he went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain; and that for the very reason which he had given for a contrary choice. Then he feared some evil would take him if he went to the mountain; now he “fears to dwell in Zoar.” It is well to know that the way of man is not in himself, and that it is not in man to direct his steps. Our wisdom is to refer all to God, and to follow wherever his word and providence lead the way. But why did not Lot return to Abraham? There was no occasion now for strife about their herds; for he had lost all, and but just escaped with his life. Whatever was the reason, he does not appear to have made a good choice. Had he gone to the mountain when directed, he might have hoped for preserving mercy; but going of his own accord, and from a motive of sinful distrust, evil in reality overtakes him. His daughters, who seem to have contracted such habits in Sodom as would prepare them for any thing, however unnatural, draw him into intemperance and incest, and thus cover his old age with infamy. The offspring of this illicit intercourse were the fathers of two great but heathen nations, viz. the Moabites and the children of Ammon.

The dishonourable end of this good man shows that we are never out of danger while we are upon earth. He whose righteous soul was grieved with the filthy conversation of the wicked while in a city, is drawn into the same kind of evils himself when dwelling in a cave! His whole history also, from the time of his leaving Abraham, furnishes an affecting lesson to the heads of families in the choice of habitations for themselves or their children. If worldly accommodations be preferred to religious advantages, we have nothing good to expect, but every thing evil. We may, or we may not, lose our substance as he did; but, what is of far greater consequence, our families may be expected to become mere heathens, and our own minds be contaminated with the examples which are continually before our eyes. Such was the harvest which Lot reaped from his well-watered plain; and such are the fruits very commonly seen in the experience of those that follow his example!

DISCOURSE XXVIII.

ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH.

Gen. xx.

VER. 1. After the affecting story of Lot, we return to Abraham. When he and his kinsman parted, he pitched his tent in the plains of Mamre, and appears to have continued there nearly twenty years. At length he removes again, journeying southward, and taking up his residence for a time at Gerar, which was then a royal city of the Philistines.

VER. 2. And here we find him a second time saying of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." His sin in so speaking seems to be much greater than it was before. For, 1. He had narrowly escaped the first time. If God had not remarkably interposed in his favour, there is no saying what would have been the consequence. The repetition of the same fault looked like presuming upon providence. 2. Sarah was now pregnant, and that of a son of promise; he might therefore surely have trusted God to preserve their lives in the straight-forward path of duty, instead of having recourse to his own crooked policy. But he did not. There are exceptions in every human character, and often in the very thing wherein they in general excel. The consequence was, Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent and took her, probably by force, to be one of his wives. We should have thought that the age of Sarah might have exempted both her and her husband from this temptation; but human life was then much longer than it is now; and she was a beautiful woman, and we may suppose carried her years better than many. Be that as it may, she is involved in a difficulty from which she cannot get clear, nor can Abraham tell how to deliver her. It has been observed, that when wicked men deviate from truth, they will very commonly get through with it; but if a good man think to do so, he will as commonly find himself mistaken. If once he leave the path of rectitude, he is entangled, and presently betrays himself. The crooked devices of the flesh are things in which he is not sufficiently an adept, and conscience will often prevent his going through with them. God also will generally so order things that he shall be detected, and put to shame at an early stage, and that in mercy to his soul; while sinners are left to go on in their evil courses with success.

VER. 3-7. Man's wisdom leads him into a pit, and God's wisdom must draw him out. God has access to all men's minds, and can impress them by a dream, an affliction, or in any way he thinks proper. He did thus by Abimelech. Dreams, in general, are mere vanity, the excursions of imagination, unaccompanied with reason; yet these are under the control of God, and have, in many instances, been the medium of impressing things of great importance on the mind. Abimelech dreamed that he heard the voice of the Almighty, saying unto him, "Behold, thou art a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken, for she is a man's wife." Whether Abimelech was an idolater I know not: but this I know, that if, in countries called Christian, every adulterer were "a dead man," many would be numbered with the dead who now glory in their shame. And though human laws may wink at this crime, it is no less heinous in the sight of God than when it is punished with death. Abimelech, conscious that he had not come near the woman, answered in his dream, "Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? And she, even she herself, said, He is my brother. In the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have

I done this." The first sentence in this answer appears to contain a reference to the recent and awful event of Sodom's overthrow, which must have greatly impressed the surrounding country. It is as if he had said, I am aware that thou hast slain a nation notorious for its filthy and unnatural crimes; but we are not such a nation; and in the present case all that has been done was in perfect ignorance. Surely thou wilt not slay the innocent.—The answer of God admits his plea of ignorance, and suggests that he was not charged with having yet sinned, but threatened with death in case he persisted, now that he was informed of the truth. It is intimated, however, that if he had come near her, he would in so doing have sinned against *God*, whether he had sinned against Abraham or not; and this, perhaps, owing to her being in a state of pregnancy, of which, in that case, he could not have been ignorant. But God had mercifully withheld him from thus sinning against him, for which it became him to be thankful, and without delay to "restore the man his wife." It was also added that the man was "a prophet," or one who had special intercourse with Heaven; and who, if he restored his wife, would pray to God for him, and he should live; but if he withheld her, he should surely die, and all that belonged to him.

We see in this account, 1. That absolute ignorance excuses from guilt; but this does not prove that all ignorance does so, or that it is in itself excusable. Where the powers and means of knowledge are possessed, and ignorance arises from neglecting to make use of them, or from aversion to the truth, it is so far from excusing, that it is in itself sinful. 2. That, great as the wickedness of men is upon the face of the earth, it would be much greater were it not that God by his providence, in innumerable instances, *withholds* them from it. The conduct of intelligent beings is influenced by motives; and all motives which are presented to the mind are subject to his disposal. Hence we may feel the propriety of that petition, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Ver. 8. Abimelech, awaking, is deeply impressed with his dream. He rises early, calls together the principal people about him, and imparts particulars to them, at the rehearsal of which they are *sore afraid*. Some afflictions had already been laid upon them, of which they seem to have been aware (ver. 18); and considering the late tremendous judgments of God upon Sodom, with the terrific dream of the king just rehearsed, it is no wonder they should be seized with fear.

Ver. 9, 10. After speaking to his servants, he next sent for Abraham to converse the matter over. His address to the patriarch is pointed, but temperate: "What hast thou done unto us? And (in) what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.—What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?" We are grieved to find Abraham in such a situation. How honourable did he appear before the king of Sodom, and the king of Salem; but how dishonourable before the king of Gerar! Sin is the reproach of any people, and the greater and better the man, the greater is the reproach.

Ver. 11–13. But let us hear his apology. "And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet, indeed, she is my sister: she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me: at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother." According to his account, to be sure, there was nothing against Abimelech in particular; and this might serve to appease him: but with respect to God,

or his "doing deeds that ought not to be done," what he had said, if not a lie, was yet an *equivocation*. Many things of this sort pass among men; but they will not bear a strict scrutiny. If our words, though in some sense true, yet are designed to convey what is not true, as was the case in this instance, we are guilty of doing what ought not to be done.

Ver. 14, 15. Abimelech, satisfied with this answer, so far as respected himself, restored Sarah to her husband, and that with a trespass-offering, like that which was afterwards presented by his countrymen with the ark (1 Sam. vi. 3); adding, with great courteousness, "Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee." For he saw that the Lord was with him.

Ver. 16-18. He did not part with Sarah, however, without giving her a word of reproof. In calling Abraham her *brother*, he made use of her own language in a sarcastic way; and tells her that her husband should be to her as a veil, that she should look on none else, and none else should look on her. Some have rendered the words, "It," that is, the silver, "shall be to thee a covering for the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and to all other." As if he had given it to buy her a veil, which might prevent all such mistakes in future. Take this, (q. d.) and never go without a veil again, nor any of your married servants. "So she was reproved."

The issue was, Abraham prayed, and the Lord answered him, and healed the family of Abimelech. He would feel a motive for prayer, in this case, which he did not when interceding for Sodom; for of this evil he himself had been the cause.

DISCOURSE XXIX.

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC, ETC.

Gen. xxi.

VER. 1. Abraham, still sojourning in the lands of the Philistines, at length sees the promise fulfilled. It is noted with some degree of emphasis, as forming a special epoch in his life, that "the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken." Such a kind of language is used of his posterity being put in possession of the Promised Land: "The Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers—there failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came to pass." And such will be our language sooner or later concerning all the good things promised to the church, or to us as individuals.

Ver. 2. Two things are particularly noticed in the birth of this child: It was in Abraham's "old age," and "at the set time of which God had spoken to him." Both these circumstances showed the whole to be of God. That which comes to us in the ordinary course of things may *be* of God, but that which comes otherwise manifestly *appears* to be so. One great difference between this child and the son of Hagar consisted in this: the one was born "after the flesh;" that is, in the ordinary course of generation; but the other "after the Spirit;" that is, by extraordinary Divine interposition, and in virtue of a special promise, Gal. iv. 23, 29. Analogous to these were those Jews on the one hand who were merely descended from Abraham "according to the flesh;" and those on the other who were "not of the circumcision only, but also walked in the steps of the faith of their father

Abraham," Rom. iv. 12. The former were the children of the bond-woman, who were cast out; the latter of the free-woman, who, being "his people whom he foreknew," were not "cast away," but were counted for his seed, Gal. iv. 28-31; Rom. ix. 7, 9; xi. 1, 2.

Ver. 3, 4. The name by which this extraordinary child should be called was *Isaac*, according to the previous direction of God. It signifies *laughter*, or *joy*, and corresponds with the gladness which accompanied his birth. Children are ordinarily "a heritage of the Lord." On account of the uncertainty of their future character, however, we have reason to rejoice with trembling: but in this case it was joy in a manner unmixed; for he was born under the promise of being "blessed, and made a blessing." But what a difference between the joy of Abraham at the birth of a child, and that which is commonly seen among us! His was not that vain mirth, or noisy laughter, which unfits for obedience to God: on the contrary, he circumcised his son when he was eight days old, not in conformity to custom, but "as God had commanded him."

Ver. 5-7. The sacred writers seldom deal in reflections themselves; but will often mention those of others. Moses, having recorded the fact that "Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him," tells us of the joyful sayings of Sarah:—"God," saith she, "hath made me to laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me."—"Who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should have given children suck? For I have borne him a son in his old age!" Yes, God had made her to laugh, and that without any of her crooked measures; and not merely with a private, but a public joy; for "all that hear shall laugh with her."

Ver. 8. For a time nothing remarkable occurred: the child grew, and all went on pleasantly. When the time came for his being weaned, a great feast was made, in token of joy that he had passed the most delicate and dangerous stage of life.

Ver. 9. But the joy of that day was imbittered. The son of Hagar, being stung with envy, cannot bear such an ado about this child of promise. So he turns it into ridicule, probably deriding the parents and the promise together; and all this in the sight of Sarah! Thus he that was born after the flesh began at an early stage to *persecute* him that was born after the Spirit; and thus Sarah's crooked policy, in giving Hagar to Abraham, goes on to furnish them with new sources of sorrow. From what was said of Hagar in chap. xvi. we conceived hopes of her; but whatever she was, her son appears at present to be a bitter enemy to God and his people.

Ver. 10-13. The consequence was, Sarah was set on both the mother and the son being banished from the family. Abraham had earnestly desired that Ishmael might *live before God*; but Sarah says, He shall not be heir with her son, with Isaac. This resolution on the part of Sarah might be the mere effect of temper; but whatever were her motives, the thing itself accorded with the design of God; though therefore it was grievous to Abraham, he is directed to comply with it. The Lord would indeed make a nation of Ishmael, because he was his seed; but in Isaac should his seed be called. We must not refuse to join in doing what God commands, however contrary it may be to our natural feelings, nor on account of the suspicious motives of some with whom we are called to act.

Ver. 14. Impressed with these principles, the father of the faithful without further delay rose early the next morning, probably before Sarah was stirring, and sent away both the mother and the son. His manner of doing it, however, was tender and kind. Giving Hagar a portion of bread, and a bottle of water, he committed them to Him who had in effect promised to watch over them. And now for a little while we take leave of Abraham's family,

and observe the unhappy Hagar and her son wandering in the wilderness of Beersheba.

Ver. 15, 16. It was doubtless the design of Hagar, when she set off, to go to Egypt her native country; but having to travel through a desert land, where there was ordinarily no water, it was necessary she should be furnished with that article. Whether "the wilderness of Beersheba," as it was called at the time Moses wrote the narrative, was directly in her way, or whether she went thither in consequence of having "wandered," or lost her way, so it was, that she was reduced to the greatest distress. The bread might not be exhausted, but the water was; and no spring being to be found in this inhospitable place, she and Ishmael appear to have walked about, till he, overcome of thirst, could walk no longer. She had supported him, it seems, as long as she could; but fearing he should die in her arms, she cast him under a shrub, just to screen him from the scorching sun, and "went and sat herself down over against him, a good way off, as it were a bow-shot; for she said, Let me not see the death of the child! And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice and wept."

Ver. 17, 18. A more finished picture of distress we shall seldom see. The bitter cries and flowing tears of the afflicted mother, with the groans of her dying son, are heard, and seen, and felt, in a manner as though we were present. And wherefore do they cry? Had there been any ear to hear them, any eye to pity them, or hand to help them, these cries and tears might have been mingled with hope; but, as far as human aid was concerned, there was no place for this. Whether any of them were directed to Heaven we know not. We could have wished, and should almost have expected, that those of the mother at least would have been so; for surely she could not have forgotten Him who had seen and delivered her from a similar condition about sixteen years before, and who had then promised to "multiply her seed," and to cause this very child to "dwell in the presence of all his brethren." But whether any of these expressions of distress were directed to God or not, the groans of the distressed reached his ear. "God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation."

Ver. 19. At this instant, lifting up her eyes, she saw a spring of water, which before she had overlooked; and, filling her bottle from it, returned to the lad, and gave him drink. "To God the Lord belong the issues from death." He maketh strong the bands of the mocker; and again he looseth his prisoners, and delivereth those that were appointed to die. If Ishmael were at any future time possessed of true religion, he must look back upon these humbling but gracious dispensations of the God of his father Abraham with very tender emotions.

Ver. 20, 21. Whether Hagar and her son continued any longer in the wilderness of Beersheba we are not informed: it would rather seem that they left it and prosecuted their journey. They did not however settle in Egypt, though in process of time she took a wife for him from that country; but in "the wilderness of Paran," where the providence of God watched over him, and where he lived and perhaps maintained his mother by the use of the bow. But to return—

Ver. 22-24. Abraham still continued to sojourn in the land of the Philistines, not indeed at Gerar, but within a few miles of it. Here he was visited by king Abimelech, who, attended by the captain of his host, in the most friendly manner, in behalf of himself and his posterity, requested to live in perpetual amity with him. "God is with thee," saith he, "in all that

thou doest. Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son; but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear." Observe, 1. The *motive* that induces this friendly request: he *saw that God was with him*. Probably the news of the extraordinary birth of Isaac had reached the court of Abimelech, and become a topic of conversation. This, said he, is a great man, and a great family, and will become a great nation; the blessing of Heaven attends him. It is our wisdom, therefore, to take the earliest opportunity to be on good terms with him! Had Abimelech's successors always acted on this principle towards Israel, it had been better for them; for, whether they knew it or not, God in blessing Abraham had promised to "bless them that blessed him, and to curse them that cursed him." 2. The *solemnity* with which he wished the friendship to be confirmed: "swear unto me by God." It is a dictate of prudence, very common among magistrates, to require men to swear by a name which the party holds sacred. In this view, Abimelech certainly acted a wise part; for whoever made light of God's name, the party here would not. 3. Abraham's cheerful and ready *compliance*. I hope he did not need to be sworn not to deal falsely; but, as posterity was concerned, the more solemn the engagement the better. The friend of God has no desire but to be the friend of man.

Ver. 25, 26. Now that they are entering into closer terms of amity, however, it is proper that if there be any cause of complaint on either side, it should be mentioned and adjusted, that nothing which is past, at least, may interrupt their future harmony. Abraham accordingly makes mention of "a well of water" which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. In this country, and to a man whose substance consisted much in cattle, a spring of water was of consequence; and to have it taken away by mere violence, though it might be borne with from an enemy, yet is not to be overlooked where there is professed friendship. In this matter Abimelech fairly and fully exonerates himself: "I wot not," saith he, "who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it but to-day." Public characters cannot always be accountable for the misdeeds of those who act under them; they had need take care, however, what sort of servants they employ, as, while matters are unexplained, that which is wrong is commonly placed to their account.

Ver. 27-32. Abraham, satisfied with the answer, proceeds to enter into a solemn covenant with Abimelech, and, as it should seem, a covenant by sacrifice.* The "sheep and oxen" appear to have been presented for this purpose; and the "seven ewe lambs" were probably a consideration to him, as lord of the soil, for a rightful and acknowledged propriety in the well. Having mutually sworn to this covenant of peace, the place where it was transacted was hence called *Beersheba, the well of the oath*, or the well of *seven*, alluding to the seven lambs which were given as the price of it. Matters being thus adjusted, Abimelech and Phicol, the chief captain of his host, took leave and departed.

Ver. 33, 34. Abraham, being now quietly settled at Beersheba, "planted a grove, and called there on the name of Jehovah, the everlasting God." The grove might be for the shadowing of his tent, and perhaps for a place of worship. Such places were afterwards abused to idolatry; or if otherwise, they became unlawful when the temple was erected. The use which Abraham made of it was worthy of him. Such was his common practice;

* See on chap. xv. 10.

wherever he pitched his tent, there he reared an altar to the Lord. A lovely example this, to all those who would tread in the steps of the faith of Abraham. It does not appear, however, that this was a common, but rather a special act of worship; somewhat like that of Samuel, when he set up a stone between Mizpeh and Shen, and called it Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us." There are periods in life in which we are led to review the dispensations of God towards us with special gratitude and renewed devotion. In this situation Abraham continued "many days;" but still he is "a sojourner," and such he must continue in the present world.

DISCOURSE XXX.

ABRAHAM COMMANDED TO OFFER UP HIS SON ISAAC.

Gen. xxii.

WHEN Isaac was born, Abraham might be apt to hope that his trials were nearly at an end; but if so, he was greatly mistaken. It is not enough that, in consequence of this event, he is called to give up Ishmael; a greater trial than this is yet behind.

"And it came to pass, after these things, that God did tempt Abraham." Many temptations had assailed him from other quarters, out of which God had delivered him; and does he after this become his tempter? As "God cannot be tempted with evil, so neither (in one sense) tempteth he any man." But he sees fit to *try* the righteous; and very frequently those most who are most distinguished by their faith and spirituality. So great a value doth the Lord set upon the genuine exercises of grace, that all the grandeur of heaven and earth is overlooked, in comparison of "a poor and contrite spirit, which trembleth at his word." It is no wonder, therefore, that he should bring his servants into situations which, though trying to them, are calculated to draw forth these pleasant fruits.

In discoursing upon this temptation of Abraham, I shall deviate from my usual practice of expounding verse by verse; and shall notice the trial itself—the conduct of the patriarch under it—the reward conferred upon him—and the general design of the whole.

First, with respect to *the trial itself*. The *time* of it is worthy of notice. The same things may be more or less trying as they are connected with other things. If the treatment of Job's friends had not been preceded by the loss of his substance, the untimely death of his children, the cruel counsel of his wife, and the heavy hand of God, it had been much more tolerable; and if Abraham's faith and patience had not been exercised in the manner they were anterior to this temptation, it might have been somewhat different from what it was. It is also a much greater trial to be deprived of an object when our hopes have been raised, and in a manner accomplished, respecting it, than to have it altogether withheld from us. The spirits of a man may be depressed by a heavy affliction; but if he be nearly recovered, and experiences a relapse, if again he recovers, and again relapses, this is much more depressing than if no such hopes had been afforded him. "Thou hast lifted me up," said the psalmist, "and cast me down!" Now such was the temptation of Abraham. It was "after these things" that God did tempt Abraham; that is, after five-and-twenty years' waiting; after the promise had been frequently repeated; after hope had been raised to the highest pitch; yea, after

it had been actually turned into enjoyment; and when the child had lived long enough to discover an amiable and godly disposition, ver. 7.

The shock which it was adapted to produce upon his natural affections is also worthy of notice. The command is worded in a manner as if it were designed to harrow up all his feelings as a father: "Take now thy son, thine ONLY SON (of promise)—Isaac, WHOM THOU LOVEST"—Or, as some read it, "Take now that son . . . that only one of thine . . . whom thou lovest . . . that ISAAC"—and what? Deliver him to some other hand to sacrifice him? No: be thou thyself the priest; go, "offer him up for a burnt-offering!" When Ishmael was thirteen years old, Abraham could have been well contented to have gone without another son; but when Isaac was born, and had for a number of years been entwining round his heart, to part with him in this manner must, we should think, be a rending stroke. Add to this, Isaac's having to carry the wood, and himself the fire and the knife; but, above all, the cutting question of the lad, asked in the simplicity of his heart, without knowing that he himself was to be the victim: "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?"—This would seem to be more than human nature could bear.

But the shock which it would be to natural affection is not represented as the principal part of the trial; but rather what it must have been to his *faith*. It was not so much his being his *son*, as his *only son of promise*; his Isaac, in whom all the great things spoken of his *seed* were to be fulfilled. When called to give up his other son, God condescended to give him a reason for it; but here no reason is given. In that case, though Ishmael must go, it is because he is not the child of promise; "for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." But if Isaac go, who shall be a substitute for him?

Let us next observe *the conduct of Abraham* under this sharp trial. In general, we see no opposition, either from the struggles of natural affection or those of unbelief; all bow in absolute submission to the will of God. *We* may depict to ourselves how the former would revolt, and how the latter would rise up in rebellion, and what a number of plausible objections might have been urged; but there is not a single appearance of either *in Abraham*. We have here, then, a surprising instance of the efficacy of Divine grace, in rendering every power, passion, and thought of the mind subordinate to the will of God. There is a wide difference between this and the extinction of the passions. That were to be deprived of feeling; but this is to have the mind assimilated to the mind of Christ, who, though he felt most sensibly, yet said, "If this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done!"

No sooner had the father of the faithful received the heavenly mandate than, without further delay, he prepares for the journey. Lot lingered, even when his own deliverance was at stake; but Abraham "rose early in the morning," in prompt obedience to God. He had to go three days' journey ere he reached the appointed spot; a distance perhaps of about sixty miles. Sarah seemed to have known nothing of it. He takes only two young men with him to carry what was necessary; and on his arrival within sight of the place, they were left behind. "Abide you here," said he, "with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." This would intimate that he wished not to be interrupted. In hard duties and severe trials, we should consider that we have enough to struggle with in our minds, without having any interruption from other quarters. Great trials are best entered upon with but little company. Such was the precaution taken by our Lord himself. It is admirable to see how, in this trying hour, Abraham possessed his soul. He lays the wood upon his son—takes the fire and the knife—they go both of them together—he evades the

cutting question of Isaac so as to prevent disclosure, and yet in such a manner as to excite resignation to God—built the altar—stretched forth his hand—and took the knife with an intention to slay his son!

But what did he mean by telling his two servants that he and the lad would *come again* to them? These words, compared with those of the apostle, in Heb. xi. 17, explain the whole story. They show that Abraham from the first believed that the lad would in some way be restored to him, because God had said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." He expected no other than that he should have to slay him, and that he would be burnt to ashes; but if so it were, he was persuaded that he should receive him again, "accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Such was the victory of faith.

Take notice, in the next place, of *the reward conferred upon him*. At the very moment when he was about to give the fatal stroke, and to which Isaac seems to have made no resistance, the angel of the Lord, who visited him at Mamre, and with whom he had interceded in behalf of Sodom, called unto him to forbear: "for now I know," saith he, "that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." The Lord knew the heart of Abraham before he had tried him; but he speaks after the manner of men. It is by a holy and obedient reverence of the Divine authority that faith is made manifest. As a sinner, Abraham was justified by faith only; but as a professing believer, he was justified by the works which his faith produced. This accounts, I apprehend, for what is said by Paul on the former of these subjects, and by James on the latter. They both allege the example of Abraham; but the one respects him as *ungodly*, and the other as *godly*. In the former instance he is justified by faith, exclusive of works, or as having reference merely to the promised seed; in the latter by faith as producing works, and thereby proving him to be the friend of God, Rom. iv. 3-5; James ii. 21-24.

Abraham being thus agreeably arrested in his design, makes a pause, and, lifting up his eyes, sees "a ram caught in a thicket by his horns." Him he takes, as provided of God, and "offers him up for a burnt-offering instead of his son." This extraordinary deliverance so impressed his mind, that he called the name of the place "Jehovah-jireh; The Lord will see, or provide." And this name seems to have become a kind of proverb in Israel, furnishing not only a memorial of God's goodness to Abraham, but a promise that he would interpose for them that trust in him in times of extremity. To all this, the Lord adds a repetition of the promised blessing. The angel of the Lord, who called unto him before, "called unto him a second time, saying, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord; for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice." Though the things here promised are much the same as had been promised before; yet they are more than a mere repetition. The terms are stronger than had ever been used on any former occasion, and, as such, more expressive of Divine complacency. "Blessing I will bless thee," &c., is a mode of speaking which denotes, I will *greatly* bless thee, chap. iii. 16. It is also delivered in the form of an oath, that it may be a ground of strong consolation; and the same things which were promised before are now promised as the reward of this singular instance of obedience, to express how greatly God approved of it.

A few remarks on *the general design of the whole* will conclude this subject. Though it was not the intention of God to permit Abraham actually

to offer a human sacrifice, yet he might mean to assert his own right, as Lord of all, to require it, as well as to manifest the implicit obedience of faith in the conduct of his servant. Such an assertion of his right would manifest his *goodness* in refusing to exercise it. Hence, when children were sacrificed to Moloch, who had no such right, Jehovah could say in regard of himself, "It is what *I* commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind." God never accepted but one human sacrifice; and blood in that case was not shed at his command, but by the wicked hands of men. It is necessary, however, that we should resign our lives, and every thing we have, to his disposal. We cannot be said to love him supremely if father, or mother, or wife, or children, or our own lives be preferred before him. The way to enjoy our temporal comforts is to resign them to God. When we have in this manner given them up, and receive them again at his hand, they become much sweeter, and are accompanied with blessings of greater value.

But in this transaction there seems to be a still higher design; namely, to predict in a figure the great substitute which God in due time should "see and provide." The very place of it, called "the mount of the Lord," seems to have been marked out as the scene of great events; and of that kind too in which a substitutional sacrifice was offered and accepted. Here it was that David offered burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings, and called upon the Lord; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering, and commanded the angel of death to put up his sword, 1 Chron. xxi. 26, 27. It was upon the same mountain that Solomon was afterwards directed to build the temple, 2 Chron. iii. 1. And, if it were not at the very spot, it could not be far distant that the Saviour of the world was crucified. Mount Moriah was large enough to give name to a tract of land about it, ver. 2. Mount Calvary therefore was probably a smaller mountain, which ascended from a certain part of it. Hither then was led God's own Son, his only Son, whom he loved, and in whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed; nor was he spared at the awful crisis by means of a substitute, but was himself freely delivered up as the substitute of others. One reason of the high approbation which God expressed of Abraham's conduct might be its affording some faint likeness of what would shortly be his own.

The chapter concludes with an account of Nahor's family, who settled at Haran. Probably this had not been given, but for the connexion which it had with the church of God. From them Isaac and Jacob took them wives; and it is as preparatory to those events that the genealogy is recorded.

DISCOURSE XXXI.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF SARAH.

Gen. xxiii.

WE have no such account of the death of any woman before, or of the respect paid to her memory, as is here given of Sarah. She was not without her faults, and who is? but she was upon the whole a great female character. As such her name stands recorded in the New Testament among the worthies, and the memory of her was more than usually blessed.

Ver. 1, 2. Observe, 1. The *time* of her death. She was younger by ten years than Abraham, and yet died thirty-eight years before him. Human life is a subject of very uncertain calculation: God often takes the youngest

before the eldest. She lived, however, thirty-seven years after the birth of Isaac, to a good old age, and went home as a shock of corn ripe in its season. 2. The *place*. It was anciently called Kirjath-arba, afterwards Hebron, situated in the plain of Mamre, where Abraham had lived more than twenty years before he went into the land of the Philistines, and whither he had since returned.—See p. 57. Here Sarah died, and here Abraham *mourned* for her. We may take notice of the *forms* of it. He *came* to mourn; that is, he came into her tent where she died, and looked at her dead body; his eye affected his heart. There was none of that false delicacy of modern times which shuns to see or attend the burial of near relations. Let him see her, and let him weep; it is the last tribute of affection which he will be able in that manner to pay her. We should also notice the *sincerity* of it; he *wept*. Many affect to mourn who do not weep; but Abraham both *mourned and wept*. Religion does not stop the course of nature, though it moderates it; and, by inspiring the hope of a blessed resurrection, prevents our being swallowed up of overmuch sorrow.

Ver. 3, 4. From mourning, which was commonly accompanied with sitting on the ground, (Job i. 20; ii. 13; Lam. i. 1,) Abraham at length “stood up from before his dead,” and took measures to bury her. It is proper to indulge in weeping for a time, but there is a time for it to abate; and it is well there is. The necessary cares attending life are often a merciful means of rousing the mind from the torpor of melancholy. But see what a change death makes. Those faces which once excited strong sensations of pleasure require now to be buried “out of our sight.” In those times, and long afterwards, they appear to have had no public burying-places; and Abraham, often removing from place to place, and not knowing where his lot might be cast at the time, had not provided one. He had therefore at this time a burying-place to seek. As yet he had none inheritance in the land, though the whole was given him in promise. We see him here pleading for a grave as “a stranger and a sojourner.” This language is commented upon by the apostle to the Hebrews: “They confessed,” says he, “that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; and they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.” Abraham did not sustain this character alone, nor merely on account of his having no inheritance in Canaan; for Israel, when put in possession of the land, were taught to consider it as properly *the Lord's*, and themselves as strangers and sojourners *with him* in it, Lev. xxv. 23. Even David, who was king of Israel, made the same confession, Psal. xxxix. 12.

Ver. 5–16. One admires to observe the courteous behaviour between Abraham and the Canaanites; for Heth was a son of Canaan. On his part, having signified his desire, and receiving a respectful answer, he “bowed himself to them;” and when he had fixed upon a spot in his mind, he does not ask it of the owner, but requests them to entreat him on his behalf; expressing also his desire to give him the full value of it, and refusing to accept it otherwise. Nor is there any thing wanting on their part; but every thing appears generous and lovely. Abraham calls himself a stranger and a sojourner: but they call him “a mighty prince among them;” give him the choice of their sepulchres; offer any one of them gratis; and when he insisted on paying for it, mention its value in the most delicate manner, intimating that such a sum was as nothing between them. Were commerce conducted on such principles, how pleasant would it be! How different from that selfish spirit described by Solomon, and still prevalent among men; “Naught, naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth!” Civility, courtesy, and generosity adorn religion. The plainness of Christianity is not a rude and insolent one; it stands aloof from flattery, but not

from obliging behaviour. Some who are very courteous to strangers are very much the reverse to those about them; but Abraham's behaviour to his neighbours is no less respectful than it was to the three strangers who called at his tent. It is painful to add, however, that civility and courtesy may be where there is no religion. However it may tend to smooth the rugged paths of life, and however much we are indebted to the providence of God for it, yet this alone will not avail in the sight of God.

Ver. 17-20. Respecting the purchase of this sepulchre, I observe it was *an exercise of faith*. Jacob and Joseph had certainly an eye to the promise, in requesting their bones to be carried up from Egypt. A sepulchre was like an earnest, and indicated a persuasion of future possession, Isa. xxii. 16. It would tend also to endear the land to his posterity. This was so much a dictate of nature, that Nehemiah could urge it to a heathen king, whom no religious considerations would probably have influenced (Neh. ii. 3); and when to this was added the *character* of those who should be there deposited, it would render the country still more endeared. Heathens venerate the dust of their forefathers, but contemplate it without hope. It is not so with believers; those who should lie in this sepulchre walked with God in their generations; and, though dead, yet *lived* under the promise of a glorious resurrection.

Upon the whole, it is natural to wish to mingle dust with those whom we love: "Where thou diest there will I be buried." And sometimes with those whom we only respect: "When I am dead," said the old prophet of Beth-el to his sons, "bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried, and lay my bones beside his bones." But, after all, the chief concern is with whom we shall rise.

DISCOURSE XXXII.

ABRAHAM SENDING HIS SERVANT TO OBTAIN A WIFE FOR ISAAC.

Gen. xxiv.

THE last chapter contained a funeral; this gives an account of a marriage. Such are the changes of human life! Let not this minute narrative seem little in our eyes. It was thought by the Spirit of God to be of more importance than all that was at that time going on among the great nations of antiquity. It is highly interesting to trace great things to their small beginnings; and to them that love Zion it must be pleasant to observe the minute turns of providence in respect of its first fathers.

Ver. 1-9. Abraham being now an old man, and having lost the partner of his life, feels anxious to adjust his affairs, that he may be ready to follow her. "The Lord had blessed him in all things," and he had doubtless much to dispose of; but the greatest blessing of all related to his seed, and this occupies his chief attention. Aware that character, as well as happiness, greatly depended on a suitable connexion, he was desirous that before he died he might discharge this part of the duty of a father. Calling to him therefore his eldest servant, who was already steward of his affairs, and in case of death must have been his trustee in behalf of Isaac, he bound him in a solemn oath respecting the wife that he should take to him. We are not here told the servant's name; but by the account which is given of him

compared with chap. xv. 2, it is not unlikely that it was Eliezer of Damascus.

The characters of men are not so easily ascertained from a few splendid actions as from the ordinary course of life, in which their real dispositions are manifested. In this domestic concern of Abraham we see several of the most prominent features of his character. 1. His decided aversion to idolatry. "I will make thee swear by Jehovah, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou wilt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell." Had Abraham then contracted prejudice against his neighbours? This does not appear by what occurred between them in the last chapter. He does not complain of their treatment of him, but of their alienation from his God. He has no objection to an exchange of civilities with them; but to take their daughters in marriage was the sure way to corrupt his own family. The great design of God, in giving the land to Abraham's posterity, was the eventual overthrow of idolatry, and the establishment of his true worship on earth. To what purpose then was he called from among Chaldean idolaters, if his son join affinity with those of Canaan? Such, or nearly such, were the sentiments which dictated the address to his servant. "The Lord God of heaven, *who took me from my father's house*, and sware unto me, saying, *Unto thy seed will I give this land*, he shall send his angel before thee." 2. His godliness. There does not appear in all this concern the least taint of worldly policy, or any of those motives which usually govern men in the settlement of their children. No mention is made of riches, or honours, or natural accomplishments; but merely of what related to God. Let not the woman be a daughter of Canaan, but of the family of Nahor, who had forsaken Chaldean idolatry, and with Milcah his wife settled at Haran, and who was a worshipper of the true God, ch. xxxi. 53. 3. His faith and obedience. The servant being about to bind himself by oath, is tenderly concerned lest he should engage in more than he should be able to accomplish. "Peradventure," saith he, "the woman will not follow me into this land: must I needs bring thy son again to the land whence thou camest?" No: as Isaac must not marry a daughter of Canaan, neither must he leave Canaan to humour a daughter of Haran; for though Canaan's daughters are to be shunned, yet Canaan itself is to be chosen as the Lord's inheritance, bestowed on the promised seed. Nor do these supposed difficulties at all deter Abraham: "The Lord God of heaven," saith he, "who took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and who spake unto me, and sware unto me, saying, *Unto thy seed will I give this land*, he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence." On the ground of this promise, he would send him away, fully acquitting him of his oath, if the party should prove unwilling; only charging him not to bring Isaac to Haran, as he had before charged him not to marry him to a daughter of Canaan.

Ver. 10-14. Abraham's servant having, on the above terms, consented to take the oath, now betakes himself to his journey. No time seems to have been lost; for his heart was in the business. He did not trouble his aged master in things of inferior moment; but having all his affairs intrusted to him, adjusts those matters himself. Taking with him ten camels, and of course a number of attendants, partly for accommodation, and partly, we may suppose, to give a just idea of his master's substance, he set off for Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. Nothing remarkable occurs by the way; but arriving, on a summer's evening, at the outside of the city, he espies a well. Here he causes his camels to kneel down for rest, and with a design, as soon as opportunity offered, to furnish them with drink. Now

it was customary in those countries for the women, at the time of the evening, to go out to draw water. Of this Abraham's servant is aware. And having placed himself and his camels by the well, in a waiting posture, he betakes himself to prayer for Divine direction. Light as men make of such concerns in common, there are few things of greater importance, and in which there is greater need for imploring the guidance and blessing of Heaven. Upon a few minute turns at this period of life more depends than can possibly be conceived at the time. Young people! pause a moment, and consider . . . Think of the counsel of God . . . "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" That which is done for life, and which may involve things of another life, requires to be done well; and nothing can be done well in which the will of God is not consulted, and his blessing implored. Let us each pause a few minutes, too, and notice the admirable prayer of Abraham's servant. Truly he had not lived with Abraham in vain! Observe, 1. The *character* under which he addresses the Great Supreme: "O Jehovah, God of my master Abraham." He well knew that Jehovah had entered into covenant with Abraham, and had given him exceedingly great and precious promises. By approaching him as a God in covenant, he would find matter for faith to lay hold upon; every promise to Abraham would thus furnish a plea, and turn to a good account. Surely this may direct us, in our approaches to a throne of grace, to make mention of a greater than Abraham, with whom also God is in covenant, and for whose sake the greatest of all blessings may be expected. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is to us what the God of Abraham was to Eliezer, and in the name of our Redeemer we may pray and hope for every thing that is great and good. 2. The *limitation* of the prayer to the present time; Send me good speed *this day*. We may in a general way ask for grace for our whole lives; but our duty is more especially to seek direction at the time we want it. Our Lord teaches us to pray for daily bread as the day occurs. 3. The *sign* which he presumed to ask for; that the damsel to whom he should say so and so, and who should make such and such answers, should be the person whom the Lord had appointed for his servant Isaac. In this he might be under extraordinary influence, and his conduct therefore affords no example to us. The sign he asked, however, was such as would manifest the qualifications which he desired and expected to find in a companion who should be worthy of his master's son; namely, industry, courtesy, and kindness to strangers. 4. The *faith* in which the prayer was offered. He speaks all along under a full persuasion that the providence of God extended to the minutest events, to the free actions of creatures, and even to their behaviour, of which at the time they are scarcely conscious. His words are also full of humble confidence that God would direct him in a matter of so much consequence to his church in all future ages. I believe, if we were to search the Scriptures through, and select all the prayers that God has answered, we should find them to have been the prayers of faith.

Ver. 15-28. While he was speaking, a damsel, with a pitcher upon her shoulder, came towards the well. By her appearance he is possessed of the idea that she is the person, and that the Lord hath heard his prayer. He said nothing to her till she had gone down to the well, and was come up again. Then he ran towards her, and addressed her in the words which he had resolved to do, entreating permission to drink a little water of her pitcher. To this she cheerfully consented, and offered her assistance to give drink also to his camels; all exactly in the manner which he had prayed for. The gentleness, cheerfulness, assiduity, and courtesy manifested towards a stranger, of whom she at present could have no knowledge, is truly admira-

ble. The words in which it is described are picturesque and lively to the highest degree. We need only read them in order to feel ourselves in the midst of the pleasing scene. "And she said, Drink, my lord; and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had given him drink, she said, I will draw for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw, and drew for all his camels." This conduct, in itself so amiable, and so exactly in unison with the previous wishes of the man, struck him with a kind of amazement, accompanied with a momentary hesitation whether all could be true. "Wondering at her, he held his peace, to wit, whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not." We pray for blessings, and when our prayers are answered, we can scarcely believe them to be so. There are cases in which the mind, like the eye by a great and sudden influx of light, is overpowered. Thus Zion, though importunate in prayer for great conversions, yet, when they come, is described as being in a manner confounded with them: "Thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged—thou shalt say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these?" Recovering from his astonishment, and being satisfied that the Lord had indeed heard his prayer, he opens his treasures, and presents the damsel with certain Eastern ornaments, which he had provided for the purpose; inquiring at the same time after her kindred, and whether they had room to lodge him. Being told, in answer, that she was "the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor and Milcah," and that they had plenty of accommodation for him and his company, his heart is so full that he cannot contain himself, but even in the presence of Rebecca, and perhaps of the men who were with him, "bowed down his head, and worshipped, saying, Blessed be Jehovah, God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, Jehovah led me to the house of my master's brother!" We see here not only a grateful mind, equally disposed to give thanks for mercy as to pray for it, but a delicate and impressive manner of communicating to Rebecca a few particulars which he wished her to know. His words were addressed to the Lord; but being spoken in her hearing, she would perceive by them who he was, whence he came, and that the hand of the God of Abraham was in the visit, whatever was the object of it. Full of joyful surprise, she runs home, with the bracelets upon her hands, and tells the family of what had passed. But here I must break off for the present, and leave the conclusion of this interesting story to another discourse.

DISCOURSE XXXIII.

ABRAHAM SENDING HIS SERVANT TO OBTAIN A WIFE FOR ISAAC (CONTINUED)

Gen. xxiv. 29-67.

VER. 29-31. As yet, no one suspects the object of the visit; but all hearts are full, and there is much running hither and thither. No mention is made at present of Bethuel, or of Milcah; they were aged people, and the affairs of the family seem principally to have devolved on its younger branches. Laban appears to have taken a very active part in this business. Hearing his sister's tale, and seeing the ornaments upon her hands, he is all alive, and runs towards the well, to welcome the man into his house. By the

account which is afterwards given of Laban, it is perhaps more than probable that these golden ornaments had great influence on what would otherwise appear a very generous behaviour. His whole history shows him to have been a mercenary man; and we frequently see in such characters the truth of Solomon's remarks; "A man's gift maketh room for him.—It is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it; whithersoever it turneth it prospereth." If a man be in straits, he is coldly treated; but if once he begin to rise in the world, he becomes another man, and his company and acquaintance are courted. Such is the spirit of this world. But whatever were Laban's motives, he carried it very kindly to Abraham's servant. Finding him at the well, modestly waiting for a further invitation from some of the heads of the family, he accosted him in language that would have befitted the lips of a much better man: "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? For I have prepared the house, and room for the camels." It becomes us to bless and welcome those whom the Lord hath blessed; nor must we confine it to those whom he hath blessed with outward prosperity; a Christian spirit is in the sight of God of great price, and ought to be so in ours.

Ver. 32, 33. On this becoming invitation, the man goes into the house; and we see Laban very attentive. First he ungirds the poor beasts which had borne the burdens, and furnishes them with provender; then he provides water for the man, and those who were with him, to wash their feet; and after this, sets meat before him. All this is proper. But the good man's heart is full, and he cannot eat till he has told his errand. Such are the feelings of a servant of God whose heart is in his work. Where this is the case, personal indulgence will give place to things of greater importance. "I will not give sleep to mine eyes," said David, "nor slumber to mine eyelids, till I find out a place for Jehovah, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." While the woman of Samaria was gone to tell her neighbours of the man who had told her all things that ever she did, his disciples, knowing how weary and faint he must have been, "prayed him to eat." But seeing the Samaritans flocking down the hill to hear the word of God, he answered, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of.—My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say ye not, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold—lift up your eyes, and look on (yonder companies)—the fields are white already to harvest!"

Ver. 34, 35. Being requested to tell his tale, the servant begins by informing them who he is. His prayer to "the God of his master Abraham," in the hearing of Rebecca, might possibly have superseded the necessity of this part of his statement, but lest it should not, he tells them expressly, "I am Abraham's servant." He was an upright man, and upright men do not conceal who they are. He was also a humble man, and humble men are not ashamed to own their situation in life, though it be that of a servant. A vain man might have talked about himself, and that he was the first servant of the house, the steward that ruled over all that Abraham had, and that all his master's goods were in his hand, Esth. v. 11, 12. But not a word of this is heard; for his heart was set on his errand. He has no objection, however, to tell of the glory of his master; for this would tend to promote the object. Nor does he fail to acknowledge the hand of God in it; "The Lord hath blessed my master greatly." And if they were worthy to be connected with Abraham, this would tend further to promote the object; yea, more than all the riches and glory of Abraham without it.

Ver. 36. And now for the first time he makes mention of *Isaac*. A messenger less ingenuous might have given a hint of this kind to the damsel, when he presented her with the "earring and bracelets: but so did not

Abraham's servant. Not an intimation of the kind is given till he is before her parents. In their presence, and that of the whole family, he frankly makes mention of his master's son; and as his object was to recommend him to their esteem, and to prepossess Rebecca in his favour, it is admirable to see how he accomplishes his end. All is in the form of a simple narrative; yet every moving consideration is worked into it that the subject will admit. In only this single verse we observe four circumstances touched upon, each of which would have a powerful effect—He was the son of the highly honoured Abraham—by the much-loved Sarah—in their old age—(of course he himself must be young)—and was made heir of all his father's substance.

Ver. 37, 38. Hence he proceeds to a still more explicit mention of the object of his journey, mixing with it such grounds or reasons as must ingratiate both his master and his master's son in their esteem, and so tend to accomplish his design. He informs them that Abraham was utterly averse from his son's being united with a daughter of Canaan; so much so that he even made him solemnly swear upon the subject. The family at Haran might possibly have thought that ere now Abraham had forgotten his old friends, and formed new connexions; but they would perceive by this that he had not. There is a charming delicacy in his introducing the subject of marriage. He speaks of "a wife being taken" for his master's son; but first mentions it in reference to the daughters of Canaan, whom he must *not* take, before he suggests any thing of the person he wished to take; thus giving them to infer what was coming ere he expressed it. And now, having intimated to the family whom his master preferred, he represents him as speaking of them in the most affectionate language; "My father's house, my kindred."

Ver. 39-41. Next he repeats what passed between his master and himself, as to the supposed willingness or unwillingness of the party; and here also we see much that will turn to account. In expressing Abraham's persuasion in the affair, he appeals to their piety. It was saying, in effect, The hand of God was in it; and this with godly minds would be sure to weigh. Indeed it did weigh; for when required to give an answer, it was this: "The thing proceedeth from the Lord." Religion, thus mingled with natural affection, sanctifies it, and renders sweetness itself more sweet. In repeating also the words of Abraham, Thou shalt take a wife for my son "of my kindred, and of my father's house," he touches and retouches the strings of fraternal love. And in that he intimates that his master had laid nothing more upon him than to tell his tale, and leave the issue to the Lord, he gives them to understand that whether they were willing or unwilling he should be clear of his oath. In this, and several other parts of this pleasant story, our thoughts must needs run to the work of Christ's servants, in espousing souls to him. They may be clear of the blood of all men, though sinners may be unwilling; and it is their duty to tell them so; that while, on the one hand, they allure them by exhibiting the glory of their Master, they may, on the other, convince them that their message is not to be trifled with. Both are means appointed of God to bring them to Christ; and if the Lord be with them in their work, such will be the effect.

Ver. 42-49. The *repeating* of the interview with Rebecca at the well was all admirably in point, and of a tendency to bring the matter to a crisis.—I came to the well—I called on the God of my master Abraham—I asked for a sign—a sign was given me—every thing answered to my prayer—judge ye—let Rebecca judge—whether the hand of the Lord be not in it?—"And now, if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me, and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left."

Ver. 50-52. With this simple but interesting account the whole family is

overcome: one sentiment bows every mind. Rebecca says nothing; but her heart is full. It is an affair in which little or nothing seems left for creatures to decide. "The thing," say they, "proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee good or bad. Behold, Rebecca is before thee; take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken!" Such was the happy result of this truly religious courtship; and the good man, who saw God in all things, still keeps up his character. Hearing their words, he bowed himself to the earth, and worshipped God! How sweet would all our temporal concerns be rendered, if they were thus intermingled with godliness!

Ver. 53. The main things being settled, he, according to the customs of those times, presents the bride elect with "jewels of silver, jewels of gold, and raiment" suited to the occasion; and, further to conciliate the esteem of the family, "he gave also to her brother, and to her mother, precious things." Presents, when given from sincere affection, are very proper, and productive of good effects. It is by a mutual interchange of kind offices that love is often kindled, and always kept alive. Our Saviour accepted the presents which were offered him, not only of food, but raiment, and even the anointing of his feet. Where love exists, it is natural and grateful to express it in acts of kindness.

Ver. 54-58. The good man would not eat till he had told his errand; but now that his work is done, he and the men who were with him both eat and drink; and doubtless it would add to the enjoyment of their meal to know that the Lord had made their way prosperous. The next morning, having accomplished his object, the diligent and faithful servant wants to be going. To this proposal however, though honourable to him as a servant, the mother and the brother object; pleading for a few days, ten at least, ere they parted; nor does their objection seem to be unreasonable. Though willing upon the whole that she should go, yet parting is trying work, especially when they considered that they might never see her more in this world, as in truth they never did. The man, however, knows not how to consent to it; but entreats that he might not be hindered, seeing the Lord had prospered his way. Whether we consider him as too pressing in this case, or not, we may lay it down as a general rule, never to hinder those who are engaged in a right way, and who have received manifest tokens that God hath blessed them in it. The case being somewhat difficult, and neither of the parties disposed to disoblige the other, they consent to leave it to the damsel herself. A few days to take leave of her friends could not, we may suppose, have been disagreeable to her; but seeing, as she did, so much of God in the affair, and the man's heart so deeply set upon it; feeling also her own heart entirely in it; she would not so much as seem to make light of it, or hinder it even for an hour; but, far from all affectation, answered, "I will go."

Ver. 59, 60. And now preparation is made for her departure. Before she goes she must be provided with "a nurse." Rebecca's having been employed in drawing water, we see, was no proof of the poverty of her parents, but rather of the simplicity of the times. Daughters were not yet taught to be so delicate as scarcely to "adventure to set the sole of their foot upon the ground." But now that she is going to leave her family, it is desirable that she should have one of its domestics, who had probably been brought up with her from her childhood, who in times of affliction would kindly wait on her, and at all times be a friend and companion. The name of this nurse was Deborah. We hear no more of her till we are told of her death. She appears to have survived her mistress, and to have died in the family of Jacob, much lamented, chap. xxxv. 8. To an affectionate nurse, they added a parting blessing. The language used in it shows that Abra-

ham's servant had told them of the promises which God had made to his master, and which were to be fulfilled in Isaac and his posterity. They speak as believing the truth of them, and as having their hearts full of hope and joy, amidst the natural sorrow which must have attended the parting scene. "They blessed Rebecca, and said unto her, Thou art our sister; be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those that hate them!"

Ver. 61-63. Taking leave of Haran, they go on their way towards Canaan. A little before their arrival at Hebron, they are unexpectedly met by a person who was taking an evening walk. This was no other than Isaac. It may be thought that he was looking out in hope of meeting them; but we are expressly told that his walk was for another purpose, namely, to "meditate." It is a word which is sometimes used for *prayer*, and hence it is so rendered in the margin of our Bibles. He was a man of reflection and prayer; and, in the cool of the evening, it might be common for him to retire an hour to converse, as we should say, with himself and with his God. Admitting that the thought might occur,—I may possibly see my father's servant on his return—still his object would be, on such an important turn in his life, to commit the matter to God. Those blessings are likely to prove substantial and durable which are given us in answer to prayer.

Ver. 64, 65. "Rebecca, having espied a stranger approaching towards them, inquires of her guide whether he knew him; and being told that it was no other than his young "master," she modestly alighted from the camel, and took a veil and covered herself. This Eastern head dress might in the present instance answer a double purpose: First, it would express her subjection to her husband, as being already his espoused wife. Secondly, it would prevent that confusion which the exposure of her person, especially in so sudden and unexpected a manner, must have occasioned.

Ver. 66, 67. Isaac, observing her to have put on her veil, very properly avoids addressing himself to her; but walking awhile with the servant by himself, heard the whole narrative of his journey, which appears to have wrought on his mind as the former had wrought on that of Rebecca. And now the marriage is consummated. "Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." In this tender manner is the admirable story closed. Who can forbear wishing them all happiness? The union of filial and conjugal affection is not the least honourable trait in the character of this amiable man. "He brought her into his mother Sarah's tent;" and was then, and not till then, comforted for the loss of her. Dutiful sons promise fair to be affectionate husbands; he that fills up the first station in life with honour is thereby prepared for those that follow. God, in mercy, sets a day of prosperity over against a day of adversity. Now he woundeth our spirits by dissolving one tender union, and now bindeth up our wounds by cementing another.

DISCOURSE XXXIV.

ABRAHAM'S MARRIAGE WITH KETURAH, AND DEATH.—ISHMAEL'S POSTERITY AND DEATH.—THE BIRTH AND CHARACTERS OF ESAU AND JACOB.

Gen. xxv.

THIS chapter gives an account of several changes in the families of Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac. In each the sacred writer keeps his eye on the fulfilment of the great promise to the father of the faithful.

Ver. 1-6. The marriage of Abraham to Keturah is an event which we should not have expected. From the last account we had of him, charging his servant respecting the marriage of his son Isaac, we were prepared to look for his being buried rather than married. I do not know that it was a sin; but it is easy to see in it more of man than of God. No reason is given for it; no marks of Divine approbation attend it; five-and-thirty years pass over with little more than recording the names of his children, and that not from any respect to the connexion, but to show the fulfilment of the Divine promise of multiplying his seed. During this last period of his life we see nothing of that extraordinary strength of faith by which he was formerly distinguished; but, like Samson when he had lost his hair, he is become weak like another man. While the promise of Isaac was pending, and while Abraham was employed in promoting that great object, the cloud of glory accompanies all his movements; but this being accomplished, and his mind diverted to something else, the cloud now rests upon Isaac; and he must walk the remainder of his journey in a manner without it.

Who Keturah was we are not told; probably she was one of his family. She and Hagar are called *concubines*. This does not mean, however, that they were not his lawful wives, but that they occupied a less honourable station than Sarah, who was a fellow heir with him in promise. Keturah bare Abraham six sons, among whose descendants were preserved, in some measure, the knowledge and fear of the true God. From one of them, namely Midian, descended Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses; and it is not improbable that Job and his friends had the same general origin.

We have seen how the last thirty-five years of Abraham's life fall short of what it was in former periods; it is pleasant, however, to observe that his sun does not set in a cloud. There are several circumstances which shed a lustre upon his end. Among others, his regard for Isaac, constituting him his heir, and settling his other sons at a sufficient distance from him, shows that his heart was still with God's heart, or that he whom the Lord had chosen was the object to whom his thoughts were chiefly directed. He was not wanting in paternal goodness to any of his children. Though Ishmael was sent away, and as it should seem by the other parts of the history with nothing, yet it is here plainly intimated that his father *gave gifts* to him, as well as to the sons of Keturah. Probably he visited and provided for him in the wilderness of Paran, and gave him a portion when he married. But God's covenant being established with Isaac, *his* settlement in Canaan is that to which all the others are rendered subservient. All this shows that his faith did not fail; that he never lost sight of the promise in which he had believed for justification; but that as he had lived, so he died.

Ver. 7-10. Let us notice the death and burial of this great and good man. His death is expressed by a common but impressive Scriptural phrase—"he gave up the ghost;" and his burial by another—"he was gathered to his

people." The one is the parting of body and soul; the other the mingling of our dust with that of our kindred who have gone before us. Even in the grave, it is natural to wish to associate with those whom we have known and loved on earth; and still more in the world to come. When all the sons of Adam shall be assigned their portion, each in a sense will be gathered to his people! The inscription on his tomb, if I may so call it, was, "He died in a good old age." On this I have two remarks to offer. 1. It was *according to promise*. Upwards of fourscore years before this, the Lord told Abraham in vision, saying, "Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age." In every thing, even in death, the promises are fulfilled to Abraham.—2. It is language that is *never used of wicked men, and not very commonly of good men*. It is used of Gideon and of David (Judg. viii. 32; 1 Chron. xxix. 28); and I know not whether of any other. The idea answers to what is spoken by the psalmist, "They shall bring forth fruit in old age;" or that in Job, "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season." Isaac and Ishmael are both present at his funeral. We have no account of their having ever seen each other before, from the day that Ishmael was cast out as a mocker; but whether they had or not, they met at their father's interment. Death brings those together who know not how to associate on any other occasion, and will bring us all together, sooner or later. Finally, the place where they buried him was the same as that in which he had buried his beloved Sarah.

Ver. 11. The death and burial of so great and good a man as Abraham must have made an impression upon survivors: howbeit, the cause of God died not. "It came to pass after the death of Abraham that God blessed his son Isaac." Isaac was heir to the promise; and though all flesh withereth and fadeth like the grass, yet the word of the Lord shall stand for ever. We shall hear more of Isaac soon; at present we are only told, in general, that he "dwelt by the well Lahai-roi." It was necessary in those countries to fix their residence by a well; and it is no less necessary, if we wish to live, that we fix ours near to the ordinances of God. The well where Isaac pitched his tent was distinguished by two interesting events: 1. The merciful appearance of God to Hagar, whence it received its name—"The well of him that liveth and seeth me." Hagar or Ishmael, methinks, should have pitched a tent there, that it might have been to them a memorial of past mercies; but if they neglect it, Isaac will occupy it. The gracious appearance of God in a place endears it to him, let it have been to whom it may. 2. It was the place from the way of which he first met his beloved Rebecca; there therefore they continue to dwell together.

Ver. 12-18. A short account is here given of Ishmael's posterity, and of his death. His sons were numerous and great; they had their *towns, and their castles*; nay, more, they are denominated "twelve princes, according to their nations." Thus amply was fulfilled the promise of God concerning him: "Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." But this is all. When a man leaves God and his people, the sacred historian leaves him. After living in prosperity a hundred and thirty-seven years, "he gave up the ghost, and died;" and was "gathered unto his people." As this language is applicable to men, whether good or bad, no conclusion can be drawn from it in favour of his having feared God. It is added that "he died in the presence of all his brethren;" that is, in peace, or with his friends about him; which, considering how his hand had been against every man, and of course every man's hand against him, was rather surprising; but so it had been promised of the Lord to

his mother, at *the well* Lahai-roi, "He shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." So he lived, and so he died, an object of providential care for his father's sake; but as to any thing more, the oracles of God are silent.

Ver. 19-23. The history now returns to the son of promise. Forty years old was he when he took Rebecca to wife; and for twenty years afterwards he had no issue. We should have supposed that, as the promise partly consisted in a multiplication of his seed, the great number of his children would have made a prominent part of his history. When Bethuel, and Milcah, and Laban, took leave of Rebecca, saying, "Be thou the mother of thousands of millions," they doubtless expected to hear of a very numerous family. And she herself, and her husband, would, as believing the Divine promise, expect the same. But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways. Abraham's other sons abound in children, while he in whom his seed is to be as the stars of heaven for multitude lives childless. In this manner God had tried his father Abraham; and if he be heir to his blessings, he must expect to inherit a portion of his trials. God bestows his mercies upon wicked men without waiting for their prayers; but his conduct is somewhat different with them that fear him. Isaac had received Rebecca in answer to prayer; and let him not expect to receive seed by her in any other way. Well, the good man is led to pray: "Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebecca conceived." During the time of her pregnancy, she was the subject of some extraordinary sensations, which filling her mind with perplexity, she "inquired of the Lord." Both the entreaty of Isaac, and the inquiry of Rebecca, might be improper in ordinary cases; but as it was not the natural desire of children that prompted him, so neither was it an idle curiosity that excited her: they each kept in view the promise of all nations being blessed in their posterity, and therefore were not only solicitous for children, but anxious concerning every thing which seemed indicative of their future character. And as Isaac had received an answer to prayer, so it is revealed to Rebecca that the sensations which she felt were signs of other things—that she was pregnant of twins—that they should become *two nations*—and not only so, but *two manner of nations*—lastly, that *the elder should serve the younger*. The struggle between these children, which was expressive of the struggles that should in after-ages take place between their posterity, furnished another instance of the opposition between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, both which are commonly found in most religious families. Paul introduces this case as an instance of the sovereignty of God in the dispensation of his grace. The rejection of a great part of the Jewish nation was to some a stumbling-block. It seemed to them as if the word of promise to the fathers had taken none effect. The apostle, in answer, maintains that it was not the original design of God in the promise to save all Abraham's posterity; but, on the contrary, that from the beginning he drew a line of distinction between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, though all were alike descended from him according to the flesh. To a further supposed objection, that such a distinction between children, while they were yet unborn, reflected on the *righteousness* of God, he contents himself with denying the consequence, and asserting the absolute right of God to have mercy on whom he will have mercy.

Ver. 24-28. As there were extraordinary sensations during the pregnancy of the mother, so in the birth of the children there was a certain circumstance which betokened that the one should prevail over the other; and that not only in his person, but in his posterity. Hence the prophet Hosea, reproaching the degenerate sons of Jacob, says of him, "He took his brother by the

heel in the womb—and by his strength had power with God.” But, as if he should say, Are you worthy of being called his children? Hos. xii. 3.

From the circumstances attending the birth of a child, it was common in those ages to derive their names; and thus it was in the present instance. The first-born, from his colour, was called *Esau*, i. e. *red*; the younger, from the circumstance of his taking hold of his brother's heel, was called *Jacob*, a *supplanter*. Both these names were prophetic. Esau was of a sanguinary disposition, and his posterity, the Edomites, always cherished a most *cruel* and *bloody* antipathy against Israel. In allusion to this, when the enemies of the church are punished, they are not only represented as Edomites, but God is described as giving them as it were blood for blood: “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?—Wherefore art thou *red* in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their *blood* shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.” Jacob, on the other hand, supplanted his brother in the affair of the birthright, as we shall see presently. As his having hold of his brother's heel seemed as if he would have drawn him back from the birth, and have been before him; so his mind in after-life appeared to aspire after the blessing of the first-born, and never to have rested till he had obtained it.

As they grew up they discovered a different turn of mind. Esau was the expert huntsman, quite a *man of the field*; but Jacob was simple-hearted, preferring the more gentle employment of rearing and tending cattle. The partiality of Isaac towards Esau, on account of his venison, seems to have been a weakness rather unworthy of him: that of Rebecca towards Jacob appears to have been better founded; her preference was more directed by the prophecies which had gone before him, choosing him whom the Lord had chosen.

Ver. 29–34. In process of time, a circumstance arose in the family which in its consequences was very serious. Jacob was one day boiling some pottage, perhaps for his dinner; for he lived mostly upon herbs. Just then came in Esau from hunting, very faint and hungry, and had a great mind to Jacob's pottage. Its very colour, corresponding with his sanguinary disposition, seemed to take his fancy, on which account he was called Edom, a name commonly applied to his posterity, and of similar import with that which was at first given to him. There seems, at first sight, to be something ungenerous in Jacob's availing himself of his brother's hunger in the manner he did; but if there were, however it may reflect dishonour upon him, it reflects none upon the event. God often brings his purposes to pass by means which on man's part are far from justifiable. The Reformation was a great and good work, and we may wish to vindicate every measure which contributed to it; but that is more than we can do. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways. It will be found that “he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works;” but this is more than can be said of his best servants, in any age of the world. A close inspection of this affair, however, will convince us that whether Jacob was right as to the means he used or not, his *motives* were good, and those of Esau were evil. Observe, particularly, 1. The birthright attached to seniority. 2. It ordinarily consisted in the excellence of dignity, the excellence of power, and a double portion, Gen. xlix. 3; Deut. xxi. 17. 3. These privileges of the first-born were in several instances forfeited by the misconduct of the parties; as in the case of Cain, Reuben, &c. 4. There was in the family of Abraham a peculiar blessing, which was supposed to be attached to the birth-

right, though God in several instances put it into another direction. This blessing was principally spiritual and distant, having respect to the setting up of God's kingdom, to the birth of the Messiah, or, in other words, to all those great things included in the covenant with Abraham. This was well understood by the family: both Esau and Jacob must have often heard their parents converse about it. If the birthright that was bought at this time had consisted in any temporal advantages of dignity, authority, or property to be enjoyed in the lifetime of the parties, Esau would not have made so light of it as he did, calling it *this* birthright, and intimating that he should soon die, and then it would be of no use to him.* It is a fact, too, that Jacob had none of the ordinary advantages of the birthright during his lifetime. Instead of a double portion, he was sent out of the family with only *a staff* in his hand, leaving Esau to possess the whole of his father's substance. And when, more than twenty years afterwards, he returned to Canaan, he made no scruple to ascribe to his brother the excellence of dignity, and the excellence of power, calling him, *My lord Esau*, and acknowledging himself as his *servant*. The truth is, the question between them was, which should be heir to the blessings promised in the covenant with Abraham. This Jacob desired, and Esau despised; and in despising blessings of so sacred a nature, and that for a morsel of meat, he was guilty of profaneness. The spirit of his language was, "I cannot live upon promises: give me something to eat and drink, for to-morrow I die." Such is the spirit of unbelief in every age; and thus it is that poor deluded souls continue to despise things distant and heavenly, and prefer to them the momentary gratifications of flesh and sense.

From the whole, we may perceive in this case a doctrine which runs through the Scriptures; namely, that while the salvation of those that are saved is altogether of grace, the destruction of those that are lost will be found to be of themselves. From what is recorded of Jacob, he certainly had nothing to boast of; neither had Esau any thing to complain of. He lost the blessing, but not without having first despised it. Thus when the apostle had asserted the doctrine of election, and grounded it upon God's absolute right to have mercy on whom he would have mercy, he nevertheless proceeds to ascribe the cause of the overthrow of them that perish merely to themselves. "But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith; but as it were by the works of the law: for they stumbled at the stumbling-stone." I am aware that when we preach in this manner many are ready to accuse us of inconsistency. "You preach the doctrine of election," say they: "but before you have done you destroy your own work, by telling the unconverted that if they perish, the fault will lie at their own door." We answer, it is enough for us to teach what the Scriptures teach. If we cannot conceive how the purposes of God are to be reconciled with the agency and accountableness of man, let us be content to be ignorant of it. The Scriptures teach both; and true wisdom will not aspire to be wise above what is written.

* He could not mean surely that he should then die of hunger, unless he ate of the pottage; for that is scarcely conceivable, while he had full access to all the provision in Isaac's house; but that in a little time he should be dead; and then of what account would these fine promises be to him?

DISCOURSE XXXV.

ISAAC AND ABIMELECH.

Gen. xxvi.

WE saw Abraham in a great variety of situations, by means of which sometimes his excellences and sometimes his failings became the more conspicuous. Isaac has hitherto been but little tried, and therefore his character is but little known. In this chapter, however, we shall see him roused from his retirement, and brought into situations in which, if there be some things to lament, there will be many to admire.

Ver. 1-6. We now see him *in affliction*, by reason of "a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham." There seem to have been more famines in the times of the patriarchs than usual; which must not only be afflictive to them in common with their neighbours, but tend more than a little to try their faith. Every such season must prove a temptation to think lightly of the Land of Promise. Unbelief would say, "It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants;" it is not worth waiting for. But faith will conclude that he who hath promised to give it is able to bless it. Thus Abraham believed, and therefore took every thing patiently; and thus it is with Isaac. He first went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, at Gerar. His father Abraham had found kind treatment there about a hundred years before, and there was a covenant of peace between them. It seems, however, as if he had thought of going as far as Egypt; but the Lord appeared to him at Gerar, and admonished him to put himself under his direction, and go no where without it. "Dwell," saith he, "in the land that I shall tell thee of: sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and I will bless thee." In times of trouble we are apt to cast, and forecast, what we shall do; but God mercifully checks our anxiety, and teaches us, by such dispensations, in all our ways to acknowledge him. To satisfy Isaac that he should never want a guide, or a provider, the Lord renews to him the promises which had been made to his father Abraham. Had he met with nothing to drive him from his retreat by the well of Lahai-roi, he might have enjoyed more quiet; but he might not have been indulged with such great and precious promises. Times of affliction, though disagreeable to the flesh, have often proved our best times.

Two things are observable in this solemn renewal of the covenant with Isaac. 1. The good things promised. The sum of these blessings is, the land of Canaan, a numerous progeny, and, what is the greatest of all, the Messiah, in whom the nations should be blessed. On these precious promises Isaac is to live. God provided him with bread in the day of famine; but he lived not on bread only, but on the words which proceeded from the mouth of God. It was in reference to such words as these that Moses said unto Hobab, "We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." 2. Their being given for Abraham's sake: "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." We are expressly informed in what manner this patriarch was accepted of God, namely, as "believing on him who justifieth the ungodly;" and this accounts for the acceptance of his works. The most *spiritual sacrifices*, being offered by a sinful creature, can no otherwise be acceptable to God than *by Jesus Christ*; for, as President Edwards

justly remarks, "It does not consist with the honour of the majesty of the King of heaven and earth to accept of any thing from a condemned malefactor, condemned by the justice of his own holy law, till that condemnation be removed." But a sinner being accepted as believing in Jesus, his works also are accepted for his sake, and become rewardable. It was in this way, and not of works, that Abraham's obedience was honoured with so great a reward. The blessings here promised are called the *mercy* to Abraham, Mic. vii. 29. Hence we perceive the fallacy of an objection to the New Testament doctrine of our being forgiven and blessed in Christ's *name*, and for *his sake*; that this is no more than was true of Israel, who were blessed and often forgiven for the sake of Abraham. "Instead of this fact making against the doctrine in question," says a late judicious writer, "it makes for it; for it is clear from hence that it is not accounted an improper or unsuitable thing, in the Divine administration, to confer favours on individuals, and even nations, *out of respect to the piety of another to whom they stood related*. But if this principle be admitted, the salvation of sinners, out of respect to the obedience and sufferings of Christ, cannot be objected to as unreasonable. To this may be added, that every degree of Divine respect to the obedience of the patriarchs was in fact no other than respect to the obedience of Christ, in whom they believed, and through whom their obedience, like ours, became acceptable. The light of the moon, which is derived from its looking as it were on the face of the sun, is no other than the light of the sun itself reflected. But if it be becoming the wisdom of God to reward the righteousness of his servants, and that many ages after their decease, so highly, (which was only borrowed lustre,) much more may he reward the righteousness of his Son, from which it originated, in the salvation of those that believe in him."*

The renewal of these great and precious promises to Isaac in a time of famine would preserve him from the fear of perishing, and be more than a balance to present inconveniences. It is not unusual for our heavenly Father to make up the loss of sensible enjoyments by increasing those of faith. We need not mind where we *sojourn*, nor what we endure, if the Lord be *with us and help us*. When Joseph was sold into a strange land, and unjustly cast into prison, it was reckoned a sufficient antidote to add, "But the Lord was with Joseph."

Ver. 6-11. After so extraordinary a manifestation of the Lord's goodness to Isaac, we might have supposed he would have dwelt securely and happily in Gerar; but great mercies are often followed with great *temptations*. The abundance of revelations given to Paul were succeeded by a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him. It is said of our Lord himself, after the heavens were opened, and the most singular testimony had been borne to him at Jordan, "*Then* was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." Heavenly enjoyments are given to us in this world, not merely to comfort us under present troubles, but to arm us against future dangers; and happy is it for us if they be so improved.

Isaac had generally lived in solitude; but now he is called into company, and company becomes a snare. "The men of the place asked him of his wife." These questions excited his apprehensions, and put him upon measures for self-preservation that involved him in sin. Observe, 1. He did not sin by thrusting himself into the way of temptation; for he was necessitated and directed of God to go to Gerar. Even the calls of necessity and duty may, if we be not on our watch, prove insuaring; and if so, what must those situations be in which we have no call to be found? 2. The tempta-

* Williams's Letters to Belsham, pp. 156-158.

tion of Isaac is the same as that which had overcome his father, and that in two instances. This rendered his conduct the greater sin. The falls of them that have gone before us are so many rocks on which others have split; and the recording of them is like placing buoys over them, for the security of future mariners. 3. It was a temptation that arose from the beauty of Rebecca. There is a vanity which attaches to all earthly good. Beauty has often been a snare, both to those who possess it and to others. In this case, as in that of Abraham, it put Isaac upon unjustifiable measures for the preservation of his own life; measures that might have exposed his companion to that which would have been worse than death. Man soon falls into mischief when he sets up to be his own guide.

And now we see, what we are grieved to see, a great and good man let down before heathens, and reproved by them for his dissimulation. He had continued at Gerar *a long time* uninterrupted, which sufficiently showed his fears were groundless; yet he continued to keep up the deception, till the king observed from his window some freedoms he took with Rebecca, from which he inferred that she was his wife. The conduct of Abimelech on this occasion was as worthy of a king as that of Isaac had been unworthy of a servant of God.

Ver. 12-17. Things being thus far rectified, we see Isaac engaged in the primitive employment of husbandry; and the Lord blessed him and increased him, so that he became the envy of the Philistines. Here again we see how vanity attaches to every earthly good; prosperity begets *envy*, and from envy proceeds *injury*. The wells which Abraham's servants had digged Isaac considered as his own, and made use of them for his flocks; but the Philistines, out of envy to him, "stopped them up, and filled them with earth." Had they drank of them, it might have been excused; but to stop them up was downright wickedness, and a gross violation of the treaty of peace which had been made between a former Abimelech and Abraham. The issue was, the king, perceiving the temper of his people, entreated Isaac quietly to depart. The reason he gave for it, that *he was much mightier than they*, might be partly to apologize for his people's jealousy, and partly to soften his spirit by a compliment. If Isaac was so great as was suggested, he might, instead of removing at their request, have disputed it with them; he might have alleged the covenant made with his father, the improvement of his lands, &c. But he was a peaceable man; and therefore, without making words, removed to the *valley of Gerar*, either beyond the borders of Abimelech's territory, or at least farther off from the metropolis. A little with peace and quietness is better than much with envy and contention.

Ver. 18-22. Isaac, though removed to another part of the country, yet finds "wells of water which had been digged in the days of Abraham his father," and which the Philistines had stopped up after his death. It seems, wherever Abraham went, he improved the country; and wherever the Philistines followed him, their study was to mar his improvements, and that for no other end than the pleasure of doing mischief. Isaac, however, is resolved to open these wells again. Their waters would be doubly sweet to him for their having been first tasted by his beloved father; and to show his filial affection still more, he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. Many of our enjoyments, both civil and religious, are the sweeter for being the fruits of the labour of our fathers; and if they have been corrupted by adversaries since their days, we must restore them to their former purity. Isaac's servants also digged "new wells," which occasioned new strife. While we avail ourselves of the labours of our forefathers, we ought not to rest in them without making further progress, even though it expose us to many unpleasant disputes. *Envy* and *strife* may be

expected to follow those whose researches are really beneficial, provided they go a step beyond their forefathers. But let them not be discouraged: the wells of salvation are worth striving for; and, after a few conflicts, they may enjoy the fruits of their labours in peace. Isaac's servants dug two wells, which, from the bitter strife they occasioned, were called Esek and Sitnah, *contention* and *hatred*; but peaceably removing from these scenes of wrangle, he at length digged a well for which "they strove not." This he called Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord hath made *room* for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

Ver. 23-25. The famine being now over, Isaac returned to Beersheba, the place where he and his father had lived many years before. It may seem strange, after God had made room for him at Rehoboth, that the next news we hear is that he takes leave of it. This however might be at some distance of time, and Beersheba was to him a kind of home. Here, the very first night he arrived, the Lord appeared to him, probably in vision, saying, "I am the God of Abraham thy father; fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed, for my servant Abraham's sake." Isaac was attached to the wells which his father had digged, and to the place where he had sojourned; and doubtless it would add endearment to the very name of Jehovah himself, that he was the God of Abraham, especially as it would remind him of the covenant which he had made with him. A self-righteous spirit would have been offended at the idea of being blessed *for another's sake*; but he who walked in the steps of his father's faith would enjoy it: and by how much he loved him for whose sake the blessing was bestowed, by so much would this enjoyment be the greater. The promises are the same for substance as were made to him on his going to Gerar. The same truths are new to us under new circumstances, and in new situations. To express the grateful sense he had of the Divine goodness, he arose and "built an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord:" and now, the very place being rendered doubly dear to him, "*there* he pitched his tent, and *there* his servants digged a well." Temporal mercies are sweetened by their contiguity to God's altars, and by their being given us after we have first sought the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Ver. 26-31. One would not have expected, after driving him, in a manner, out of their country, that the Philistines would have had any thing more to say to him. Abimelech, however, and some of his courtiers, pay him a visit. They were not easy when he was with him, and now they seem hardly satisfied when he has left them. I believe they were afraid of his growing power, and, conscious that they had treated him unkindly, wished for their own sakes to adjust these differences before they proceeded any further. Isaac, while they acted as enemies, bore it patiently, as a part of his lot in an evil world; but now they want to be thought friends, and to renew covenant with him, he feels keenly, and speaks his mind: "Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?" We can bear that from an avowed adversary which we cannot bear from one in habits of friendship. "It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it." To this they answer, "We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee." Had they any regard, then, for Isaac's God, or for him on that account? I fear they had not; they feel however a regard to themselves, and a kind of respect for Isaac, which is very commonly seen in men of no religion towards them that fear the Lord. We do not blame them for wishing to be on good terms with such a man as Isaac; but they should not have pretended to have "done unto him nothing but good," when they must know, and he must have felt, the contrary. But this is the very character of a self-righteous heart, when seeking reconciliation with

God as well as with man. It palliates its sin, and desires peace in return for its good deeds, when in fact its deeds are evil. Isaac, being of a peaceable spirit, admitted their plea, though a poor one, and treated them generously. Next morning they arose; and having solemnly renewed covenant with each other, parted in peace.

Ver. 32, 33. The same day in which Abimelech and his courtiers took leave, the news came out of the field that Isaac's servants had discovered a well. It is the same well as they are said in the 25th verse to have digged; only there the thing is mentioned without respect to the time. Here we are told that the news of the discovery of the well arrived immediately after the mutual oath which had been taken between Isaac and Abimelech, and he for a memorial of the event called it *Sheba*, an *oath*; and a city being afterwards built on the spot, was hence, it seems, called *Beersheba*, *the well of the oath*. Indeed this name had been given it by Abraham above a hundred years before, and that on a similar occasion; but what was now done would serve to confirm it.

Ver. 34, 35. The Lord had promised to *multiply Isaac's seed*; and they are multiplied in the person of Esau; howbeit not to the increase of comfort, either in him or in Rebecca. Esau went into the practice of polygamy, and took both his wives from among the Canaanites. Whether he went into their idolatrous customs we are not told, nor whether they lived in the father's family. However this might be, their ungodly, and some think undutiful behaviour, was a grief of mind to their aged parents. Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife when she bare no children; and now that they have children grown up, one of them occasions much *bitterness of spirit*; this indeed is not uncommon. Such an issue of things in this instance would tend to turn away the hopes of Isaac from seeing the accomplishment of Abraham's covenant in the person of his first-born son, to whom he appears to have been inordinately attached. By other instances of the kind, God teaches us to beware of excessive anxiety after earthly comforts, and in receiving them to rejoice with trembling.

DISCOURSE XXXVI.

JACOB'S OBTAINING THE BLESSING.

Gen. xxvii.

BEFORE we entered on the history of Isaac, we met with some painful events respecting the departure of Ishmael; but in the introduction to the history of Jacob, we find things much more painful. In the former instance, we found him that was rejected a mocker; but in this we see in the heir of promise a supplanter. This deviation from rectitude, though it changes not the Divine purpose, but, on the contrary, is overruled for its accomplishment, yet sows the seed of much evil in the life of the offender. Isaac retained his place in the family; but Jacob was obliged to depart from it. When the former was of age to be married, an honourable embassy was sent to bring it about; but the latter is necessitated to go by himself, as one that had just escaped with his life. There is a deep mystery in the system of providence, and much eventual good brought out of great evils.

Ver. 1-4. Isaac was now about a hundred and thirty-seven years of age, and "his eyes were dim, so that he could not see." He therefore called

Esau his eldest son, and said, "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death—take I pray thee thy weapons—and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless thee before I die." Isaac lived forty-three years after this; but as it was unknown to him, he did very properly in settling his affairs. The day of our death is concealed from us for the very purpose that we may be always ready; and when life is upon the wane, especially, it becomes us to do what we do quickly. The above account, however, does not appear greatly to his honour. His partiality towards Esau would seem to imply a disregard to what had been revealed to Rebecca; and his fondness for the venison has the appearance of weakness.

But, passing this, there are two questions which require an answer—Wherein consisted the blessing which was now about to be bestowed? and why was savoury meat required, in order to the bestowment of it? Respecting the first, I might refer to what has been said already on the birthright, chap. xxv. 29–34. There was, no doubt, a common blessing to be expected from such a father as Isaac on all his children, and a special one on his first-born; but in his family there was a blessing superior to both. It included all those great things contained in the covenant with Abraham, by which his posterity were to be distinguished as God's peculiar people. Hence that which Isaac did is said to have been done *in faith*, and was prophetic of "things to come," Heb. xi. 20. The faith of this good man was however, at first, much interrupted by natural attachment. Desirous of conferring the blessing on Esau, he gives him directions as to the manner of receiving it. And here occurs the second question, Why was savoury meat required in order to the bestowment of the blessing? The design of it seems to have been, not merely to strengthen animal nature, but to enkindle affection. Isaac is said to have *loved* Esau on account of his venison, (chap. xxv. 23); this therefore would tend, as he supposed, to revive that affection, and so enable him to bless him with all his heart. It seems, however, to have been but a carnal kind of introduction to so Divine an act; partaking more of the flesh than of the Spirit, and savouring rather of that natural affection, under the influence of which he at present acted, than of the faith of a son of Abraham.

Ver. 5–10. Rebecca, overhearing this charge of Isaac to his son Esau, takes measures to direct the blessing into another channel. This is a mysterious affair. It was just that Esau should lose the blessing, for by selling his birthright he had despised it. It was God's design too that Jacob should have it. Rebecca also knowing of this design, from its having been revealed to her that the elder should serve the younger, appears to have acted from a good motive. But the scheme which she formed to correct the error of her husband was far from being justifiable. It was one of those crooked measures which have too often been adopted to accomplish the Divine promises; as if the end would justify, or at least excuse, the means. Thus Sarah acted in giving Hagar to Abraham; and thus many others have acted, under the idea of being *useful* in promoting the cause of Christ. The answer to all such things is that which God addressed to Abraham; "I AM GOD ALMIGHTY; *walk before me, and be thou perfect.*" The deception practised on Isaac was cruel. If he be in the wrong, endeavour to convince him; or commit the affair to God, who could turn his mind, as he afterwards did that of Jacob, when blessing Ephraim and Manasseh; but do not avail yourself of his loss of sight to deceive him. Such would have been the counsel of wisdom and rectitude; but Rebecca follows her own.

Ver. 11–13. We ought not to load Jacob with more of the guilt of this transaction than belongs to him. He was not first in the transgression

His feelings revolted at it when it was proposed to him. He remonstrated against it. Considering too that it was against the advice, or rather the command, of a parent, such remonstrance would seem to go far towards excusing him. But no earthly authority can justify us in disregarding the authority of God. Moreover, the remonstrance itself is founded merely on the *consequences* of the evil, and not on *the evil itself*. What a difference between this reasoning and that of his son Joseph! "I shall bring a curse upon me," said he, "and not a blessing." "How can I do this great wickedness," said the other, "and sin against God!" The *resoluteness* of Rebecca is affecting. "Upon me be thy curse, my son; only obey my voice." Surely she must have presumed upon the Divine promise, which is a dangerous thing: our Lord considered it as tempting God, Matt. iv. 7. Those who do evil under an idea of serving God commonly go to the greatest lengths. It was in this track that the Lord met Saul in his way to Damascus.

Ver. 14-17. If Jacob's remonstrance had arisen from an aversion to the evil, he would not so readily have yielded to his mother as he did; but, to resist temptation with merely the calculation of consequences, is doing nothing. Rebecca takes the consequence upon herself, and then he has no more to object, but does as she instructs him. She also performs her part; and thus between them the scheme is executed. What labour and contrivance are required to dissemble the truth and carry on a bad cause! Uprightness needs no such circuitous measures.

Ver. 18-24. Jacob now enters upon the business. And first, with all the artifice of his mother, she cannot guard him at all points. He is obliged to *speak*, and he could not counterfeit his brother's voice. "My father," said he: the patriarch starts "Who art thou, my son?" It was the voice of one of his sons, but not of him whom he expected. And now what can Jacob answer? He must either confess the deception, or persist in it at all events. He chooses the latter. One sin makes way for another, and in a manner impels us to commit it: "Jacob said, I am Esau thy first-born—I have done according as thou badest me—Arise, I pray thee, sit, and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me." Isaac, still suspicious, inquires how he came so soon. The answer intimates that by a special interposition of his father's God he had met with early success! It is not easy to conceive of any thing more wicked than this. It was bad enough to deal in so many known falsehoods; but to bring in the Lord God of his father, in order to give them the appearance of truth, was much worse, and what we should not have expected but from one of the worst of men. There is something about falsehood which though it may silence, yet will not ordinarily satisfy. Isaac is yet suspicious, and therefore desirous to feel his hands; and here the deception answered. The hands, he thinks, are Esau's; but still it is mysterious, for *the voice is Jacob's*. Were it not for some such things as these we might overlook the wisdom and goodness of God in affording us so many marks by which to detect imposture, and distinguish man from man. Of all the multitudes of faces, voices, and figures in the world, no two are perfectly alike; and if one sense fail us, the others are frequently improved. Such was the strength of Isaac's doubts, that he would not be satisfied without directly asking him again, "Art thou my very son Esau?" and receiving for answer "I am." After this he seems to have thought that it must be Esau, and therefore proceeded to bless him.

The adversaries of revelation may make the most they can of these narrations: evil as was the conduct of Jacob and of Rebecca, the history of it contains the strongest internal evidence that it is written by inspiration of God. Had it been a cunningly devised fable, it would have been the business of the writer to have thrown the faults of this his great ancestor into the

shade; but the Scriptures do not profess to describe perfect characters; they represent men and things as they were. We feel for the imposition practised on Isaac; and yet it was no doubt a chastisement to him for his ill-placed partiality for Esau, on grounds so unworthy of him, and to the disregarding of what God had revealed concerning them.

Ver. 25-29. It was of the Lord that Jacob should have the blessing, notwithstanding the unwarrantable means he had used to obtain it. In pronouncing it, Isaac was supernaturally directed; otherwise it would not have corresponded with what afterwards actually befell his posterity, which it manifestly does; nor would he have felt himself unable to revoke it. It is observable, however, that the blessing is expressed in very general terms. No mention is made of those distinguishing mercies included in the covenant with Abraham; and this might be owing to his having Esau in his mind, though it was Jacob who was before him. He could not be ignorant how that young man had despised these things, and this might be a check to his mind while he thought he was blessing him. Moreover, his attachment to Esau, to the disregard of the mind of God, must have greatly weakened and injured his own faith in these things: it might therefore be expected that the Lord would cause a comparative leanness to attend his blessing, corresponding with the state of his mind.

Ver. 30-33. Jacob had scarcely left the room when Esau, returning from the chase, enters it, and presents his father with his venison. This at once discovers the imposition. Isaac is greatly affected by it. At first, when he heard his voice, he was confounded: "Who art thou?" And when he perceived that it was indeed his first-born son, Esau, he "trembled very exceedingly," and said, "Who, where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it to me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him?" Such a shock must have been more than he knew how to sustain. To ascertain the sensations of which it was composed, we must place ourselves in his situation. As an aged and afflicted man, the imposition which had been practised on him would excite his *indignation*. Yet a moment's reflection would convince him that the transfer of the blessing must have been *of the Lord*; and, consequently, that he had all along been acting against his will in seeking to have it otherwise. Two such considerations rushing upon his mind in the same instant sufficiently account for all his feelings: it was to him like a place where two seas met, or as the union of subterraneous fires and waters, the commotion of which causeth the earth to tremble. It must have appeared to him as a strong measure, permitted of God for his correction; and that he had thus caused him to do that against his choice which should have been done with it. Viewing it in this light, and knowing the blessing to be irrevocable, he, like a good man, acquiesced in the will of God, saying, "Yea, and he shall be blessed."

Ver. 34-40. The *very exceeding trembling* of Isaac is now followed by "a great and exceeding bitter cry" on the part of Esau. Nothing he had ever met with seems to have affected him like it. But how is it that he who made so light of the birthright, as to part with it for a morsel of meat, should now make so much of the blessing connected with it? It was not that he desired to be a servant of the Lord, or that his posterity should be his people, according to the tenor of Abraham's covenant; but as he that should be possessed of these distinctions would *in other respects* be superior to his brother, it became an object of emulation. Thus we have often seen religion set at naught, while yet the advantages which accompany it have been earnestly desired; and where grace has in a manner crossed hands, by favouring a younger or inferior branch of a family, envy, and its train of malignant passions, have frequently blazed on the other side. It was not

as the father of the holy nation, but as being "lord over his brethren," that Jacob was the object of Esau's envy. And this may further account for the blessing of Isaac on the former dwelling principally upon *temporal advantages*, as designed of God to cut off the vain hopes of the latter of enjoying the *power* attached to the blessing, while he despised the blessing itself.

When Esau perceived that Jacob must be blessed, he entreated to be blessed *also*: "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" One sees in this language just that partial conviction of there being something in religion, mixed with a large portion of ignorance, which it is common to see in persons who have been brought up in a religious family, and yet are strangers to the God of their fathers. If this earnest request had extended only to what was consistent with Jacob's having the pre-eminence, there *was* another blessing for him, and he had it; but though he had no desire after the best part of Jacob's portion, yet he was very earnest to have had that clause of it reversed, "Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee." If this could have been granted him, he had been satisfied; for "the fatness of the earth" was all he cared for. But this was an object concerning which, as the apostle observes, "he found no place of repentance," (that is, in the mind of his father,) "though he sought it carefully with tears." Such will be the case with fornicators, and all profane persons, who, like Esau, for a few momentary gratifications in the present life, make light of Christ, and the blessings of the gospel. They will cry with a great and exceedingly bitter cry, saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us?" But they will find no place of repentance in the mind of the Judge, who will answer them, "I know you not whence ye are: depart from me, ye workers of iniquity."

Esau's reflections on his brother for having twice supplanted him were not altogether without ground; yet his statement is exaggerated. It was not accurate to say, "He took away my birthright," as though he had robbed him of it, seeing he himself had so despised it as to part with it for a morsel of meat; and having done so, whatever might be said of Jacob's conduct in the sight of God, *he* had no reason to complain.

Ver. 41. Esau obtained, as we have seen, a blessing, and some relief on the score of subjection; yet because he could not gain his point, but the posterity of Jacob must needs have the ascendancy, there is nothing left for him but to "hate him for the blessing wherewith his father blessed him." He was not ignorant of Isaac's partiality; he must therefore have known that it was not owing to him, nor even to Jacob's subtlety, that the first dominion was given him. He must have perceived, from what his father had said, that the thing was *of the Lord*, and therefore could not be reversed. Hence it appears that the hatred of Esau was of the same nature with that of Cain to Abel, and of Saul to David; and operated in the same way; it was directed against him principally on account of his having been an object whom the Lord had favoured. Such also was the motive of hatred which, in after-ages, subsisted in the Edomites against Israel. As nothing could comfort Esau but the hope of murder, so nothing could satisfy his posterity but to see Jerusalem razed to its foundations. Isaac had talked of dying, and Esau thought to be sure the time was not far distant; and then, during the days of mourning for his father, he hoped for an opportunity of murdering his brother. He might think also that it was best to suppress his resentment till the poor old man was dead, and then it would not be a grief to him. The most cruel designs of wicked men may be mixed with a partiality for those who have been partial to them.

Ver. 42-45. Esau, it seems, had not only *said in his heart*, I will slay my brother, but had put his thought into words, probably before some of the

servants. The hint, however, was carried to Rebecca, and she clearly foresaw what was to be expected. She therefore sent for Jacob, and told him of his brother's design, counselling him at the same time to go to her relations at Haran, and tarry there awhile, till Esau's anger should have subsided. The reason which she urges to enforce her counsel is very strong: "Why should I be deprived of you both in one day?" Had Esau's purpose succeeded, the murderer, as well as the murdered, had been lost to her. We see here the bitter fruits which Rebecca begins to reap from her crooked policy; she must part with her favourite son to preserve his life, and will never see him again in this world, though she thinks of sending in a little time to fetch him home.

Ver. 46. By the manner in which things are here related, it appears that Isaac was so infirm as to have lost all the power of management, and that the whole in a manner devolved on Rebecca. She advises Jacob what to do; it is expedient, if not necessary, however, before he takes his departure, to obtain his father's concurrence. She does not choose to tell her husband the true reason of her wishes, as that was a tender point, and might lead to a subject which she might think it better to pass over in silence; but knowing that he as well as herself had been grieved with Esau's wives, (chap. xxvi. 35,) she judges that the most likely means of success would be a proposal for Jacob to go to Haran for the purpose of taking a wife from among their relations in that country. She does not propose it, however, directly, but merely expresses her strong disapprobation of his following the example of his brother, leaving it to Isaac to mention positively what should be done. And this, her apparent modesty, answered the end, as we shall see in the following chapter.

DISCOURSE XXXVII.

JACOB'S DEPARTURE FROM BEERSHEBA.

Gen. xxviii.

VER. 1-4. The hint which Rebecca had dropped against Jacob's taking a wife from among the daughters of Heth quite fell in with Isaac's mind; and knowing that there was but one place for him to go to on such an errand, he determines without delay to send him thither. The account here given of his *calling*, *blessing*, and *charging* him is very much to his honour. The first of these terms implies his reconciliation to him; the second, his satisfaction in what had been done before without design; and the last, his concern that he should act in a manner worthy of the blessing which he had received. How differently do things issue in different minds! Esau, as well as Isaac, was exceedingly affected by what had lately occurred; but the *bitter cry* of the one issued in a settled hatred, while the *trembling* of the other brought him to a right mind. He had been thinking matters over ever since, and the more he thought of them, the more satisfied he was that it was the will of God, and that all his private partialities should give place to it.

One sees in what he now does that his heart is in it. He not only blesses him, but invokes the blessing of Almighty God to attend him: "God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee,

and to thy seed with thee, that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham." Who does not perceive the difference between this blessing and the former? In that he was thinking of one person, and blessing another; in this he understands what he is about. Then his mind was straitened by carnal attachment, now it is enlarged by faith. The rich promises of Abraham's covenant seem there to have been almost forgotten; but here they are expressly named, and dwelt upon with delight. Of what importance is it for our minds to be kept one with God's mind! and what a difference it makes in the discharge of duty! We may pray, or preach, after a manner, while it is otherwise; and God may preserve us from uttering gross error: but what we deliver will be miserably flat and defective in comparison of what it is when a right spirit is renewed within us.

Ver. 5-9. The departure of Jacob was attended by many painful and humiliating circumstances, as well it might; for these are the necessary consequences of sin. The parting scene to Isaac was tender; but Jacob and his mother must have felt something more than tenderness. As to Esau, it is not likely that he was present. He was near enough however to eye his motions, and by some means to make himself acquainted with every thing that passed. Probably he expected more supplanting schemes were forming, and longed for the time when a fair opportunity should offer for his being revenged on the supplanter. But when he found that his father had blessed him, and charged him not to take a wife of the daughters of Canaan, and that he had obeyed his voice, and was gone to Padan-aram, it seems to have wrought in a way that we should scarcely have expected. Finding himself left in the possession of all the substance of the family, and Jacob out of his way, he thinks he has now only to please his father, and, notwithstanding the loss of his birthright and blessing, all will be his. And now, to accomplish his end, he carefully notices the means by which Jacob succeeded in pleasing his parents. One great advantage which he had gained over him, as he perceived by his father's *charge*, was in reference to marriage. He had obeyed the voice of his father and his mother, and was gone to take a wife from the family of Bethuel. I will take another wife then, said Esau to himself, if that will please them; and, as they seem attached to their *relations*, it shall be from among them. Moreover, as Jacob, who is his mother's favourite, intends to marry into her family, I, who am my father's, will marry into his. See what awkward work is made when men go about to please others and promote their worldly interest, by imitating that in which they have no delight. Ignorance and error mark every step they take. Esau was in no need of a wife, for he had two already; nor did his parents desire him to add to the number; nor would they be gratified by his connexion with the apostate family of Ishmael; nor was it principally on account of Bethuel's being a *relation* that Abraham's family took wives from his. In short, he is out in all his calculations; nor can he discover the principles which influence those who fear the Lord. Thus have we often seen men try to imitate religious people, for the sake of gaining esteem, or in some way promoting their selfish ends; but instead of succeeding, they have commonly made bad worse. That which to a right mind is as plain as the most public highway, to a mind perverted shall appear full of difficulties. "The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city." But to return:—

Ver. 10, 11. The line of promise being now fully ascertained, Jacob becomes the hero of the tale. He was now about seventy-seven years old; and though his brother Esau had two wives, yet he was single. The posterity of Ishmael and Esau increased much faster than those of Isaac and

Jacob. It seemed to be the design of God that the fulfilment of the promise should be protracted in order to try the faith of his servants. Setting out from his father's house at Beersheba, we find Jacob journeying towards Haran, a distance of about five hundred miles. Without a servant to attend him, or a beast to carry him, or any other accommodation, except, as he afterwards informs us, *a staff* to walk with, he pursues his solitary way. Having travelled one whole day, the sun being set, he alighted on a certain place, where he took up his abode for the night. The place was called Luz, and is said to have been *a city*, ver. 19. Jacob, however, does not seem to have entered it; but, for some reason, chose to sleep in the open air in its suburbs. Sleeping abroad is a custom very common in the East, and less dangerous than in colder climates. The stones which he used for a pillow must have preserved him from the damp of the ground; but, we should think, must have contributed but little to rest his weary body.

Ver. 12-15. During the night he had a very extraordinary dream, almost every particular of which is introduced by the sacred writer with the interjection "*Behold!*"

We might have been at a loss in ascertaining the meaning of the ladder, if the great medium of communion between heaven and earth had not almost expressly applied it to himself. "Hereafter," said Jesus to Nathanael, "ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending (that is, to heaven) and descending (that is, to the earth) upon the Son of man." Our Lord's design appears to have been to foretell the glory of gospel times, in which, through his mediation, heaven should as it were be opened, and a free intercourse be established between God, angels, and men. But, it may be asked, What analogy could there be between this and that which was revealed to Jacob? I answer, We have seen that the Messiah was not only included in the promises to Abraham, but that he made a principal part of them; and as these promises were now renewed to Jacob, though we had read nothing of his vision of the ladder, yet we should have known that they looked as far forward as to him, and to that dispensation in which "all the families of the earth should be blessed" in him. As it is, we may conclude that what was *seen* in vision was of the same general import as what was *heard* in the promises which followed. It was giving the patriarch a glimpse of that glory which should be accomplished in his seed.

There was something very *seasonable* in this vision, and in the promises which accompanied it. Jacob had lately acted an unworthy part, and, if properly sensible of it, must have been very unhappy. His father, it is true, had blessed him, and of course forgiven him; but, till God has done so too, he can enjoy no solid peace. Now such was the present vision: it was the Lord his God saying Amen to his father's blessing, ver. 3, 4, with 13, 14. He was taking leave of Canaan, and if he had calculated on human probabilities, he was never likely to return to it, at least during the lifetime of Esau; but, by the gift of the land on which he lay to him, and to his seed, he was taught to expect it, and to consider himself only as a sojourner at Haran. Considering his age, too, there seemed but little probability of his having a numerous offspring. If the blessing consisted in this, it seemed much more likely to be fulfilled in his brother than in him; but he was hereby assured that his seed should be as the dust of the earth, spreading abroad in every direction. The thought also of leaving his father's house, and of going among strangers, must needs have affected him. During his solitary walk from Beersheba he had doubtless been thinking of his lonely condition, and of the difficulties and dangers which he had to encounter. How seasonable then was the promise, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into

this land!" Finally, the present was a new epoch in his life, and, as an heir of promise, a kind of commencement of it. In this character he must, like his predecessors, live by faith. Esau's blessing was soon fulfilled; but Jacob's related to things at a great distance, which none but *God Almighty* could bring to pass. How seasonable then were those precious promises which furnished at his outset a ground for faith to rest upon! "I will not leave thee till I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Ver. 16-22. Awaking from sleep in the night time, and reflecting on his dream, he was greatly affected, as well he might. "Surely," exclaimed he, "Jehovah is in this place, and I knew it not!" And he was afraid, and said, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" As if he had said, Surely this is no common dream! God is in it! God is near! I went to sleep as at other times, expecting nothing; and lo, ere I was aware, God hath visited me! Feeling himself as in the presence of the Divine Majesty, he trembles; the place seems to be holy ground, the temple of Jehovah, the suburbs of heaven! Whether he slept after this we are not told: be that as it may, he "rose early in the morning;" and, deeply impressed with what had passed, resolved to perpetuate the remembrance of it. Taking the stone upon which he had lain, he set it up for a pillar, or monument; and, that he might consecrate it to the future service of the Lord, "poured oil upon the top of it." This done, he gave the place a new name. Instead of *Luz*, (probably so called on account of a number of *almond* or *nut* trees growing near it,) he called it "Beth-el—the house of God."

Finally, He closed this extraordinary vision by a solemn vow, or dedication of himself to God. The *terms* of this solemn vow were not of Jacob's dictating to the Almighty, but arose out of his own gracious promises; and so furnish a lovely example of the prayer of faith. God had promised to be with him, to keep him, to bring him again into the land, and not to leave him. Jacob takes up the precious words, saying, "If God will thus be with me, and keep me, and provide for me, and bring me home in peace, then in return I will be his for ever." We may pray for things which God hath not promised *in submission to his will*, as Abraham interceded for Sodom, and Moses for the idolaters at Horeb; but when we ask for that which he hath engaged to bestow, we approach him with much greater encouragement. The *order* of what he desired is also deserving of notice. It corresponds with our Saviour's rule, to seek things of the greatest importance first. By how much God's favour is better than life, by so much his being *with us*, and *keeping us*, is better than food and raiment. A sense of this will moderate our desires for inferior things, as it did Jacob's. A little with the fear of the Lord is better than great treasures with trouble. If God be with us, and keep us, the mere necessities of life will make us happy. The *vow itself* contains an entire renunciation of idolatry, and a taking Jehovah to be his God. And inasmuch as it looks forward to his return to Canaan, it includes a solemn promise to maintain the worship of God in his family. Then he would rear an altar to him in Beth-el, and consecrate the tenth of all his substance to his cause.

In the course of the history we shall perceive the use that Jacob made of this vision, and that which the Lord made of the vow which here he vowed to him. But I conclude with only remarking that in the former chapter we saw much of man; but in this we have seen much of God. In the works of the one, sin abounded; in those of the other, grace hath much more abounded.

DISCOURSE XXXVIII.

JACOB'S ARRIVAL AT HARAN.

Gen. xxix.

VER. 1. Jacob's second day's journey was very different from the first; then he had a heavy burden, but now he has lost it. His outset from Beth-el is expressed by a phrase which signifies he *lifted up his feet*; that is, he went lightly and cheerfully on. Nothing more is recorded of his journey, but that "he came into the land of the people of the east."

VER. 2-10. The first object that struck him was a well, with three flocks of sheep lying by it, ready to be watered. The shepherds coming up rolled away the stone from the well's mouth, watered the flocks, and then put the stone again in its place. Jacob, who had hitherto looked on, now began the following conversation with them.—My brethren, whence be ye?—Of Haran.—Know ye Laban, the son of Nahor?—We know him.—Is he well?—He is well; and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep. On this Jacob suggests that it was too soon to gather all the flocks together, as they did at night; and that there was much time for their being again led forth to pasture. "Water ye the sheep," said he, "and go and feed them." It might appear somewhat out of character for a stranger to be so officious as to direct them how to proceed with their flocks; but the design was, I apprehend, to induce them to depart, and to leave him to converse with Rachel by herself. They tell him, however, that they must stop till all the flocks are watered; Rachel's, it seems, as well as the rest. Such probably was the custom, that the well might be left secure. While they were talking Rachel came up. The sight of the daughter of his mother's brother affected Jacob. He could have wished that so tender an interview had been by themselves; but as this could not be, he, in the presence of the shepherds, went and "rolled away the stone from the well's mouth, and watered her flock;" which being done, he "kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept." The tears shed on this occasion must have arisen from a full heart. We cannot say that the love which he afterwards bore to Rachel did not commence from his first seeing her. But however that might be, the cause of this weeping was of another kind; it was her being "the daughter of his *mother's* brother" that now affected him. Every thing that revived *her* memory, even the very flocks of sheep that belonged to *her* brother, went to his heart. Nor did he wish to be alone with Rachel, but that he might give vent without reserve to these sensations.

VER. 12-14. It must have excited surprise in Rachel's mind to see a stranger so attentive in watering her flock, and still more so to receive from him so affectionate a salutation; but now, having relieved his heart by a burst of weeping, he tells her who he is;—he is her father's near kinsman, Rebecca's son! And now we may expect another very tender interview. Rachel ran and told her father; and the father "ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house." After an interchange of salutations, Jacob tells him his whole story; and Laban seems much affected with it, and speaks to him in affectionate language, "Surely, thou art my bone and my flesh."

VER. 15-20. During the first month of his stay, Jacob employed himself about his uncle's business; but nothing was said with respect to terms. On such a subject it was not for Jacob to speak; so Laban very properly inti

mated that he did not desire to take advantage of his near relationship, that he should serve him any more than another man for nothing. Tell me, said he, what shall be thy wages. This gives Jacob an opportunity of expressing his love to Rachel. Aware that he had no dowry, like his father Isaac, he could not well have asked her, but for such an opportunity as this being afforded him. It was humiliating, however, to be thus in a manner obliged to earn his wife before he could have her. This is twice afterward referred to in the Scriptures, as an instance of his low condition. It was a part of the confession required to be made by every Israelite, when he presented his basket of first-fruits before the Lord, "A Syrian, *ready to perish*, was my father!" And when, in the days of Hosea, they were grown haughty, the prophet reminds them that "Jacob *fled* into the country of Syria, and Israel *served* for a wife, and for a wife he *kept sheep*." Half the generosity which Laban's words seem to express would have given Jacob the object of his choice, without making him wait seven years for her. It was very proper for the one to offer it; but it was mean and selfish for the other to accept it. If he had really esteemed his daughters, and on this account set a high value on them, he would not afterwards have imposed two, where only one was desired. But his own private interest was all he studied. In his sister Rebecca's marriage there were presents of gold and silver, and costly raiment, besides an assurance of the Lord having greatly blessed the family, and that Isaac was to be the *heir*. These were things which wrought much on Laban's mind. He could then say, "Rebecca is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife." But here are none of these moving inducements. Here is a man, it is true, and he *talks* of promised blessings; but he is poor, and Laban cannot live upon promises. He perceives that Abraham's descendants are partial to his family, and he is resolved to make his market of it. The sight of the very flocks of Laban, as being his *mother's* brother, interested Jacob's heart; but he would soon find that Laban will make him pay for his attachments. Such, however, was the love he bore to Rachel, that he took all in good part, and consented to *serve* seven years for her. Nay, such was the strength of his affection, that "they seemed unto him but a few days." Some would suppose that love must operate in a contrary way, causing the time to appear long rather than short; and therefore conclude that what is here spoken is expressive of what it appeared *when it was past*: but the phraseology seems rather to denote what it appeared *at the time*. The truth seems to be this: when there is nothing to obstruct a union, love is impatient of delay; but when great difficulties interpose, it stimulates to a patient and resolute course of action, in order to surmount them. Where the object is highly valued, we think little of the labour and expense of obtaining it. "Love endureth all things."

Ver. 21-24. At the expiration of the time Jacob demanded his wife, and preparation is made accordingly for the marriage. Laban, like some in their gifts to God, is not wanting in ceremony. He *made a feast*, gave his daughter a handmaid, and went through all the forms; but the gift itself was a deception; it was not Rachel, but Leah, that was presented. It seems somewhat extraordinary that Jacob should be capable of being thus imposed upon. Perhaps the veil which was then worn by a woman on her marriage might contribute to his not perceiving her. It was a cruel business on the part of Laban; yet Jacob might see in it the punishment of his having imposed upon his father. In such a way God often deals with men, causing them to reap the bitter fruits of sin, even when they have lamented and forsaken it. "When thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee."

Ver. 25-30. Jacob, perceiving by the light of the morning, how he had

been deceived, remonstrated; but it was to no purpose. The answer of Laban was frivolous. If the custom of the country was as he alleged, he ought to have said so from the first; but it is manifest that he wanted to dispose of both his daughters in a way that might turn to his own advantage. Hence he adds, "Fulfil her week, and I will give thee this also." These words would seem to intimate that he had seven years longer to stay for Rachel; but this does not agree with other facts. Jacob was twenty years in Haran, chap. xxxi. 41. At the end of fourteen years Joseph was born. At which time Rachel had been a wife, without bearing any children, for several years, chap. xxx. 22-25. The two marriages therefore must have been within a week of each other; and the meaning of Laban's words must be, Fulfil the seven days' feasting for Leah, and then thou shalt have Rachel, and shalt serve me seven years after the marriage on her account.—With this perfectly agrees what is said in ver. 30, in which he is said to have gone in *also* unto Rachel, denoting that it was soon after his having gone in unto Leah; and in which the seven years' service is spoken of as following his marriage to her. This proposal on the part of Laban was as void of principle as any thing could well be. His first agreement was ungenerous, his breach of it unjust; and now to extort seven years' more labour, or withhold the object agreed for, was sordid in the extreme. Jacob had no desire for more wives than one; yet as polygamy was at that time tolerated, and as the marriage had been consummated, though ignorantly, with Leah, he could not well put her away; yet neither could he think of foregoing Rachel. So he acceded to the terms, notwithstanding their injustice, and was married also to Rachel; and Billah was given to her for a handmaid. But it was to him a sore trial, and that which laid the foundation of innumerable discords in his family, of which the succeeding history of it abounds. The following prohibition to Israel seems to have been occasioned by this unhappy example in their great ancestor: "Thou shalt not take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, besides the other, in her lifetime."

Ver. 31-35. That Leah, who was never the object of Jacob's choice, and who must have had a share in the late imposition, should be *hated* in comparison of Rachel, is no more than might be expected; yet it is worthy of notice how God balances the good and ill of the present life. Leah is slighted in comparison of Rachel; but God gives children to her, while he withholds them from the other; and children, in a family whose chief blessing consisted in a promised *seed*, were greatly accounted of. The names given to the children were expressive of their mother's state of mind; partly as to her affliction for want of an interest in her husband's heart, and partly, we hope, as to her piety, in viewing the hand of God in all that befell her. Four children were born of her successively; namely, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; and thus God was pleased to put more abundant honour upon the part that lacked. The name of the last of these children, though given him by his mother merely under an emotion of thankfulness, yet was not a little suited to the royal tribe, whence also the Messiah should descend. Of this his father was made acquainted by revelation when he blessed his sons. "Judah," said he, "thou art he whom thy brethren shall PRAISE—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!"

One sees, in the conduct of both Jacob and Leah, under their afflictions, a portion of that patience which arose from a consciousness of their having brought them upon themselves. They were each buffeted in this manner for their faults; and, being so, there was less of praiseworthiness in their taking it patiently. Yet, when compared with some others, who, in all their troubles, are as bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke, we see what is worthy of imitation.

DISCOURSE XXXIX.

JACOB IN HARAN.

Gen. xxx.; xxxi. 1-16.

THOUGH every part of Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for various purposes, yet I conceive it is no disparagement from its real value to say that every particular passage in it is not suited for a public exposition. On this ground I shall pass over the thirtieth chapter, with only two or three general remarks.

First, The domestic discords, envies, and jealousies, between Jacob's wives, serve to teach us the wisdom and goodness of the Christian law, that every man have his own wife, as well as every woman her own husband. No reflecting person can read this chapter without being disgusted with polygamy, and thankful for that dispensation which has restored the original law of nature, and with it true conjugal felicity.

Secondly, Though the strifes and jealousies of Jacob's wives were disgusting, yet we are not to attribute their desire of children, or the measures which it put them upon for obtaining them, to mere carnal motives. Had it been so, there is no reason to believe that the inspired writer would have condescended to narrate them. "It would," as an able writer observes, "have been below the dignity of such a sacred history as this is to relate such things, if there had not been something of great consideration in them." The truth appears to be, they were influenced by the promises of God to Abraham; on whose posterity were entailed the richest blessings, and from whom the Messiah was, in the fulness of time, to descend. It was the belief of these promises that rendered every pious female in those times emulous of being a mother. Hence also both Leah and Rachel are represented as praying to God for this honour, and, when children were given them, as acknowledging the favour to have proceeded from him, ver. 17, 18, 22.

Thirdly, The measure which Jacob took to obtain the best of the cattle would at first sight appear to be selfish and disingenuous; and if viewed as a mere human device, operating according to the established laws of nature, it would be so: but such it was not. As when unbelievers object to the curse of Noah upon his son that it was the mere effect of revenge, we answer, Let them curse those who displease them, and see whether any such effects will follow; so if they object to the conduct of Jacob as a crafty device, we might answer, Let them make use of the same, if they be able. I believe it will not be pretended that any other person has since made the like experiment with success. It must therefore have been by a special direction of God that he acted as he did, chap. xxxi. 10-12. And this will acquit him of selfishness, in the same manner as the Divine command to the Israelites to borrow of the Egyptians acquits them of fraud. Both were extraordinary interpositions in behalf of the injured; a kind of Divine reprisal, in which justice was executed on a broad scale. And as the Egyptians could not complain of the Israelites, for that they had freely lent or rather given them their jewels, without any expectation of receiving them again;* so neither could Laban complain of Jacob, for that he had nothing more than it was freely agreed he should have; nor was he on the whole injured, but greatly benefited by Jacob's services.

* The Hebrew word *שאל* often signifies merely *to ask*, Psal. ii. 8.

Chap. xxxi. 1, 2. It is time for Jacob to depart; for though Laban has acknowledged, in the hope of detaining him, that the Lord had *blessed him for his sake*, yet here is at this time much envy and evil-mindedness at work in the family against him, overlooking all their gains, and dwelling only upon his. Mercenary characters are not contented to prosper with others, but think much of every thing that goes beside themselves. If a poor tenant or a servant thrive under them, they will soon be heard murmuring, "He hath taken away all that was ours, and of that which was ours hath he gotten all this glory." If Laban's sons only had murmured thus, Jacob might have borne it; but their father was of the same mind, and carried it thus unkindly towards him. He had been very willing to part with his daughters, more so indeed than he ought to have been; but Jacob's increase of cattle under him touches him in a tender part.

Ver. 3. The Lord had promised to be with Jacob, and to keep him in all places whither he went; and he makes good his promise. Like a watchful friend at his right hand, he observes his treatment, and warns him to depart. If Jacob had removed from mere personal resentment, or as stimulated only by a sense of injury, he might have sinned against God, though not against Laban. But when it was said to him, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee," his way was plain before him. In all our removals, it becomes us to act as that we may hope for the Divine presence and blessing to attend us; else, though we may flee from one trouble, we shall fall into many, and be less able to endure them.

Ver. 4-13. And now, being warned of God to depart, he sends for his wives into the field, where he might converse with them freely on the subject, without danger of being overheard. Had they been servants, it had been sufficient to have imparted to them his will; but being wives, they require a different treatment. There is an authority which Scripture and nature give to the man over the woman; but every one who deserves the name of a man will exercise it with a gentleness and kindness that shall render it pleasant, rather than burdensome. He will consult with her as a friend, and satisfy her by giving the reasons of his conduct. Thus did Jacob to both his wives, who, by such kind conduct, forgot the differences between themselves, and cheerfully cast in their lot with him.

The reasons assigned for leaving were partly the treatment of Laban, and partly the intimations from God. "I see your father's countenance," says he, "that it is not toward me as before." It is wisely ordered that the countenance shall, in most cases, be an index to the heart; else there would be much more deception in the world than there is. We gather more of men's disposition towards us from looks than from words; and domestic happiness is more influenced by the one than by the other. Sullen silence is often less tolerable than contention itself, because the latter, painful as it is, affords opportunity for mutual explanation. But while Jacob had to complain of Laban's cloudy countenance, he could add, "The God of my father hath been with me." God's smiles are the best support under man's frowns; if we walk in the light of his countenance, we need not fear what man can do unto us. He then appeals to his wives, as to the faithfulness and diligence with which he had served their father, and the deceitful treatment he had met with in return. "Ye know that with all my power I have served your father; and your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times." Next he alleges the good hand of his God upon him, that he had not suffered him to hurt him; but, in whatever form his wages were to be, had caused things in the end to turn to his account; and that the purport of this was revealed to him by a dream before it came to pass, in which he saw the cattle in those colours which were to distinguish them as his hire

Moreover, that he had very lately had another dream,* in which the Angel of God directed him to observe the fact as accomplished, of which he had before received only a pre-intimation; and accounted for it, saying, "I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee." In alleging these things in his defence, Jacob said, in effect, If your father's cattle have of late been given to me, it is not my doing, but God's, who hath seen my wrongs, and redressed them. Finally, He alleges, as the grand reason of his departure, the command of God. The same Angel who had directed him to observe the accomplishment of his former dream, at the same time added, "I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred."

Let us pause, and observe with attention this important passage. "I am the God of Beth-el!" Such words could never have been uttered by a created angel; nor does the appearing in the form of an angel, or messenger, accord with the Scripture account of God the Father: it must therefore have been the Son of God, whose frequent appearances to the patriarchs afforded a prelude to his incarnation. Paul, speaking of Christ in his incarnate character, says, that, "being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God." But to what does the apostle refer? When or where had he appeared equal with God? In such instances as these, no doubt; wherein he constantly spoke of himself, and was spoken to by his servants, *as God*; and in a manner which evinces that he accounted it *no usurpation* of that which did not belong to him.

"I am the God of Beth-el!" When at Beth-el, the Lord said, "I am Jehovah, God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." He might have said the same now; but it was his pleasure to direct the attention of his servant to the *last*, and to him the most interesting, of his manifestations. By giving him hold of the last link in the chain, he would be in possession of the whole. The God of Beth-el was the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac; the God who had entered into covenant with the former, had renewed it with the latter, and again renewed it with him. What satisfaction must it afford to be directed by such a God!

It is also observable, that, in directing Jacob's thoughts to the vision at Beth-el, the Lord reminds him of those *solemn acts* of his own by which he had at that time *devoted* himself to him. "I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and vowedst a vow unto me." It is not only necessary that we be reminded of God's promises for our support in troubles, but of our own solemn engagements, that the same affections which distinguished the best seasons of our life may be renewed, and that in all our movements we may keep in view the end for which we live. The object of the vow was that *Jehovah should be his God*: and whenever he should return, that *that stone should be God's house*. And now that the Lord commands him to return, he reminds him of his vow. He must not go to Canaan with a view to promote his own temporal interest, but to introduce the knowledge and worship of the true God. This was the great end which Jehovah had in view in all that he did for Abraham's posterity, and they must never lose sight of it.

Ver. 14-16. Jacob, having given the reasons for his proposed departure, paused. The women, without any hesitation, acquiesce, intimating that there was nothing in their father's house that should induce them to wish to stay in it. It is grievous to see the ties of nature dissolved in a manner by

* I am aware that the dreams in verses 10, 11, are generally considered as one and the same. But those who thus consider them are not only obliged to interpret those as one which the text represents as two, but what is said by the Angel in the 12th and 13th verses as two speeches, which manifestly appears to be one.

a series of selfish actions. I am not sure that Rachel and Leah were clear of this spirit towards their father; their words imply that they were sufficiently on their own side. Yet the complaints which they make of him were but too well-founded. The sordid bargain which he had made with Jacob, exacting fourteen years' labour from him as the price of his daughters, appears to have stung them at the time; and, now that an opportunity offers, they speak their minds without reserve. They felt that they had been treated more like slaves than daughters, and that he had not consulted their happiness any more than their husband's, but merely his own interest. Moreover, they accuse him of having *devoured all their money*. Instead of providing for them as daughters, which the law of nature required, (2 Cor. xii. 14,) he seems to have contrived to get all that private money which it is common to allow a son or a daughter while residing with their parents into his hands, and had kept them in a manner penniless. Hence they allege that all the riches which had been taken from him and given to their husband were theirs and their children's in right; and that God, knowing their injuries, had done this to redress them. Upon the whole, their mind is that Jacob should go, and they will go with him.

We have seen some things in the history of these women which has induced us to hope well of them, notwithstanding their many failings: but though in this case it was their duty to comply with the desire of their husband, and to own the hand of God in what had taken place between their father and him; yet there is something in their manner of expressing themselves that looks more like the spirit of the world than the spirit which is of God. A right spirit would have taught them to remember that Laban, whatever was his conduct, was still their father. They might have felt it impossible to vindicate him; but they should not have expiated on his faults in such a manner as to take pleasure in exposing them. Such conduct was but too much like that of Ham towards his father. And as to their acknowledging the hand of God in giving their father's riches to their husband, this is no more than is often seen in the most selfish characters, who can easily admire the Divine providence when it goes in their favour. The ease, however, with which all men can discern what is just and equitable towards themselves, renders the love of ourselves a proper standard for the love of others, and will, sooner or later, stop the mouth of every sinner. Even those who have no written revelation have this Divine law engraven on their consciences; they can judge with the nicest accuracy what is justice to them, and therefore cannot plead ignorance of what is justice from them to others.

DISCOURSE XL.

JACOB'S DEPARTURE FROM HARAN.

Gen. xxxi. 17-55.

VER. 17-21. Jacob having consulted with his wives, and obtained their consent, the next step was to prepare for their departure. Had Laban known it, there is reason to fear he would either have detained him by force, or at least have deprived him of a part of his property. He must therefore, if possible, depart without his knowledge. At that time Laban was three days' journey from home, at a sheep-shearing. Jacob, taking advantage of

this, effected his escape. The women, returning from the field, collected their matters together in a little time; and being all ready, Jacob rose up, set his family upon the camels, and, with all his substance, set off for his father's house in the land of Canaan. Being apprehensive that Laban would pursue him, he passed over the Euphrates, and hastened on his way towards Mount Gilead.

I do not know that we can justly blame Jacob for this his sudden and secret departure; but when we read of Rachel's availing herself of her father's absence to steal his images, a scene of iniquity opens to our view! What, then, is the family of Nahor, who left the idolatrous Chaldees—the family to which Abraham and Isaac repaired, in marrying their children, to the rejection of the idolatrous Canaanites—is this family itself become idolaters? It is even so. But is Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, not only capable of stealing, but of stealing images? Some, reluctant to entertain such an opinion of her, have supposed she might take them away to prevent their ill effects on her father's family; but subsequent events are far from justifying such a supposition. It is a fact that these teraphim afterwards proved a snare to Jacob's family, and that he could not go up to Beth-el till he had cleansed his house of them, chap. xxxv. 1-3. But had the family of Laban cast off the acknowledgment of Jehovah, the one true God? This does not appear, for they make frequent mention of him. Both Rachel and Leah, on the birth of their children, were full of apparently devout acknowledgments of him; and we were willing, thence, to entertain a hope in favour of their piety. Laban also, notwithstanding his keeping these images in his house, could afterwards invoke Jehovah to watch between him and Jacob, ver. 49. The truth seems to be, they were like some in after-times, who *swore by the Lord and by Malcham* (Zeph. i. 5); and others in our times, who are neither cold nor hot, but seem to wish to serve both God and mammon. The teraphim that Rachel stole were not public idols, set up in temples for worship; but, as some think, little images of them, a kind of household gods. Laban's family would probably have been ashamed of publicly accompanying the heathen to the worship of their gods; but they could keep images of them in their house, which implies a superstitious respect, if not a private homage paid to them.

This dividing of matters between the true God and idols has in all ages been a great source of corruption. A little before the death of Joshua, when Israel began to degenerate, it was in this way. They did not openly renounce the acknowledgment of Jehovah, but kept images of the idols in the countries round about them in their houses. Of this the venerable man was aware; and therefore, when they declared, saying, "We will serve Jehovah, for he is our God," he answered, "Ye cannot serve Jehovah, for he is a holy God, he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins." And when they replied, "Nay, but we will serve Jehovah," he answered, "Put away the strange gods that are among you:" as if he should say, "You cannot serve God and your idols: if Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him." What is popery? It does not profess to renounce the true God; but abounds in images of Christ and departed saints. What is the religion of great numbers among protestants, and even protestant Dissenters? They will acknowledge the true God in words; but their hearts and houses are the abodes of spiritual idolatry. When a man, like Laban, gave himself up to covetousness, he has no room for God or true religion. The world is his god; and he has only to reside among gross idolaters in order to be one, or at least a favourer of their abominations.

Ver. 22-30. The news of Jacob's abrupt departure was soon carried to Laban, who, collecting all his force, immediately pursued him. It was seven

days, however, ere he came up with him. Without doubt, he meditated mischief. He would talk of his regard to his children and grandchildren, and how much he was hurt in being prevented from taking leave of them; but that which lay nearest his heart was the substance which Jacob had taken with him. This, I conceive, he meant by some means to recover. And if he had by persuasion or force induced the family to return, it had been only for the sake of this. But, the night before he overtook Jacob, God appeared to him in a dream, and warned him not only against doing him harm, but even against "speaking to him (that is, on the subject of returning to Haran) either good or bad." From this time his spirit was manifestly overawed, and his heart was smitten as with a palsy. Overtaking Jacob at Mount Gilead, he begins with him in rather a lofty tone, but falters as he proceeds, dwelling upon the same charges over and over again. "What hast thou done," said he, "that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword? Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me? and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret and with harp? and hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done foolishly in so doing." In all this he means to insinuate that Jacob had no cause to leave him on account of any thing *he* had done; that where there was so much secrecy there must be something dishonourable; and that, in pursuing him, he was only moved by affection to his children. He adds, "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt; but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad." Without doubt Laban's company was much more powerful than that of Jacob, and he meant to impress this idea upon him, that his forbearance might appear to be the effect of generosity; nay, it is possible he might think he acted very religiously, in paying so much deference to the warning voice of his God. He concludes by adding, "And now, though thou wouldst needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house; yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?" The manner in which he accounts for his desire to be gone has an appearance of candour and sympathy; but the design was to insinuate that it was not on account of any ill treatment he had received from *him*, and perhaps to give an edge to the heavy charge with which his speech is concluded. It was cutting to be accused of theft; more so of having stolen what he abhorred; and, for the charge to be preferred by a man who wished to make every possible allowance, would render it more cutting still. Jacob felt it, and all his other accusations, as his answers sufficiently indicate.

Ver. 31, 32. With respect to the reiterated complaints of the *secrecy* of his departure, Jacob answers all in a few words: It was "because I was afraid; for I said, peradventure thou wouldst take by force thy daughters from me." This was admitting his power, but impeaching his justice; and as *he* had dwelt only upon the taking away of his daughters, so *Jacob* in answer confines himself to them. Laban might feel for the loss of something else besides his daughters; and Jacob, when he left Haran, might be afraid for something else; but as the charge respected only them, it was sufficient that the answer corresponded to it. If by withholding the women he could have detained him and his substance, his former conduct proved that he would not have been to be trusted. With respect to the gods, Jacob's answer is expressive of the strongest indignation. He will not deign to disown the charge; but desires that all his company might be searched, saying, "With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live!" It was worthy of an upright man to feel indignant at the charge of stealing, and of a servant of

God, at that of stealing idols. But unless he had been as well assured of the innocence of all about him as he was of his own, he ought not to have spoken as he did. His words might have proved a sorer trial to him than he was aware of.

Though Laban had not expressly charged him with fraud in any thing except the gods; yet, having dwelt so much upon the *privacy* of his departure as to intimate a general suspicion, Jacob answers also in a general way, "Before our brethren, discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee." It was unpleasant to be thus pursued, accused, and searched; but it was all well. But for this, his uprightness would have appeared in a more suspicious light.

Ver. 33-42. Laban accepts the offer, and now begins to search. Going from tent to tent, he hopes to find at least his gods. Rachel's policy, however, eludes his vigilance: "He searched, but found not the images." No mention is made of his going among the cattle, which proves he had no suspicion of being wronged in respect of them. During the search, Jacob looked on and said nothing; but when nothing was found that could justify the heavy charges which had been preferred against him, his spirit was provoked. "He was wroth, and chode with Laban." Hard words and cutting interrogations follow. "What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? Set it here before my brethren, and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both?" He goes on, and takes a review of his whole conduct towards him for twenty years past, and proves that he had been very hardly dealt with, summing up his answer in these very emphatic terms: "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac had been with me," notwithstanding all thy talk of sending me away with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp, "surely thou hadst sent me away now empty: God hath seen mine affliction, and the labour of mine hands, and rebuked thee yesternight." Laban made a merit of obeying the dream; but Jacob improves it into an evidence of his evil design, for which God had *rebuked* him, and pleaded the cause of the injured.

Ver. 43-53. Laban, whose spirit was checked before he began, was now confounded. He quite gives up the cause, and wishes to make up matters as well as he can. He cannot help prefacing his wish, however, with a portion of vain boasting and affected generosity. "These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters or unto their children which they have borne?" As if he had said, Yes, yes, God hath given you many things; but remember they were all mine, and you have obtained them under me. Let us have no more disputes however; for though I am come so far, and possess so great a force, yet how can I find in my heart to hurt my own children? Come, therefore, and let us make a covenant and be good friends.

Jacob makes no reply to Laban's boasting, but lets it pass; and though he had felt so keenly, and spoken so warmly, yet he consents to a covenant of peace. Anger may rise in the breast of a wise man; but it *resteth* only in the bosom of fools. He said nothing, but expressed his mind by actions. He first "took a stone, and set it up for a pillar;" then said to his brethren, "Gather stones; and they took stones, and made a heap, and did eat together," in token of reconciliation, upon it. This done, Laban called it *Jegar-sahadutha*, and Jacob *Galeed*: the one was the Syriac and the other the Hebrew word for the same thing; that is, *the heap of witness*. It was also called *Mizpah*, a *beacon*, or *watch-tower*. The meaning of these names, in refer-

ence to the present case, is explained by Laban, as being the elder man, and the leading party in the covenant. "This heap," said he, "is a *witness* between me and thee this day. Jehovah *watch* between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives besides my daughters, no man is with us: see, God is witness betwixt me and thee." To this he added, "Behold this heap, and behold this pillar—this heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father judge betwixt us." To this covenant Jacob fully assented, and swore by the fear of his father Isaac; that is, by the God whom Isaac feared.

We are surprised to hear a man who had been seven days in pursuit of certain stolen gods speak so much, and in so solemn a manner, about Jehovah; but wicked men will, on some occasions, utter excellent words. After all, he could not help manifesting his attachment to idolatry. When speaking to Jacob of Jehovah, he calls him "the God of *your* father," in a manner as if he was not *his* God; and in swearing to the solemn covenant which had been made between them, he does not appear to have invoked Jehovah as the *only* true God. It is very observable, that though he makes mention of "the God of Abraham," yet it is in connexion with *Nahor* and their father, that is, *Terah*; but when Abraham was with Nahor and Terah, they were idolaters. To this purpose we read in Joshua: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor; and they served other Gods." The God of Abraham, and Nahor, and Terah, therefore, were words capable of a very ill construction. Nor does Jacob appear to be ignorant of Laban's design in thus referring to their early ancestors; and therefore, that he might bear an unequivocal testimony against all idolatry, even that of Abraham in his younger years, he would swear only by "the fear of his father Isaac," who had never worshipped any other than the true God. It were worth while for those who plead for *antiquity* as a mark of the true church to consider that herein they follow the example of Laban, and not of Jacob.

Ver. 54, 55. Laban had professed his regret that he had not an opportunity to enjoy a day of feasting and of mirth at parting with his children. Such a parting would hardly have been seemly, even in a family which had no fear of God before their eyes. Jacob, however, makes a *religious* feast, previously to the departure of his father-in-law. "He offered sacrifices upon the Mount Galeed, and called his brethren," that is, the whole company, "to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place." This parting proved final. We hear no more of Laban, nor of the family of Nahor. They might for several ages retain some knowledge of Jehovah; but, mixing with it the superstitions of the country, they would in the end sink into gross idolatry, and be lost among the heathens.

On observing the *place* from which Balaam, the son of Beor, is said to have been sent for, to curse Israel, namely, *Pethor* of Mesopotamia, (Deut. xxiii. 4.) or *Aram*, (Numb. xxiii. 7.) or, as it is frequently called, *Padan-aram*, and that it is the same with that in which Laban dwelt, I have been inclined to think he might be one of his descendants. He is supposed to have lived about two hundred and eighty years after Jacob's departure from that country, which in those ages would not include above two or three generations. The opinion of ancient Jewish writers, though often fabulous, yet,

when agreeing with what is otherwise probable, may serve to strengthen it. "The Targum of Jonathan on Numb. xxii. 5, and the Targum on 1 Chron. i. 44, make Balaam to be Laban himself: and others say he was the son of Beor, the son of Laban."* The former of these opinions, though in itself utterly incredible, yet may so far be true as to hit upon the family from which he descended; and the latter, allowing perhaps for a defect of one generation, appears to be highly probable. Add to this, that the teraphim, or images, which Laban kept in his house, and which he would doubtless replace on his return, are supposed to be a sort of "talismans;" they "were consulted as oracles, and in high esteem with the Chaldeans and Syrians, a people given to astrology, and by which they made their divinations, Hos. iii. 4; Zech. x. 2."† According to this, Balaam, the soothsayer, would only tread in the steps of his ancestors; not utterly disowning Jehovah, but being devoted to the abominations of the heathen.

If the above remarks be just, they show, in a strong point of light, *the progress of apostasy and corruption*. Laban imitated the corruptions of his ancestors, some of whom were good men; and his descendants degenerated still more. Thus you will often see a man who has descended from religious parents, but whose heart is entirely taken up with the world; he keeps up the forms of godliness, though he denies the power, and mixes with them all the evil that he can rake up from the examples of his forefathers, and considerable additions of his own. The next generation degenerates still more, having less of the form of religion, and more conformity to the world. The third throws off both the form and the power, retaining no vestige of the religion of their ancestors, excepting a few speculative notions, learnt from a few old books and sayings, which have no other influence upon them than to enable them to be more wicked than their neighbours, by sinning against somewhat of superior light. How important is it for good men to act in character in their families, inasmuch as every evil which they practise will be reacted and increased by their carnal posterity!

DISCOURSE XLI.

JACOB'S FEAR OF ESAU. HIS WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL.

Gen. xxxii.

VER. 1, 2. The sacred writer, pursuing the history of Jacob, informs us that he went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when he saw them, he said, "This is God's host; and he called the name of that place Mahanaim." That the angels of God are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation," is a truth clearly revealed in the Scriptures; but this their ministry has seldom been rendered visible to mortals. "The angel of Jehovah," it is said, "encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." But I do not recollect that any of these celestial guardians have *appeared* in this character to the servants of God, except in times of *imminent danger*. When a host of Syrians encompassed Dothan, in order to take Elisha, his servant was alarmed, and exclaimed, "Alas! master, how shall we do?" The prophet exclaimed, "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be

* See Gill on Numb. xxii. 5.

† Gill on Gen. xxi. 19.

with them." Yet there was no earthly force to protect them. But when, in answer to the prophet's prayer, "the young man's eyes were opened, he saw the mountain full of horses, and chariots of fire round about Elisha." In this case, God's host became visible, to allay the fear of man's hosts. Thus it was also in the present instance. Jacob had just escaped one host of enemies, and another is coming forth to meet him. At this juncture God's host makes its appearance, teaching him to whom he owed his late escape, and that he who had delivered did deliver, and he might safely trust would deliver him. The angels which appeared on this occasion are called God's host, in the singular; but by the name which Jacob gave to the place, it appears that they were divided into two, encompassing him as it were before and behind; and this would correspond with the two hosts of adversaries which at the same time, and with almost the same violent designs, were coming against him; the one had already been sent back without striking a blow, and the other should be the same. This however was not expressly revealed to Jacob, but merely a general encouragement afforded him; for it was not the design of God to supersede other means, but to save him in the use of them.

Ver. 3-5. Jacob had as yet heard nothing of his brother Esau, except that he had settled "in the land of Seir, the country of Edom;" but knowing what had formerly taken place, and the temper of the man, he is apprehensive of consequences. He therefore resolves on sending messengers before him, in order to sound him, and, if possible, to appease his anger. These messengers are instructed what they shall say, and how they shall conduct themselves on their arrival, all in a way to conciliate. "Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus: I have sojourned with Laban, and staid there until now. And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and men-servants, and women-servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight." Observe, 1. He declines the honour of precedence given him in the blessing, calling Esau *his lord*. Isaac had said to him, "Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee;" but Jacob either understood it of spiritual ascendancy, or if of temporal, as referring to his posterity rather than to him. He therefore declines all disputes on that head. 2. He would have him know that he was not come to claim the *double portion*, nor even to divide with him his father's inheritance; for that God had given him plenty of this world's goods without it. Now as these were the things which had so greatly provoked Esau, a relinquishment of them would tend more than any thing to conciliate him.

Ver. 6-12. The messengers had not proceeded far ere they met Esau coming forth to meet his brother Jacob, and four hundred men with him. It would seem, by the account, that they went and delivered their message to him. But however that was, they appear to have been struck with the idea that he was coming with a hostile design, and therefore quickly returned and informed their master of particulars. We are surprised that Jacob's journey, which had taken him only about a fortnight, and had been conducted with so much secrecy, should yet have been known to Esau. His thirst for revenge must have prompted him to great vigilance. One would think he had formed connexions with persons who lived in the way, and engaged them to give him information of the first movements of his brother. However this was, *Jacob was greatly afraid*, and even *distressed*. This term with us is sometimes lightly applied to the state of mind produced by ordinary troubles; but in the Scriptures it denotes a sore strait, from which there seems to be no way of escape. This distress would probably be heightened by the recollection of his sin, which first excited the resentment of Esau. There is no time, however, to be lost. But what can he do

Well, let us take notice what a good man will do in a time of distress, that we may as occasion requires follow his example. First, He uses all possible precaution, "dividing the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands," saying, "If Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape." Secondly, He betakes himself to prayer; and as this is one of the Scripture examples of successful prayer, we shall do well to take particular notice of it. Observe, 1. He approaches God *as the God of his father*; and *as such, a God in covenant*. "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac!" This was laying hold of the Divine faithfulness; it was the prayer of faith. We may not have exactly the same plea in our approaches to God; but we have one that is more endearing, and more prevalent. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a character which excites more hope, and in which more great and precious promises have been made, than in the other. 2. As *his own God*, pleading what he had promised to *him*. "Jehovah, who saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." Jehovah has never made promises to us in the same extraordinary way as he did to Jacob; but whatever he hath promised to believers in general may be pleaded by every one of them in particular, especially when encountering opposition in the way which he hath directed them to go. 3. While he celebrates the great mercy and truth of God towards him, he acknowledges himself *unworthy* of the least instance of either. The worthiness of *merit* is what every good man, in every circumstance, must disclaim; but that which he has in view I conceive is that of *meekness*. Looking back to his own unworthy conduct, especially that which preceded and occasioned his passing over Jordan with a *staff* only in his hand, he is affected with the returns of mercy and truth which he had met with from a gracious God. By sin he had reduced himself in a manner to nothing; but God's goodness had made him great. As we desire to succeed in our approaches to God, we must be sure to take low ground; humbling ourselves in the dust before him, and suing for relief as a matter of mere grace. Finally, having thus prefaced his petition, he now presents it: "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." This was doubtless the petition of a kind husband and a tender father; it was not as such only, nor principally, however, but as a believer in the promises, that he presented it: the great stress of the prayer turns on this hinge. It was as though he had said, If my life, and that of the mother, with the children, be cut off, how are thy promises to be fulfilled? Hence he adds, "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." It is natural for us as husbands and as parents to be importunate with God for the well-being of those who are so nearly related to us; but the way to obtain mercy for them is to seek it in subordination to the Divine glory.

Ver. 13-39. Jacob and his company seem now to have been north of the river Jabbok, near to the place where it falls into the Jordan. Here he is said to have "lodged that night." Afterwards we read of his *rising up*, and sending his company *over the ford*, ver. 22. Probably it was during one single night that the whole of what follows in this chapter occurred. The messengers having returned towards evening, he divided his company into two bands, and then committed his cause to God. After this he halted for the night; but whatever sleep might fall to the lot of the children, or rest to the beasts of burden, there was but little of either for him. First, he resolves neither to flee nor fight; but to try the effect of a *present*. Upwards of five hundred head of cattle were sent off in the night, under the care of his ser-

vants; and, to produce the greater effect, they were divided into droves, with a space between drove and drove. Having sent off the present, he seems to have tried to get a little rest; but not being able to sleep, he *rose up*, and took his whole family, and all that he had, and sent them over the ford of Jabbok. Every servant presenting his drove in the same words, would strike Esau with amazement. It would seem as if all the riches of the East were coming to him; and every one concluding by announcing his master as coming behind them, would work upon his generosity. He expected, it is likely, a host of armed men, and felt resolved to fight it out; but, instead of an army, here is a present worthy of a prince, and the owner coming after it with all the confidence of a friend, and kindness of a brother.

Whether he thought it would express more friendship, and be better taken, to be at the trouble of crossing the ford in order to meet Esau, than to oblige Esau to cross it in order to meet him, or whatever was his reason, so he acted; and, the family being all over the river, *he himself staid behind*. Here it was that he met with that extraordinary appearance on which he wrestled with the Angel and prevailed. The account is as follows:—"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel (that is, *a prince of God*); for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name: and he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

On this singular manifestation of God to his servant, we offer the following remarks:—1. It does not appear to be a vision, but a literal transaction. A personage, in the form of a man, really wrestled with him, and permitted him to prevail so far as to gain his object. 2. Though the form of the struggle was corporeal, yet the essence and object of it was spiritual. An inspired commentator on this wrestling says, "He wept and made supplication to the Angel." That for which he strove was a blessing, and he obtained it. 3. The personage with whom he strove is here called *a man*, and yet, in seeing him, Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Hosea, in reference to his being a messenger of God to Jacob, calls him "the Angel;" yet he also describes the patriarch as having "power with God." Upon the whole, there can be no doubt that it was the same Divine personage who appeared to him at Beth-el, and at Padan-aram; who, *being in the form of God*, again thought it no usurpation to appear as *God*. 4. What is here recorded had relation to Jacob's distress, and may be considered as an answer to his evening supplications. By his *power with God* he had *power with men*. Esau and his hostile company were conquered at Peniel. 5. The change of his name from *Jacob* to *Israel*, and the *blessing* which followed, signified that he was no longer to be regarded as having obtained it by *supplanting* his brother, but as a *prince of God*, who had wrestled with him for it, and prevailed. It was thus that the Lord pardoned his sin, and wiped away his reproach. It is observable, too, that this is the name by which his posterity are afterwards called. Finally, The whole transaction furnishes an instance of believing, importunate, and successful prayer. As Jacob would not let the angel go except he blessed him; and as the latter (though to convince him of his power he touched the hollow

of his thigh, and put it out of joint) suffered himself to be overcome by him; so every true Israelite pleads the promises of God with an importunity that will take no denial, and God is pleased to suffer himself in this manner to be as it were overcome.

Ver. 30-32. What a night was this to Jacob! What a difference between what he felt the past evening, on the return of the messengers, and what he now felt! Well might he wonder and exclaim, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved!" Passing over Peniel, however, to rejoin his family, just as the sun rose upon him, *he halted upon his thigh*. This would be a memorial to him of his own weakness, as well as of the power and goodness of God, who, instead of touching a single part, might, as he intimated, have taken away his *life*. The law which afterwards prevailed in Israel, of not eating of the sinew which shrank, might be of Divine origin, as it corresponds with the genius of the ceremonial economy.

DISCOURSE XLII.

JACOB'S INTERVIEW WITH ESAU, AND ARRIVAL IN CANAAN.

Gen. xxxiii.

VER. 1-4. No sooner had Jacob passed over the ford of Jabbok, and re-joined his family, but, lifting up his eyes, he saw his brother approaching him, and four hundred men with him. He has just time before he comes up to arrange his family, placing the children with their respective mothers, and those last for whom he has the tenderest affection. This circumstance shows that though he treated Esau with the fullest confidence, yet he was still secretly afraid of him. He must, however, put the best face he can upon it, and go on to meet him. This he does; and as he had by his messengers acknowledged him as his *lord*, so he will do the same by *bowing down to him*. His object was to satisfy him that he made no claim of that kind of pre-eminence which the other's heart was set upon, but freely gave it up. And this seems to have had the desired effect on Esau's mind; for though he did not bow in return to his brother, since that had been relinquishing his superiority; yet "he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him:" nor could such an unexpected meeting fail to dissolve both of them in tears! It is pleasant and affecting to see the bitter heart of Esau thus melted by a kind and yielding conduct. We must not forget that God's hand was in it, who turneth the hearts of men as rivers of water; but neither must we overlook the means by which it was effected. "A soft tongue," saith Solomon, "breaketh the bone." On which our commentator *Henry* remarks, with his usual pith, "Hard words, we say, break no bones, and therefore we should bear them patiently; but it seems soft words do, and therefore we should on all occasions give them prudently." Treat men as friends, and make them so. Pray but as Jacob did, and be as obliging and condescending as he was, and you will go through the world by it.

Ver. 5-7. The two brothers having wept over each other, Esau, lifting up his eyes, saw the women and children, and inquired who they were? Jacob's answer is worthy of him. It savours of the fear of God which ruled in his heart, and taught him to acknowledge him even in the ordinary concerns of

life. They are, saith he, "the children which God hath graciously given thy servant. Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. And Leah also, with her children, came near, and bowed themselves; and after came Joseph near, and Rachel, and they bowed themselves." Had this been done to Jacob, methinks he would have answered, "God be gracious unto you, my children!" But we must take Esau as he is, and rejoice that things are as they are. We have often occasion to be thankful for civilities, where we can find nothing like religion. One cannot help admiring the uniformly good behaviour of all Jacob's family. If one of them had failed, it might have undone all the good which his ingratiating conduct had done; but, to their honour it is recorded, they all acted in unison with him. When the head of a family does right, and the rest follow his example, every thing goes on well.

Ver. 8. But Esau desires to know the meaning of these droves of cattle being sent to him. The answer is, "These are to find grace in the sight of my lord." This would express how high a value he set upon his favour, and how much he desired to be reconciled to him; and so tended to conciliate. We might, in most cases, purchase peace and good-will from men at a much cheaper rate than this; a few shillings, nay, often only a few kind words, would do it; and yet we see, for the want of these, strifes, contentions, lawsuits, and I know not what evil treatment, even between those who ought to love as brethren. But if the favour of man be thus estimable, how much more that of God! Yet no worldly substance, nor good deeds of ours, are required as the price of this; but merely the receiving of it as a free gift, through Him who hath given himself a sacrifice to obtain the consistent exercise of it towards the unworthy.

Ver. 9-11. The reply of Esau to this obliging answer was, "I have enough, my brother, keep that thou hast unto thyself." There might be in this language pretty much of a high spirit of independence. Whatever effect Jacob's present had had upon him, he would not be thought to be influenced by any thing of that kind; especially as he had great plenty of his own. Jacob, however, continued to urge it upon him, not as if he thought he needed, but as a token of good-will, and of his desire to be reconciled. He did not indeed make use of this term, nor of any other that might lead to the recollection of their former variance. He did not say that he should consider the acceptance of his present as a proof that he was cordially reconciled to him; but what he did say, though more delicately expressed, was to the same effect. Such I conceive to be the import of the terms, "If now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand." The receiving of a present at another's hand is perhaps one of the greatest proofs of reconciliation. Every one is conscious that he could not receive a present at the hand of an enemy. And upon this principle no offerings of sinful creatures can be accepted of God, till they are reconciled to him by faith in the atonement of his Son. To find grace in the sight of Esau, and to have his present accepted as a token of it, was the desire of Jacob. To these ends he further assures him how highly his favour was accounted of, and that to have seen his face in the manner he had was to him next to seeing *the face of God*. This was strong language, and doubtless it was expressive of strong feelings. Reconciliation with those with whom we have long been at variance, especially when it was through our own misconduct, is, as to its effect upon the mind, next to reconciliation with God. Finally, he entreats him to accept what he had presented, as his *blessing*; (so a present was called when accompanied with love or good-will: see Josh. xv. 19; 1 Sam. xxv. 27; 2 Kings v. 15;) and the rather, because God had graciously blessed him, and given him *enough*; nay more,

had given him *all things*.* Esau on this accepted it; and, as far as we know, the reconciliation was sincere and lasting.

Ver. 12-15. Esau proposes to be going, and to guard his brother and his family through the country. The proposal was doubtless very friendly and very honourable; and appears to have contained an invitation of Jacob and his family to his house at Seir; but Jacob respectfully declines it, on account of the feebleness of the cattle, and of the children. There is no reason that I know of for supposing Jacob had any other motive than that which he alleged; and this is expressive of his gentleness as a shepherd, and his tenderness as a father. There are many persons with whom we may wish to be on good terms, who nevertheless, on account of a difference of character, taste, or manners, would be very unsuitable companions for us. Jacob proposes going to Seir after his arrival; and this he probably did, though we read not of it. We have no account of his visiting his father Isaac till he had been several years in Canaan; yet, to suppose him capable of such a neglect, were not only injurious to his character, but contrary to what is implied in Deborah, one of Isaac's family, being found in his house at the time of her death, chap. xxxv. 8. Esau's first proposal being declined, he next offers to leave a part of his men, as a guard to Jacob's company; but this also he respectfully declines, on the ground of its being unnecessary; adding, "Let me find grace in the sight of my lord"—which I conceive was equal to saying, Let me have thy favour, and it is all I desire.

Ver. 16-20. The two brothers having parted friendly, Esau returns to Seir, and Jacob journeyed to a place east of Jordan, where he stopped awhile, and built a house for his family, and booths for his cattle. Upon this spot a city was afterwards built, and called *Succoth*, that is, *booths*, from the circumstance above related, Josh. xiii. 27; Judg. viii. 5. He did not stop here, however, with a design to abide; for he was commanded to return *to the land of his kindred*, that is, to Canaan, and he was as yet not in Canaan: but finding it a country abounding with rich pasture, he might wish to refresh his herds, and take time for inquiry into a more suitable place for a continued residence. Hence, when after this he passed over Jordan, and "came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, in the land of Canaan," it is said to be "when he came from Padan-aram;" intimating that till then he had not arrived at the end of his journey. *Shalem* is considered by *Ainsworth*, and some others, not as the name of a city, but as a term denoting the *peace and safety* with which Jacob arrived. Hence they render it, "He came *in safety*, or, *in peace*, to the city of Shechem." It is an argument in favour of this translation that we have no account of a city called Shalem near to Shechem. All agree that it could not be the place where Melchizedek reigned, as it was forty miles distant from it; and as to that near Enon, where John was baptizing, (John iii. 23,) it was not in the neighbourhood of Shechem, but of Jordan. This rendering also gives additional propriety and force to the phrase, "When he came from Padan-aram." It is a declaration to the honour of him who had said, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land." He arrived *in peace* at his journey's end, notwithstanding the dangers and difficulties he met with by the way.

Shechem, before which Jacob pitched his tent, was a city called after the name of the son of Hamor, its king, of whom we shall presently hear more. It is the same place as that which in the New Testament is called *Sychar*, John iv. 5. Here he bought "a parcel of a field," that neither he nor

* Though both expressions are rendered alike, *I have enough*, yet they differ in the original: Esau said, יש לי רב, *I have much*; but Jacob, יש לי כל, *I have all*.—R.

his cattle might trespass on the property of others. This field was afterwards taken from him, it should seem, by the Amorites; and he was under the necessity of recovering it "by his sword and his bow;" which having accomplished, he bequeathed it to his son Joseph. I have sometimes thought that this parcel of ground might be designed to exhibit a specimen of the whole land of Canaan. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, he marked out an allotment for the children of Israel (Deut. xxxii. 8); but the Canaanites, taking possession of it, were obliged to be dispossessed by the rightful owners, with the sword and with the bow.

But that which requires the most particular notice is, that "he erected there an altar, and called it El-elohe-Israel, i. e. God the God of Israel." It was worthy of this great and good man publicly to acknowledge God, after so many signal deliverances, and soon after his arrival. His first purchasing a piece of ground, and there erecting his altar, was like saying, Whenever this whole country shall be in possession of my posterity, let it in this manner be devoted to God. Nay, it was as if he had then taken possession of it in the name of the God of Israel, by setting up his standard in it. It is the first time also in which he is represented as availing himself of his *new name*, and of the *covenant blessing* conferred upon him under it. The name given to the altar was designed, no doubt, to be a memorial of both; and whenever he should present his offerings upon it, to revive all those sentiments which he had felt when wrestling with God at Peniel. It were no less happy for us than consistent with our holy profession, if every distinguishing turn of our lives were distinguished by renewed resignations of ourselves to God. Such times and places would serve as memorials of mercy, and enable us to recover those thoughts and feelings which we possessed in our happiest days.

DISCOURSE XLIII.

DINAH DEFILED, AND THE SHECHEMITES MURDERED.

Gen. xxxiv.

THE arrival of Jacob in Canaan promised fair for a holy and happy residence in it. Laban no more oppresses him, and the breach between him and his brother Esau is healed. But, alas! foreign troubles being removed, domestic ones take place of them. He had but one daughter, and she is defiled. He had many sons, and the greater part of them are deceitful and cruel. What with the conduct of the one and the other, his heart must be sorely grieved. It was not however till he had lived six or seven years in the neighbourhood of Shechem that these troubles came upon him; for in less time than this the two brethren could not have arrived at man's estate; and there is reason to believe that, from his first settlement at this place, his mind began to sink into a state of spiritual declension. One would think, if he had had a proper sense of things, he could not have continued so long to expose a family of young people to the contagious influence of a heathen city. It was next to the conduct of Lot when he took up his residence in Sodom.

Ver. 1, 2. It is natural to suppose that the younger branches of the family, hearing every thing that was going on among the youth of the place, would think it hard if they must not go among them. Whether the sons formed acquaintances among the Shechemites, we know not; but Dinah, on a certain

occasion, "must needs go out to see the daughters of the land." She wished no doubt to be acquainted with them, to see and be seen of them, and to do as they did. It might not be to a ball, nor a card party; but I presume it was to some merry-making of this kind: and though the daughters of the land were her professed companions, yet the sons of the land must have assembled with them, else how came Shechem there? Young people, if you have any regard for your parents, or for yourselves, beware of such parties! The consequence was what might have been expected. Shechem was the son of the "prince of the country," and men of rank and opulence are apt to think themselves entitled to do any thing which their inclinations prompt them to. The young woman was inexperienced, and unused to company of this kind; she therefore fell an easy prey to the seducer. But could Dinah have gone without the consent or connivance of her parents, at least of one of them? We should think she could not. I fear Leah was not clear in this matter.

Ver. 3, 4. The story is such as must needs excite indignation: some circumstances, however, bad as it is, tend in a certain degree to extenuate it. The young man is not like Amnon by Tamar; he is attached to her, and applies to his father Hamor to obtain her for him to wife. Had this been done at first, all had been honourable; but a bad beginning seldom admits of a good ending. And though a respectful application was immediately made to the parents of the damsel, yet she herself was at the same time detained in Shechem's house. But let us observe the effect of this disgraceful transaction.

Ver. 5-24. The news soon reached Jacob's ear; his sons were in the field; he felt much, no doubt, but said nothing till they returned. He did not, however, foresee what would follow, or he would not have reserved the utterance of his grief to them. But probably he knew not what to do. If Leah had connived at her daughter's visit, he would not know how to speak to her; and as to Rachel, the jealousies between the sisters might prevent his speaking freely to the one on the concerns of the other. So he held his peace till his sons should return. Meanwhile Hamor, and it seems his son with him, came out of the city to Jacob, to commune with him on the subject, and to ask the young woman in marriage. It had been well if he and Jacob had settled it, and this to all appearance they might have done; but scandal, with its swift wings, reaching the young men in the field, brought them home before the usual time; so that Hamor and his son had scarcely entered Jacob's door ere they followed them. Had Jacob and Hamor conversed the matter over by themselves, or Jacob and his sons by themselves, their anger might have been somewhat abated; but, all meeting together, there was no vent for the first strong feelings of the mind; and such feelings when suppressed, like subterraneous fires, must find their way, and very commonly issue in some dreadful explosion. The young men said little, but thought the more. The real state of their minds is thus described: "And the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter, which thing ought not to be done." There certainly was cause for great displeasure; and provided it had been directed against the sin, frankly avowed, and kept within the limits of equity, great displeasure ought to have been manifested. Light as heathens and other wicked men may make of fornication, it is an evil and a bitter thing. To the honour of Jacob and his posterity, he that was guilty of it among them was said to have "wrought folly in Israel," and to have done that which "ought not to be done." It might be from the present early example that this phraseology became proverbially descriptive of a fornicator (2 Sam. xiii. 12); and a great advantage it must be to any people

where the state of society is so far influenced by principles of honour and chastity, as by common consent to brand such characters with infamy. It was proper that the brothers of the young woman should be *grieved*; it was not unnatural that they should be *wroth*: but wherefore did they feel thus strongly? Was it for the sin committed against God, or only for the shame of it in respect of the family? Here, alas! they failed; and this it was that prompted them to all their other wickedness. Jacob was grieved and displeased as well as they; but his grief and displeasure wrought not in the manner theirs did. The reserve which they assumed, while Hamor and his son were speaking, concealed behind it the most deadly resentment. They heard all that was said (and many fine things were said, both by the father as a politician, in favour of intermarriages between the families in general, and by the son as a lover, in order to gain the damsel); they heard it, I say, with much apparent coolness, and stated their objections in a manner as if there was nothing between them but the compliance with a certain ceremony, and as though they felt nothing for their sister that should hinder their entering into a covenant of peace with him who had seduced her. But all was *deceit*; a mere cover to a bloody design, which they appear to have formed for the purpose of revenge, *because he had defiled Dinah their sister*.

The deceitful proposal, however, succeeded: "Their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem, Hamor's son." So they go about forthwith to persuade the citizens into a compliance with them; not as a matter of principle, but of policy, as a measure which would contribute to the country's good. They also succeed, the Shechemites are circumcised, and all seems to bid fair for an amicable issue.

But let us pause and reflect on the right and wrong in these transactions. What was the line of conduct that Hamor and Shechem should have pursued? They ought no doubt, in the first place, to have restored the young woman to her parents; and at the same time to have acknowledged the great injury done to her and to the family, and expressed their sorrow on account of it. Till they had done this, they had no reason to expect any thing like a reconciliation on the part of Jacob or his sons. But it is likely the young man being of so honourable a family, and the sin of fornication being so common in the country, made them think these punctilios might be dispensed with in the present instance. And being wholly under the influence of sensual and worldly motives, they are prepared to profess any religion, or profane any institution, however sacred, so that they may accomplish their selfish ends.—But what was the line of conduct which ought to have been pursued by Jacob and his sons? If the one had taken a greater share in the conversation, and the other a less, it had been more to the honour of both; and might not have issued in the manner it did. It is very proper for brothers to consider themselves as guardians of a sister's honour; but not in such a way as to supersede the authority or silence the counsel of a father. The answer to the question, Whether Dinah should be given in marriage to Shechem, belonged to the parents, and not to the brothers. With respect to the displeasure which required to be expressed, it ought to have been confined to words; and if the proposed marriage could not be acceded to, they should, as they said, have "taken their sister and been gone." As to their objection on the score of circumcision, there appears to have been no such law established as yet in Jacob's family. It is true they were discouraged from marrying with the devotees of idolatry; but the circumcision of the Shechemites was merely a form; and had they been suffered to live, would have produced no change in respect of this. Could they indeed have been induced to renounce their idolatrous practices, and to cast in their lot with Israel, the good had overbalanced the evil; but

religion was no part of the young men's concern: the whole was a mere pretence to cover their malignant designs.

Ver. 25-29. The result was shocking. Simeon and Levi, two of Dinah's brethren by the same mother, as well as father, availing themselves of the present incapacity of the Shechemites to resist them, took each man his sword, and slew all the males of the city, with Hamor, and Shechem his son, and took their sister out of his house, and went their way! Nor was this cruel business to be attributed to the two brothers only; for the rest were so far accessory as to join in plundering the city, and taking captive all the females.

Alas, how one sin leads on to another, and, like flames of fire, spreads desolation in every direction! Dissipation leads to seduction; seduction produces wrath; wrath thirsts for revenge; the thirst of revenge has recourse to treachery; treachery issues in murder; and murder is followed by lawless depredation! Were we to trace the history of illicit commerce between the sexes, we should find it, more perhaps than any other sin, terminating in blood. We may read this warning truth, not only in the history of David and his family, but in what is constantly occurring in our own times. The murder of the innocent offspring by the hand of the mother, or of the mother by the hand of the seducer, or of the seducer by the hand of a brother or a supplanted rival—is an event which too frequently falls under our notice. Nor is this all, even in the present world. Murder seldom escapes detection; a public execution therefore may be expected to close the tragical process!

Ver. 30, 31. It is some relief to find the good old man expressing his disapprobation of these proceedings: "Ye have troubled me," says he to Simeon and Levi, "to make me stink among the inhabitants of the land—and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." Both Abraham and Isaac had carried it peaceably in all places where they pitched their tents, and by their good conduct had recommended true religion, and gained great respect among the heathen. It was Jacob's desire to have trod in their steps; but his sons were children of Belial, who knew not the Lord; yet, being so nearly akin to him, his character is implicated by their conduct. Their answer is insolent in the extreme: "Should he deal with our sister," say they, "as with a harlot?" As if their father had no proper concern for the honour of his children, and cared not what treatment they met with, so that he might be at peace and maintain his credit.

But how is it that Jacob should dwell only upon the *consequences* of the sin, and say nothing about the sin itself? Probably because he knew his sons to be so hardened in wickedness, that nothing but consequences, and such as affected their own safety too, would make them feel. It is certain that he did abhor the deed, and that with all his soul. Of this he gave a most affecting proof upon his dying bed, when, instead of blessing the two brethren with the rest of his children, he in a manner cursed them, or at least branded their conduct with perpetual infamy. "Simeon and Levi," said he, "are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel!"*

* Simeon and Levi are brethren,
Instruments of violence are their fraudulent bargains:
Into their secret come not thou, O my soul;

We read no more of Dinah, except her bare name: probably she died single. Her example affords a loud warning to young people to beware of visiting in mixed companies, or indulging in amusements by which they put themselves in the way of temptation.

DISCOURSE XLIV.

JACOB'S REMOVAL TO BETH-EL.—GOD'S RENEWAL OF COVENANT WITH HIM.—
THE DEATH OF DEBORAH, RACHEL, AND ISAAC.—ESAU'S GENERATIONS.

Gen. xxxv., xxxvi.

THERE is a greater diversity in the life of this patriarch than in that of Abraham, and much greater in that of Isaac. If he did not attain to "the days of the years of the life of his fathers," the records of his pilgrimage are not less useful than those of either of them.

Ver. 1. It might have been expected that Jacob would leave Shechem, on account of what had taken place; yet he would not know whither to flee; but "God said unto him, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." This admonition appears to resemble that which was addressed to Abram, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect;" that is, it implies a reproof, and was intended to lead Jacob to reflect upon his conduct. There were two things in particular which required serious consideration. 1. Whether he had not neglected to perform his vow. He had solemnly declared, in the presence of God, that if he would be with him, and keep him in the way he went, and give him bread to eat, and raiment to put on, then Jehovah should be his God; and that the stone which he then set up for a pillar should be God's house, chap. xxviii. 20-22. Now God had performed all these things on his part; but Jacob had not been at Beth-el, even though he had now resided in Canaan about seven years. And what was worse, though Jehovah had been his God, so far as respected himself, yet his house was not clear of idols! Rachel's stolen teraphim had proved a snare to the family. At the time Laban overtook him, Jacob knew nothing of them, but he appears to have discovered them afterwards; and yet, till roused by this Divine admonition, he never interposed his authority to have them *put away*. 2. Whether the late lamentable evils in his family had not arisen from this cause. Had he gone sooner to Beth-el, his house had been sooner purged of the *strange gods* that were in it, and his children had escaped the taint which they must of necessity impart. At first the gods of Laban were hid by Rachel, and none of the family except herself seemed to know of them; but now Jacob had to speak to his "household, and to all that were with him," to cleanse themselves. Moreover, had he gone sooner

Unto their assembly be not united, mine honour :
For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they exterminated a prince.
Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce ;
And their excess of passion, for it was cruel.
I will divide them in Jacob,
And scatter them in Israel.

But Venema would render the last distich in a good sense.

[Yet] I will grant them a portion in Jacob,
And cause them to be diffused abroad (Gen. x. 18) in Israel.—R.

to Beth-el, his children might have been out of the way of temptation, and all the impure and bloody conduct in which they were concerned have been prevented. From the whole, we see the effects of spiritual negligence, and of trifling with temptation. Do not neglect God's house, nor delay to keep his commandments. He that puts them off to a more convenient season has commonly some idols about him, which it does not suit him just yet to put away.

Ver. 2, 3. No sooner is Jacob admonished to go to Beth-el than he feels the necessity of a reformation, and gives command for it. This proves that he knew of the corrupt practices of his family, and had too long connived at them. We are glad, however, to find him resolved at last to *put them away*. A constant attendance on God's ordinances is *dwelling* as it were in Beth-el; and it is by this that we detect evils in ourselves which we should otherwise retain without thought or concern. It is "coming to the light," which will "manifest our deeds, whether they be wrought in God" or not. Wicked men may reconcile the most sacred religious duties with the indulgence of secret sins; but good men cannot do so. They must wash their hands in innocency, and so compass God's altar, Psal. xxvi. 6. Jacob not only commands his household to put away their idols, but endeavours to impress upon them his own sentiments. "Let us arise," saith he, "and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." He is decided for himself, and uses all means to persuade his family to unite with him. His intimating that God had heretofore *answered him in the day of his distress* might be designed not only to show them the propriety of what he was about to do, but to excite a hope that God might disperse the cloud which *now* hung over them on account of the late impure and bloody transaction.

Ver. 4. Considering the evils which prevailed in this family, and the bewitching nature of idolatry, it is rather surprising to observe the readiness with which they consent to give it up. But no doubt the hand of the Lord was in it. When Jacob spoke as he ought to speak, their hearts were bowed before him. Difficulties which, in a languid state of mind, seem insurmountable, are easily got over when once we come to act decidedly for God; and those whom we expected to oppose the good work shall frequently be found willing to engage with us in it. They not only gave their gods, but even their *earrings*, which in those times were convertible, and often, if not always, converted, to purposes of idolatry, Exod. xxxii. 2; Hos. ii. 13. But why did Jacob bury them? We may think they might have been melted down, and converted to a better use; but that was expressly forbidden by the Mosaic law, Deut. vii. 25, and it seems the patriarchs acted on the same principle. But why did he not utterly destroy them? Perhaps it would have been better if he had. I hope, however, he hid them where they were found no more. Upon the whole, we see at this time a great change for the better in Jacob's family. He should not have been reluctant, or indifferent, to going up to Beth-el; for it appears to have been the design of God to make it one of his best removals. It was a season of grace, in which God not only blessed him, but caused even those that *dwelt under his shadow to return*. I have more hope of Rachel and Leah's having relinquished all for the God of Israel from this time than from any thing in the former part of their history.

Ver. 5. We now see Jacob and his family on their journey. It would appear to the cities round about that the slaughter of the Shechemites was the cause of this removal. Their *not pursuing them* being ascribed to the *terror of God being upon them*, implies that the public indignation was so excited against them, that if they had dared, they would have cut them off.

The kind care which God exercised on this occasion was no less contrary to the parent's fears than to the deserts of his ungodly children; and its being extended to them *for his sake* must, if they had any sense of things, appal their proud spirits, and repress the insolence with which they had lately treated him.

Ver. 6, 7. Arriving at Beth-el in safety, Jacob, according to his vow, "built there an altar" unto Jehovah, and gave it a name which God had graciously given himself; namely, "*El-beth-el, the God of Beth-el.*" This altar, and this name, would serve as a perpetual memorial of God's having "appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother." And as that time many great and precious promises were made to him, it would be natural for him to associate with the idea of *the God of Beth-el* that of a God *in covenant*; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

Ver. 8. While Jacob and his family were at Beth-el, their enjoyments seem to have been interrupted by the death of "Deborah, Rebecca's nurse." Some particulars are here implied which are not recorded in the history. Deborah did not belong to the family of Jacob, but to that of Isaac. Jacob must therefore have gone and visited his father; and finding his mother dead, and her nurse far advanced in years, more fit to be nursed herself than to be of any use to her aged master, he took her home, where she would meet with kind attentions from her younger countrywomen, and probably furnished his father with another more suitable in her place. Nothing is said of her from the time she left Padan-aram with her young mistress; but, by the honourable mention that is here made of her, she seems to have been a worthy character. The death of an aged servant, when her work was done, would not ordinarily excite much regret. To have afforded her a decent burial was all that in most cases would be thought of; but Jacob's family were so much affected by the event, as not only to weep over her grave, but to call the very tree under the shadow of which she was interred *Allon-bachuth, the oak of weeping*. It is the more singular, too, that the family who wept over her was not that in which she had lived in what we should call her best days; but one that had merely taken her under their care in her old age. It is probable, however, that the sorrow expressed at her interment was on account, not only of her character, but her office, or her having been "Rebecca's nurse." The text seems to lay an emphasis upon these words. The sight of the daughter of Laban, "his mother's brother," and even of his sheep, had interested Jacob's heart, chap. xxix. 10; much more would the burial of her nurse. In weeping over her grave, he would seem to be weeping over that of his beloved parent, and paying that tribute of affection to her memory which providence had denied him at the time of her decease.

Ver. 9-15. During the seven years in which Jacob resided at Shechem we do not find a single instance of God's manifesting himself to him, except that of admonishing him to depart. But now that he is come to Beth-el, and has performed his vow, "God appeared unto him again, and blessed him." But how is it that this is said to be "when he came out of Padan-aram?" The design of the phrase, I apprehend, is not to convey the idea of its being at the time of his return from that country, or immediately after it; but to distinguish it from that appearance of God to him, in the same place where he now was, in his way thither. He appeared to him at Beth-el when he was going to Padan-aram; and now he "appeared to him again," at the same place, "when he was come out of it."* The whole account given in these verses of the appearance of God to Jacob, and of his conduct

* So the passage is rendered by Ainsworth

in return, describes a solemn and mutual *renewal of covenant*. There is nothing material in what is here said to him but what had been said before; and nothing material which he did but what had been done before; but the whole was now as it were consolidated and confirmed. 1. God had before told him that his name should no more be called Jacob, but Israel, chap. xxxii. 28; this honour is here *renewed*, and the renewal of it contained an assurance that he should still go on and prevail. 2. God had before declared that the promises made to Abraham should be fulfilled in him and his posterity, chap. xxviii. 13, 14; this declaration is here *renewed*, and prefaced with an assertion of his own all-sufficiency to fulfil them. 3. When God had before appeared to him, he set up a pillar of stone, and poured oil upon it, and called the name of the place Beth-el, chap. xxviii. 18, 19; this process he now *renewed*, with the addition of a drink-offering, for which on his first journey he probably had not the materials. These renewals of promises and acknowledgments may teach us not to be so anxious after new discoveries as to overlook those which we have already obtained. God may *appear to us* by the revival of known truths, as well as by the discovery of what was unknown; and we may glorify him as much by "doing our first works," as by engaging in something which has not been done before. Old truths, ordinances, and even places, become new to us when we renew communion with God in them.

Ver. 16-20. We are not told the reason of Jacob's leaving Beth-el. Probably he was directed to do so. However this might be, his removal in the present instance was accompanied with a very painful event; namely, the loss of his beloved Rachel, and that in the prime of life. Journeying from Beth-el, and within a little of Ephrath, or Bethlehem, she "travailed, and had hard labour." The issue was, the infant was spared, but the mother removed. Thus she that had said, "Give me children, or I die," died in child-birth!

Several circumstances which attended this afflictive event are deserving of notice. 1. The words of the midwife; "Fear not; thou shalt have this son also." When Rachel bare her first son, she called him Joseph, that is, *Adding*; "for," said she, by a prophetic impulse, "the Lord shall add to me another son." It is probably in reference to this that the midwife spake as she did. Her words, if reported to Jacob, with the recollection of the above prophetic hint, would raise his hopes and render his loss more affecting, by adding to it the pain of disappointment. They appear to have no influence, however, on Rachel. She has the sentence of death in herself, and makes no answer; but turning her eyes towards the child, and calling him Ben-oni, *the son of my sorrow*, she expires! 2. The terms by which her death is described—"It came to pass, as her soul was in departing." An ordinary historian would have said, as she was dying, or as she was ready to expire; but the Scriptures delight in an impressive kind of phraseology, which at the same time shall both instruct the mind and affect the heart. It was by means of such language, on various occasions, that the doctrine of a future state was known and felt from generation to generation among the Israelites, while the heathen around them, with all their learning, were in the dark upon the subject. 3. The change of the child's name: "She called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin." The former, though very appropriate at the time, yet, if continued, must tend perpetually to revive the recollection of the death of his mother? and of such a monitor Jacob did not stand in need. The name given him signified, *the son of my right hand*; that is, a son of the most tender affection and delight, inheriting the place which his mother had formerly possessed in his father's heart. If the love of God be wanting, that of a creature will often be supreme; and

where this is the case, the loss of the object is frequently known to leave the party utterly inconsolable: but though the affection of a good man may be very strong, and his sorrow proportionably deep, yet he is taught to consider that every created good is only lent him; and that, his generation work being as yet unfulfilled, it is not for him to feed melancholy, nor to pore over his loss with a sullenness that shall unfit him for duty, but rather to divert his affections from the object that is taken, and direct them to those that are left. 4. The stone erected to her memory, which appears to have continued for many generations. Burying her in the place where she died, "Jacob set a pillar upon her grave;" and that was the pillar of Rachel's grave when her history was written. It was near this place, if not upon the very spot, that the tribe of Benjamin afterwards had its inheritance; and therefore it is that the people who lived in the times of Jeremiah are called "Rachel's children," Jer. xxxi. 15. The babes which Herod murdered are also so called; and she herself, though long since dead, is supposed to rise, as it were, out of her grave, and witness the bloody deed; yea more, to stand upon it and weep, refusing to be comforted, because they were not!

Ver. 21. It is proper that Jacob, or, as he is now called, Israel, after having interred his beloved Rachel, should remove to some little distance, at least, from her grave. *The tower of Edar*, near to which he next spread his tent, was in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem. In removing, however, from the scene of one sorrow, he is soon overtaken by another. While dwelling in that land, a criminal intercourse took place between Reuben and Bilhah, his father's wife. It was done in secret; but *Israel heard of it*. For this, his unnatural wickedness, Reuben was afterwards cursed as a tribe, the heavier on account of his being the first-born of the family, chap. xlix. 4. By his conduct, however, in reference to his brother Joseph, (chap. xxxvii. 20, 22,) he seems to have obtained at least a mitigation of his punishment; for Moses, in blessing the tribes, said of him, "Let Reuben live, and not die, and let not his men be few." Yet even here he does but *live*: no idea is suggested that he should ever *excel*, and with this the history of his tribe, in after-ages, perfectly accords.

Ver. 22-26. The history will henceforward principally respect "the sons of Jacob," as being the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. We have here, therefore, at the outset, a particular account of them, as descended from the different wives of their father Jacob.

Ver. 27-29. Before the sacred writer, however, proceeds to narrate their history, he furnishes two other subjects, that the thread of the story may not be broken. One of them is the conclusion of the life of Isaac; and the other, which is contained in the thirty-sixth chapter, a brief sketch of the family and temporal prosperity of Esau. If the former of these events had been introduced in the order of time, it would have fallen in the midst of the history of Joseph; for it occurred about twelve or thirteen years after his being sold into Egypt. There are not many particulars concerning it. Jacob seems to have been sent for just in time to witness his father's decease. By the years of his life, namely, *a hundred and fourscore*, it appears that he must have lived fifty-seven years in a state of blindness and inactivity. This is one of the mysteries of Providence which often strikes us: an aged and afflicted person, whose usefulness appears to us at an end, shall have his life prolonged, while a hundred active young people around him shall be cut off. We know not the reason of these things in the present state; but we may know it hereafter.

Chap. xxxvi. With respect to Esau, he and his brother had been together at their father's funeral, and, for aught that appears, were on brotherly terms. In the course of this chapter we find them separated; not however from any

difference arising between them, but on account of their great prosperity. Their riches are said to have been "more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them, because of their cattle."

The account which is here given of him and his posterity is, however, a kind of leave taken of them; we shall hear no more of Esau, nor of his descendants, but as enemies to the people of God. It is remarkable that three times in this chapter when Esau is spoken of we meet with the phrase "This is Edom;" and twice, "He is Esau, the father of the Edomites," verses 1, 8, 9, 19, 43. We have seen that the name of Edom was given him on account of his *sanguinary* disposition (chap. xxv. 24-34); and as this was notoriously the character of the Edomites, especially towards Israel, it would seem as if the Holy Spirit would have it well remembered that the bitterest enemies of the church of God descended from this man. He seems to be marked as the father of persecutors, in some such manner as Ahaz is marked by his wickedness of another kind, "This is that king Ahaz," 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

Finally, It is remarkable that Esau, though he had despised and lost his birthright, yet was prospered in his lifetime, and for several generations, more than his brother. While the latter was a servant at Padan-aram, he established his dominion in Mount Seir; and while the descendants of the one were groaning under Egyptian bondage, those of the other were formed into an independent kingdom, and had eight kings in succession, *before there reigned any king over the children of Israel*. In this manner did God order things, to show, it may be, that the most valuable blessings require the greatest exercise of faith and patience.

DISCOURSE XLV.

JOSEPH SOLD FOR A SLAVE.

Gen. xxxvi. ~~1~~

WE now enter on the very interesting history of Joseph, a history in which I feel not pleasure only, but a portion of dismay; and this because I have but little hope of doing justice to it. It is a history, perhaps, unequalled for displaying the various workings of the human mind, both good and bad, and the singular providence of God in making use of them for the accomplishment of his purposes.

Ver. 1. Jacob is represented as "dwelling in the land wherein his father was a stranger." The character of sojourners was common to the patriarchs: it is that which Jacob afterwards confessed before Pharaoh; on which the apostle remarks, that "they who say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."

Ver. 2. The "generations of Jacob" seem here to mean his family history: so the word is used of Adam, chap. v. 1. And Joseph being, as we should say, the chief hero of the tale, it begins with him. It was the design of the sacred writer, in the course of his narration, to tell of all the great events of that family; as of their going down into Egypt, remaining there for a number of years, and at last being brought out by the mighty hand of God; at present his object is to lead us to the origin of these events,

as to the spring-head of a great river, or to describe the minute circumstances by which they were brought about.

Joseph was distinguished by his early piety. His brethren were most, if not all of them, very wicked; and he, being frequently with them in the field, saw and heard such things as greatly affected him. We are not told what they were: the oracles of God have thrown a veil over them till the judgment day. Suffice it for us to know that the mind of this godly youth was hurt by their conversation and behaviour, and that he could not be easy without disclosing particulars to his father. In this he was to be commended; for though a child should not indulge, nor be indulged by his parents, in reporting every trivial tale to the disadvantage of his brothers or sisters; yet, where wickedness is acted, it ought not to be concealed. The parents should know it, that they may correct it; or if that cannot be, that they may be enabled to counteract its effects. But that which was commendable in him produced hatred in them. They would perceive that he did not join them when in company, and perhaps the carriage of their father would lead them to suspect that this his favourite son had been their accuser. In this, the outset of Joseph's story, we perceive a striking resemblance between him and our Lord Jesus Christ, whom "the world hated, because he testified of it that the works thereof were evil."

Here, therefore, before I proceed any further, I would offer a few words on the question whether Joseph is to be considered as *a type of Christ*. I am far from thinking that every point of analogy which may be traced by a lively imagination was designed as such by the Holy Spirit; yet neither do I think that we are warranted in rejecting the idea. We have already seen that God prepared the way for the coming of his Son by a variety of *things*, in which the great principles of his undertaking were prefigured, and so rendered familiar to the minds of men; (see on chap. vi. 18; xvii. 4;) and he pursued the same object by a variety of *persons*, in whom the life and character of Christ were in some degree previously manifest. Thus Melchizedek prefigured him as a priest, Moses as a prophet, and David as a king; and I cannot but think that in the history of Joseph there is a portion of designed analogy between them. But to return—

Ver. 3, 4. The hatred of Joseph's brethren on account of his reports was not diminished, but heightened, by his father's partiality towards him. It is much less difficult to account for this partiality than to justify it, or at least the method of expressing it. He was the son of the beloved Rachel; and though Benjamin was in this respect equal to him, yet he was but a child, and had as yet developed nothing as to character: he therefore would be out of the question. Joseph seems to have been the only one in the family who had hitherto discovered either the fear of God, or the duty of a child. From these considerations his father might be allowed to love him with a peculiar affection; but his clothing him with "a coat of many colours" was a weakness calculated only to excite envy and ill-will in his brethren. If he had studied to provoke these dispositions, he could scarcely have done it more effectually. The event was, that the hatred of the brothers could no longer be concealed, nor could they speak in the usual strain of civility to Joseph.

Ver. 5-11. Another circumstance occurred which tended still more to heighten the enmity, namely, certain *dreams* which Joseph had at this time, and which he in the simplicity of his heart related to his brethren. These were Divine intimations of his future advancement, and were remarkably fulfilled in Egypt about twenty-three years afterwards. But at present they inflamed a resentment already too strong; and even his father thought it necessary to chide what seemed a little presumptuous in his son. Yet as Jacob felt a check on this occasion, and *observed the saying*, suspecting, it

should seem, that there might be more in it than he was at present aware of, so I apprehend his sons had a secret persuasion that these dreams were prophetic; but that which softened the father only hardened and inflamed the sons. Their hatred had originated in religion; and the thought of God having determined to honour him provoked them the more. Such were the operations of malice in Cain towards Abel, in Esau towards Jacob, in Saul towards David, and in the scribes and Pharisees towards the Lord of glory.

Ver. 12-17. Things now approach fast to a crisis. It seems as if the vale of Hebron, where Jacob now was, did not contain sufficient pasturage for his flocks: the young men therefore take them to Shechem, a distance it is said of about sixty miles, and the place where they lived for the first seven years after their return from Padan-aram. Jacob, feeling anxious about them and the cattle, (as well he might, considering the part they had acted there,) proposes to Joseph that he should go and inquire, and bring him word of their welfare; to which the latter with cheerful obedience consents. Arriving at Shechem, he finds they had left it with the flocks; and being informed by a stranger that they were gone to Dothan, a distance of about eight miles, he proceeds thither.

Ver. 18-22. The sight of Joseph, while he was yet afar off, rekindles all the foul passions of his brethren, and excites a conspiracy against him. "Behold," say they, with malignant scorn, "this dreamer cometh! Come now, let us slay him!" In some cases sin begins upon a small scale, and increases as it advances; but the very first proposal in this case is murder! This shows the height to which their hatred had been previously wrought up, and which, now that opportunity offered, raged like fire with uncontrollable fury. But have they no apprehensions as to consequences? What tale are they to carry home to their father? O, they are at no loss for this. Malice has two intimate friends always at hand to conceal its dark deeds; namely, artifice and falsehood. "We will cast him into some pit," say they, "and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams!" Who will say that the workers of iniquity have no knowledge? They have all the cunning as well as the cruelty of the old serpent. See how they wrap it up. But what do they mean by that sarcastic saying, "We shall see what will become of his dreams?" If they had considered them as feigned through ambition, they would not have felt half the resentment. No, they would have winked at it as a clever piece of deceit, and have had a fellow feeling for him. I doubt not but they considered these dreams as the intimations of Heaven, and their language included nothing less than a challenge of the Almighty! But is it possible, you may say, that they could think of thwarting the Divine counsels? It is possible, and certain, that men have been so infatuated by sin as to attempt to do so. Witness Pharaoh's pursuit of Israel, after all that he had seen and felt of the Divine judgments; Saul's attempts on David's life; Herod's murder of the children of Bethlehem; and the conspiracy of the Jews against Christ, who, as many of them knew, had raised Lazarus from the dead, and done many miracles. Yes, we will kill him, say they, and then let God advance him to honour if he can! But they *shall* see what will become of his dreams. Yes, they shall see them accomplished, and that by the very means they are concerting to overthrow them. Thus, though "the kings of the earth take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us;" yet "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them, the Lord shall have them in derision." Joseph's brethren, like the sheaves in the dream, shall make obeisance to him: and "at the name of Jesus every knee shall

bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, unto the glory of God the Father."

In this bloody council there was one dissentient. God put it into the heart of Reuben, though in other respects none of the best of characters, to oppose their measures; and, being the elder brother, his opinion must have somewhat the greater weight. He appears to have utterly disapproved of their intention, and wished earnestly to get the lad safe out of their hands, that he might deliver him to his father; though perhaps through fear of his own life he made only a partial opposition. His counsel, however, saved his life, and he was doubtless raised up on this occasion for the very purpose; for Joseph's time was not yet come.

Ver. 22-24. All that had hitherto taken place was during the time that Joseph was absent. Glad to have caught the sight of them, he was walking towards them in the simplicity of his heart, while they were taking counsel to destroy him! He arrives. Like beasts of prey, they immediately seize him, and tear off the envied "coat of many colours." It was not enough to injure him; they must also insult him. Thus Jesus was stripped and degraded before he suffered. Now it was, as they afterwards confessed one to another in the Egyptian prison, that they "saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought them, and they would not hear;" now it was that Reuben interceded on his behalf, saying, "Do not sin against the child; but they would not hear," chap. xlii. 21, 22. No, they would not hear: "they took and cast him into a pit;" probably a hole in the earth, both dark and deep; for he does not appear to have been able to get out again. It was however empty, or without water. Whether they knew of this circumstance or not, God knew it; and it seems to have been known to Reuben when he made the proposal of his being cast into it, seeing he hoped by this means to save his life.

Ver. 25-28. Having thus far gratified their revenge, they retire, and with hardened unconcern "sit down to eat bread." It is probable that they both ate and drank, and made merry; and it may be partly in allusion to this that certain characters, in the times of the prophet Amos, are described as drinking wine in bowls, and anointing themselves with the chief ointments, but were "not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."

At this juncture appeared a company of merchants, who were going down to Egypt. They are called Ishmaelites, and also Midianites; they were it seems a mixed people, composed of both. On the sight of them a thought occurs to the mind of Judah, that they had better sell their brother for a slave than murder him, which he proposes to the rest. His proposal contains words of mercy, but it was mercy mixed with covetousness. I am not sure that Judah felt any tenderness towards Joseph, as being his "brother, and of his flesh," any more than his namesake did in selling Christ: it is not unusual for covetous men to urge their objects under a show of generosity and kindness. But if he did, it was the *profit* that wrought upon the company. The love of money induced them to sell their brother for a slave; and the same principle carries on the same cruel traffic to this day. So they sold Joseph for "twenty pieces of silver," the value of which was about twenty shillings of our money, ten shillings less than the price of a slave, Exod. xxi. 32. A goodly price at which they valued him! But let not Joseph complain, seeing a greater than he was sold by Judas Iscariot for but a little more.

Ver. 29, 30. During this iniquitous transaction Reuben was absent. I suppose, while they were eating and drinking, he stole away from their company, with the intention of going by himself to the pit and delivering Joseph; and to the pit he went: but taking a circuitous course, it may be to prevent

suspicion, he was too late! At this he is greatly affected, rends his garments, returns to the company, and exclaims, "The child is not: and I, whither shall I go!" But though he spoke like a brother, and an elder brother, who was obliged to give account to his father, yet it appears to have made no impression on them. Like the scribes and Pharisees, they were ready to answer, "See thou to that!"

Ver. 31-36. They feel not for Joseph, nor for Reuben; but have some concern about themselves, and immediately fall upon a stratagem wherewith to deceive their father. A kid is slain, and the coat of Joseph is dipped in its blood. This is to be carried home, and shown to Jacob, with the addition of a lie, saying, they had "found" it; and thus the poor old man was to be persuaded that some evil beast had devoured him. Who will say that the workers of iniquity have no knowledge? Yet one cannot but remark the difficulty of supporting a feigned character. To have done it completely, they should first have seen their father without the coat, broke it to him by degrees, affected to grieve with him for the loss, and at last have presented the coat with apparent reluctance, as that which must harrow up his feelings. Instead of this, the whole is done in the most unfeeling and undutiful manner that it could be: "This have we found," say they, "know now whether it be *thy* son's coat, or no!" They could not deny themselves the brutal pleasure of thus insulting their father, even in the hour of his distress, for his former partiality. Wicked dispositions often make men act like fools: hence it is that murderers commonly betray themselves. The disguise of hypocrisy is generally very thin: truth only is throughout consistent. This disguise, however, thin as it was, seemed at present to answer the end. Jacob knew the bloody garment, and said, "it is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him: Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces." No, it is no evil beast, but men more cruel than tigers, that have done towards him what is done: but thus Jacob thought, and thus he mourned. We are ready to wonder how Reuben could keep his counsel, yet with all his grief he did so: perhaps he might be afraid for his own life. Whatever was the cause, however, of Jacob's being thus imposed upon, it was wisely ordered that he should be so. The present concealment of many things contributes not a little to the accomplishment of the Divine counsels, and to the augmentation of future joy.

Jacob's mourning is deep and durable: when, after a time, his sons and his sons' wives rose up to comfort him, he refused to be comforted; resolving to die a mourner, and to welcome the grave, which, though a land of darkness, should be dear to him, because his beloved Joseph was there! "Thus his father wept for him."

From the whole, one sees already with admiration the astonishing machinery of providence. The malignant brothers seem to have obtained their ends; the mercenary merchants, who care not what they deal in so that they get gain, have also obtained theirs; and Potiphar, having got a fine young slave, has obtained his. But, what is of greater importance, God's designs are by these means all in train for execution. This event shall issue in Israel's going down to Egypt; that in their deliverance by Moses; that in the setting up of the true religion in the world; and that in the spread of it among all nations by the gospel. "The wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder thereof will he restrain."

DISCOURSE XLVI.

THE CONDUCT OF JUDAH.—JOSEPH'S PROMOTION AND TEMPTATION.

Gen. xxxviii., xxxix.

IF we turn aside with the sacred writer for a few minutes, and notice the conduct of Judah about this time, we shall perceive new sources of sorrow for the poor old patriarch. This young man, whatever was the cause, must needs leave his father's family; and, wandering towards the south, he entered into the house of one Hirah, an inhabitant of Adullam, with whom he formed an intimate acquaintance. If all the brethren had dispersed and mingled among the heathen, if we consider only their state of mind, there had been nothing surprising in it. While tarrying here, he saw a young female, whose father's name was Shuah; and though he had joined in objecting to his sister's marriage with Shechem, yet he makes no scruple of taking this Canaanitish woman to be his wife; and that without at all consulting his father. The children which he had by this marriage were such as might be expected; and the loose life which he himself led, aided in it as he was by his *friend* the Adullamite, was that of a man who, weary of the restraints of religion, had given himself up to his evil propensities.

Yet it is observable how he keeps up the customs of his father's family, by directing his younger son to take the widow of the eldest, that he might raise up seed unto his brother; and though he himself indulged in licentiousness, yet he can feel indignation and even talk of *burning* his daughter-in-law for the same thing. Thus we have often seen men tenacious of ceremonies while living in the grossest immorality, and quick to censure the faults of others while blinded to their own.

The odious wickedness committed in this family might not have been recorded but for the purpose of chronology, and to show what human nature is till it is renewed by the grace of God. How this connexion between Judah and his *friend* the Adullamite came to be broken we know not; but, finding him afterwards in his father's house, we hope it was so. Even while he continued on that side of the country he had some remorse of conscience, particularly when he discovered the supposed harlot to be his daughter Tamar. "She hath been," said he, "more righteous than I"

But we return to the history of Joseph—

Chap. xxxix. We left him in Egypt, sold to Potiphar, a captain of the guard; and here we find him. He was sent beforehand as a saviour; and, like the Saviour of the world, was not sent in state, but in the form of a servant.

Nothing is said of the grief of mind which he felt on the occasion, but this must needs have been great. A youth of seventeen, torn from his father, enslaved, to all appearance, for life, and that among idolaters, where the true God was utterly unknown! If the day of Jacob's departure from his father's house was "the day of his distress," chap. xxxv. 3, what must Joseph's have been! The archers may well be said to have "sorely grieved him!"

Ver. 2, 3. But here is a remedy equal to this or any other disease; "the Lord was with Joseph!" God can make up any loss, sustain under any load, and render us blessed in any place. To this Moses alludes in his dying blessing upon the tribe of Joseph: "Blessed of the Lord be his land,

for the precious things of heaven—for the precious things of the earth”—and for the “good-will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren!” If we be but in the path of duty, we have nothing to fear. Whatever wrongs we suffer, if we be but kept from doing wrong, we shall enjoy the peace of God in our hearts, and all will come to a good issue. What a difference is there between the cases of Joseph and Jonah! They were both in trouble, both absent from God’s people, both among the heathen; but the sufferings of the one were for righteousness’ sake, while those of the other were of his own procuring.

God makes Joseph *prosperous*. He must then have submitted with cheerfulness to his lot, studied to make himself agreeable and useful to his master, and applied attentively to business. Herein he was an example of resignation to the will of God in afflictive circumstances. Fretfulness greatly aggravates the ills of life, while a cheerful submission to the will of God alleviates them. The prosperity attending Joseph was *manifest*; his master sees it, and sees that “Jehovah is with him,” and that it is his hand which blesses all he does. This is a circumstance not a little to Joseph’s honour; for it implies that he made no secret of his religion. He must have refused to join in Egyptian idolatry, and have avowed himself a worshipper of Jehovah, the only true God. In many cases, for a poor unprotected slave to have done this, would have cost him his life; but the Lord was with Joseph, and had all hearts in his hand. Potiphar, observing that the religion of the young man turned to his account, like many irreligious masters in the present day, makes no objection to it. This holds up a most encouraging example to religious servants to recommend the gospel by their fidelity and diligence; and to all Christians to be faithful to God, even when there are no religious friends about them to watch over them. This is walking with God.

Ver. 4. The effect of this is, Joseph comes into favour, and is promoted over all the other servants. From a slave he is made a steward; a steward not only of the household, but over all his master’s affairs, and this though but a youth.

Ver. 5. And now, as Potiphar favours the Lord’s servant, the Lord will not be behindhand with him, but will favour him. From this time forward every thing is blessed and prospered “for Joseph’s sake.” We see here that it is good to be connected with them that fear God, but much better to cast in our lot with them. In that case we shall not only gain by them for this life, but, as Moses told Hobab, whatever good thing the Lord doth to them shall be done to us. Here also we see the promise to Abraham fulfilled in his posterity: he not only blesses them, but “makes them a blessing.” Such was Jacob to Laban; such is Joseph to Potiphar, and afterwards to all Egypt; and such has Israel been to the world, who from them derive a Saviour, and all that they possess of true religion. Even the casting away of them has proved the reconciling of the world, and how much more shall the receiving of them at a future day be as life from the dead! It might also be the design of God, by this as well as other of his proceedings, to set forth under a figure the method in which he would bless the world; namely, “for the sake of another that was dear unto him.” Potiphar was not blessed for his own sake, or on account of any of his good deeds; but for the sake of Joseph. Even his receiving Joseph into favour was not *that on account of which* he was blessed, though that was necessary to it; it was *Joseph* to whom the eye of the Lord was directed: he looked on him, and blessed Potiphar. So *that for the sake of which* we are accepted and saved is not any work of righteousness which we have done, nor even our believing in

Christ, though this is necessary to it; but the name and righteousness of Jesus. Thus, in both cases, grace is displayed, and boasting excluded. Finally, It was a proverb in Israel, that "when it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth." This was singularly exemplified in the prosperity of Joseph, and still more in the exaltation of Christ. From the day that he was made head over all principalities and powers, from that time forward the Lord hath blessed the world *for his sake*.

Ver. 6. So great was the confidence which Joseph's fidelity inspired in his master, that all his concerns were left in his hands; and for his own part, he did nothing but enjoy the prosperity which was thus bestowed upon him. This circumstance might be wisely ordered to prepare this lovely youth for his future station. He was now brought into business, and inured to management: had he been raised to his last post first, he might have been less qualified to fill it. Sudden advancements are seldom safe.

Under all this prosperity, what may we suppose to be the state of Joseph's mind? No doubt his thoughts would sometimes glance to the vale of Hebron, and he would ask himself, How does my father bear the rending stroke; and what is become of my poor wicked brethren? But as to himself, so far as it was possible to be happy in a strange land, happy he must have been. God was with him, every thing he did prospered, and every thing he met with was extremely flattering. Indeed there are few characters who, at his period of life especially, could bear such a tide of success. We see in him nothing assuming or overbearing towards his fellow servants, nor forgetful of his God. If, however, any thing of this kind should have been at work in his heart, he will soon meet with that which shall recall him to a right mind. A sharp temptation approaches, in which his virtue and patience shall be put to the proof. After a day of prosperity, let us expect a day of adversity; for "God hath set the one over against the other," even in the lot of his most favoured servants.

Ver. 7-9. Joseph's goodly and well-favoured countenance excites the lawless desires of a faithless woman, who, in violation of her marriage vows, and of all the modesty and decency which should distinguish her sex, tries to seduce him. In such a situation, how many young men would have been carried away! Nay, how many are so where the temptation is far less powerful! His conduct on this occasion is a proof of great grace, and exhibits to all posterity an example of what may be done by closely walking with God.

The first attack upon him is repelled with a modest but severe remonstrance, exactly suited to his situation. Let us examine it minutely. There are four things in it worthy of admiration. 1. He is silent with respect to the wickedness of the tempter. He might have reproached her for the delicacy, the infidelity, and the baseness of her proposal; but he confines himself to what respected *his own* obligation, and what would be *his own* sin. In the hour of temptation it is enough for us to look to ourselves. It is remarkable that all our Lord's answers to the tempter, as recorded in the fourth chapter of Matthew, are in this way. He could have accused him of insolence and outrage; but he barely refuses to follow his counsels, because thus and thus *it was written*. 2. Joseph considers his obligation as rising in proportion to his station: "There is none greater in this house than I." Some young men would have drawn a contrary conclusion from the same premises, and on this ground have thought themselves entitled to take the greater liberties; but this is the true use to be made of power, and riches, and every kind of trust. 3. He considers it as heightened by the generosity and kindness of his master, who withheld nothing else from him. Eve reasoned at first on this principle, chap. iii. 2; and had she kept to it

she had been safe. When we are tempted to covet what God has forbidden, it were well to think of the many things which he has not forbidden, but freely given us. 4. He rises from created to uncreated authority: It would not only be treachery to my master, but "wickedness," "great wickedness, and sin against God." In the hour of temptation it is of infinite importance what view we take of the evil to which we are tempted. If we suffer our thoughts to dwell on its agreeableness, as Eve did concerning the forbidden fruit, its sinfulness will insensibly diminish in our sight, a number of excuses will present themselves, and we shall inevitably be carried away by it; but if we keep our eye steadfastly on the holy will of God, and the strong obligations we are under to him, that which would otherwise appear a little thing will be accounted what it is, a *great wickedness*, and we shall revolt at the idea of sinning against him. This is the armour of God, wherewith we shall stand in the evil day.

Ver. 10. This remonstrance, however, strong as it was, has no lasting effect upon the woman; for sin, and this sin in particular, is outrageous in its operations. Joseph therefore finds it necessary to shun her company, carefully avoiding, as much as possible, to be with her any where alone. This showed, First, *great sincerity*; for if we throw ourselves in the way of temptation, or be not careful to shun it when occasions offer, in vain do we talk against sin. Secondly, *great wisdom*; for though he had been kept hitherto, he was not sure that he should be so in future. Thirdly, *great resolution and perseverance*; for it is not every one who withstands a temptation in the first instance that holds out to the end. Eve repelled the tempter on his first onset, but was carried away by the second. Job endured a series of trials, and sinned not; yet afterwards spake things which he ought not. Finally, *great grace*. "Can a man go on hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" No; if we voluntarily go into temptation, we shall assuredly be hurt, if not ruined by it; but when God by his providence *leads* us into it, for the trial of our graces, we may hope to be kept in it, and brought victorious out of it.

Ver. 11-20. If we were told of a young man in Joseph's situation, we should probably advise his leaving the family; but, circumstanced as he was, that might be impossible. He was a bought servant, however exalted, and therefore was not at liberty to leave. Nor could he speak on the subject to his master without ruining his peace for ever. He therefore kept it to himself, and went on as well as he could, watching and praying, no doubt, lest he should enter into temptation. One day, being under the necessity of going into the house about business, his mistress renewed her solicitations; on which he fled from her presence as before; but, as he was escaping, she caught a piece of his garment, and kept it by her. Wantonness being disappointed, and pride wounded, the whole is now turned into hatred and revenge. She will work his overthrow, that she will! Mark how the cunning of the old serpent operates. The servants are called in to witness how she had been mocked, or, as we should say, insulted by this Hebrew. If they knew nothing from other quarters, it was very natural they should think it was so; and thus they were every thing but eye-witnesses of Joseph's guilt. Presumptive evidence is certainly very strong against him. Yet, with all this cunning, like other hypocrites, she does not do it completely. She should have pretended how much she felt for the insult offered to her husband, as well as to herself; but the truth will come out, after all the pains taken to conceal it. How disrespectfully she speaks of him to the servants, half attributing the pretended insult to him! "See," saith she, "*he* hath brought an Hebrew unto us, to mock us!" Such language not only betrayed the alienation of her heart from her husband, but tended to set the servants

against him. Nothing but truth is consistent throughout. If these servants possessed only a moderate share of good sense, they must have seen through this thin disguise, whether they chose to speak their minds or not.

The scheme however took. Potiphar thought the story so plausible that there could be no doubt of its being true. His wrath therefore was kindled, and without further ceremony he took Joseph, and committed him to prison. Being fired with anger, he had no ear to hear what could be said on the other side; and perhaps Joseph might think that nothing he could say would be regarded; or if it were, it must ruin his master's peace of mind; he would therefore go in silence to prison, trusting in God to vindicate his injured character.

But what an affecting reverse of condition! Poor young man! a stranger in a strange land, without a friend to speak for him or to care about him. Behold him confined in the dungeon, and think what must have been his reflections.—Oh, if my father knew of this, what would he feel on my account! How mysterious are the ways of Providence, that, by an inflexible adherence to righteousness, I should be brought into this horrid place!—He was not only confined in a *dungeon*, but, as we are told in the 105th Psalm, “his feet were hurt with fetters, being laid in iron.” The last phrase is very emphatic. Calvin renders it, “The iron entered into his soul.”* Not only were his feet galled, but his heart was grieved; and probably he expected nothing but death.

Ver. 21-23. But as under his former affliction, so under this, “the Lord was with Joseph.” What was once said to Abraham might now be said to him; “I am God all-sufficient: walk before me, and be thou perfect.” All will be right at last. Where providence leads us into difficulties and hardships, grace can sustain us under them; and if we suffer for righteousness' sake, as Joseph did, we may be assured it will be so. Nothing shall eventually harm us, if we be followers of that which is good. In a little time, Joseph obtains favour in the eyes of the keeper of the prison, as he had done before in those of Potiphar. And now he has an opportunity of showing the power of true religion in the prison, by his fidelity, his tenderness, and his worship of the only true God. It might be wisely ordered, too, that he should go into his high station by way of a prison; he might not otherwise have been so well qualified to feel for his brethren, and for other prisoners. Nor would he have been in the way of his future advancement; if he had not been there. “Before honour is humility.” The Lord of glory himself obtained not the crown but by first enduring the cross.

DISCOURSE XLVII.

JOSEPH IN PRISON.

Gen. xl.

WE left Joseph in prison; but, by the good hand of God upon him, its hardships are greatly mitigated. At first he is thrown into a dungeon, and laid in irons; but now he is made a kind of steward, or overseer of the other prisoners. Yet it is a prison still, and he desires to be free; but he must wait awhile. God will deliver him in his own time and way. This chapter contains the story of the means by which his deliverance was effected.

Ver. 1, 2. Two of Pharaoh's officers offend their lord, for which they are committed to prison—the chief butler and the chief baker. Whether they suffered justly for having attempted to poison the king, which was often done in heathen countries, or merely on account of unfounded suspicion; whether, if there were any thing actually attempted, it was *their* doing, or that some of the under butlers and bakers, for whose conduct they might be responsible; we know not: but imprisoned they were.

Ver. 3, 4. The prison into which they were sent is called the house of "the captain of the guard." This title is more than once before given to Potiphar, chap. xxxvii. 36; xxxix. 1. It is probable that he had the chief oversight of the prison, and that the keeper was a person employed under him. If so, it seems likely that Potiphar was reconciled to Joseph. There is little reason to think that his wife would long conceal her character; and that being known would operate in Joseph's favour; and though he might not wish to release him out of prison, for his own credit, yet he might be induced to connive at the keeper's kindness to him. It is remarkable that the prison to which these persons were sent should be the same as that wherein Joseph was confined. In this we see the hand of God ordering all events. They might have been sent to another place of confinement, but then the chain had been broken. On how many little incidents, of which the parties at the time think nothing, do some of the greatest events depend! If they had gone to another prison, Joseph might have died where he was, and no provision have been made for the seven years of famine; and Jacob and his family, with millions of others, have perished for want; and so all the promises of their becoming a great nation, and of the Messiah springing from among them, and all nations being blessed in him, would have been frustrated. But he that appoints the end appoints all the means that shall lead to it; and not one of them, however small or incidental, shall be dispensed with. In this prison Joseph is said to have *served* the chief butler and the chief baker; that is, he carried them their daily provisions, and so was in the habit of seeing them every day, and conversing with them.

Ver. 5-8. One morning, when he went to carry them their usual food, he finds them more than ordinarily dejected, and kindly inquires into the reason of it. It appears hence that Joseph was not a hard-hearted overseer. Unlike many petty officers, whose overbearing conduct towards their inferiors is most intolerable, he sympathizes with the sorrowful, and makes free with them. The fear of God produces tenderness of heart, and compassion towards men, especially to the poor and the afflicted. On inquiry, he found that they had each had a *dream*, which, by the circumstances attending it, they considered as extraordinary. Both of them dreamed, and both in one night; both their dreams related to their past employments, and seemed therefore to be ominous of their future destiny; yet they knew not what to make of them, and had no interpreter at hand who could instruct them. Such was the cause of their dejection. Though the greater part of dreams be vanity, yet in all ages and places God has sometimes impressed the mind of man by these means; and especially, it would seem, in countries which have been destitute of Divine revelation. We have many instances of this in the book of Daniel, and by which, as in this case, the servants of God came into request, and the glory of God eclipsed the powers of idolatry.

But what kind of interpreters did these men wish for? Such, no doubt, as Pharaoh, on his having dreamed, called for; namely, the magicians and the wise men of Egypt; and because they had no hopes of obtaining them in their present situation, therefore they were sad. Here lies the force of Joseph's question; "Do not interpretations belong to God?" which was a

reproof to them for looking to their magicians instead of to him: hence also he offered himself, as the servant of God, to be their interpreter.

It is worthy of notice, that what Joseph's interpretation was to the dreams of the butler and the baker, that the oracles of God are to the notices and impressions on the human mind by the light of nature and conscience. Man in every age and country has felt in himself a consciousness of his being what he ought not to be, a fearfulness of having in another state to give an account, with many other things of the kind; but all is uncertainty. He only knows enough, if he regard it not, to render him inexcusable; and if he regard it, to make him miserable. It is only in the Scriptures that the mind of God is revealed

Ver. 9-15. The butler first tells his dream, which Joseph interprets of his deliverance and restoration to office; and having told him this good news, he very naturally throws in a request on behalf of himself. There is no proof or symptom of impatience in this; but patience itself may consist with the use of all lawful means to obtain deliverance. The terms in which this request is made are modest, and exceedingly impressive: "Think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house." He might have asked for a place under the chief butler, or some other post of honour or profit: but he requests only to be delivered from "this house." He might have reminded the butler how much he owed to his sympathetic and kind treatment; but he left these things to speak for themselves, using no other language than that of humble entreaty; "I pray thee show kindness unto me!" In pleading the exalted situation in which the chief butler was about to be reinstated, he gently intimates the obligations which people in prosperous circumstances are under to think of the poor and the afflicted; and Christians may still further improve the principle, not to be unmindful of such cases in their approaches to the King of kings. This plea may also direct us to make use of His name and interest who is exalted at the right hand of the Majesty on high. It was on this principle that the dying thief presented his petition; "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." A petition which the Lord of glory did neither refuse nor forget; and still he liveth to make intercession for us.

Joseph, in order to make a deeper impression upon the butler's mind, tells him a few of the outlines of his history: "I was *stolen*," says he, "from the land of the Hebrews." But was this a *just* account? Did not the Ishmaelites *buy* him? They did; but it was of them who had no right to sell him, and therefore it was in reality stealing him. Such, you know, would be the purchase of a child by a kidnapper of an unprincipled nurse; and such is the purchase of slaves to this day on the coast of Africa. The account was not only just, but *generous*. In making use of the term *stolen*, without any mention of particulars, he seems to have intended to throw a veil over the cruelty of his brethren, whom he did not wish to reproach to a stranger; and the same generous spirit is discovered in what he says of his treatment in Egypt. We have seen in a former discourse how this great and good man refused to reproach his tempter, confining himself to what was his own duty; and now, when he had suffered so much through her base and false treatment, and when it might have been thought necessary to expose her in order to justify himself, he contents himself with asserting his own innocence: "And here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." What an example is here afforded us of temperateness and forbearance, under the foulest and most injurious treatment! Such was Joseph's request, and such his pleas to enforce it. If there had been any

gratitude, any bowels of mercy, or any justice in the butler's heart, surely he must have thought of these things.

Ver. 16-19. But, before telling us the issue of the above, the sacred writer informs us of the request of the baker. Observing the success of his companion, he is encouraged to tell *his* dream also; but here is a sad reverse. In three days his life will be taken from him! Whether he would suffer justly or unjustly we know not; but as his death was so near, it was an advantage for him to know it; and if he had been properly affected, he had now an opportunity of inquiring at the hand of a servant of God concerning his eternal salvation.

Ver. 20-23. The third day after these things, being Pharaoh's birth-day, both these prisoners were brought forth. Whether they were put to a formal trial, or whether their fate was determined by the mere will of the king, we are not informed; but the chief butler was reinstated in his office, and the chief baker hanged, according to the word of the Lord by his servant Joseph.

We should now have expected to read of the chief butler's intercession to the king in behalf of an amiable and injured young Hebrew, whom he had met with in prison. But instead of this we are told, "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him!" Alas, what a selfish creature is man! How strangely does prosperity intoxicate and drown the mind! How common is it for people in high life to forget the poor, even those to whom they have been under the greatest obligations! Well, be it so; Joseph's God did not forget him; and we, amidst all the neglects of creatures, may take comfort in this, Jesus does not neglect us. Though exalted far above all principalities and powers, he is not elated with his glory, so as to forget his poor suffering people upon earth. Only let us be concerned not to forget him. He who needs not our esteem, as we do his, hath yet in love condescended to ask us to do thus and thus *in remembrance of him!*

DISCOURSE XLVIII.

JOSEPH'S ADVANCEMENT.

Gen. xli.

VER. 1-14. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." It is not the intensity of our trials, but the duration of them, that is the greatest test of patience. "Two full years" longer must Joseph remain in prison. How long he was at the house of Potiphar, before he was sent to this dismal place, I do not recollect that we are informed; but we learn that it was thirteen years in the whole; for when he came out of Canaan he was but seventeen, and he was thirty when he stood before Pharaoh. God seldom makes haste to accomplish his designs. His movements, like those of a comet, fetch a large compass, but all comes right at last. The time is now come for Joseph's advancement, and God makes way for it by causing Pharaoh himself to dream. Abraham made a point of not laying himself under obligation to the king of Sodom; and though Joseph in the grief of his soul would gladly have been obliged to both Pharaoh and the butler for his deliverance, yet God will so order it that he shall be obliged to neither of them. Pharaoh shall send for him; but it shall be for *his own sake*. Though a poor friendless young man himself, yet he is a servant of the great King, and must maintain the honour of his Lord. It might be for this that God suf-

ferred the butler to forget him, that he might not take from a thread to a shoe-latchet what was theirs, and that the king of Egypt might not have to say, I have made Israel rich. Abraham and his posterity were made to impart blessedness to mankind rather than to receive it from them. If it be more blessed to give than to receive, theirs it is to be thus blessed and thus honoured. Oh the depth of the wisdom and goodness of God, not only in giving, but in withholding his gifts till the time when they shall best subserve the ends for which they are conferred!

And now that the set time to favour Joseph is come, events rise in quick succession. Pharaoh's mind is impressed with an extraordinary dream—the same is repeated in another form—each appears to portend something of importance—his spirit is troubled—he sends for his magicians and wise men, but their wisdom fails them—all are nonplused—what is to be done?—Just now it occurs to the butler that this had once been his own case—Oh, and I have forgotten my kind and worthy friend! Stupid creature! That is the man for the king.—Obtaining an audience, he confesses the whole truth, and ingenuously acknowledges his faults.—Joseph is now sent for in haste. He shaves himself, changes his raiment, and obeys the summons. Thus, in a few hours, he is delivered from the dungeon, and introduced to the court of what was then perhaps the first nation upon earth. Were we unacquainted with the event, with what anxious solicitude should we follow him! and even as it is, we cannot wholly divest ourselves of these feelings.

Ver. 15-24. Being introduced to the king, he is told for what cause he is sent for. "I have," said Pharaoh, "dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee that thou canst understand a dream, to interpret it." The meaning of this was, that he had a case in hand which baffled all the wise men of Egypt, but that, from what he had heard of Joseph, he supposed he might be a wiser man, or more deeply skilled in occult science, than any of them. Such a compliment from a king would have been too much for a vain mind: if he had affected to disclaim superior wisdom, it would have been done in a manner which betrayed what lurked within. But Joseph feared God; and is the same man in a palace as in a prison: "It is not in me," said he; "God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." In this brief answer we see a spirit of genuine *humility*, disclaiming all that kind of wisdom for which Pharaoh seemed very willing to give him credit, or indeed any other, but what God gave him. We see also a *disinterested concern to glorify the true God*, in the face of the mightiest votaries of idolatry, who had power to do what they pleased with him. It is observable, he does not say the God of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, or the God of the Hebrews. Such language might have been understood by Pharaoh and his courtiers as setting up one titular Deity in opposition to others, the God of his country against the gods of Egypt: but he simply says God; a term which would lead their thoughts to the One great Supreme, before whom all idols would fall to the ground. Thus, with great wisdom, modesty, and firmness, he states truth, and leaves error to fall of its own accord. In assuring Pharaoh that God would give him an answer of *peace*, he would remove all fear from his mind of an unfavourable interpretation, which, from the butler's report, he might have some reason to apprehend; inasmuch as though he had foretold his restoration to office, yet he had prophetically hanged the chief baker.

Pharaoh's mind being thus relieved and encouraged, he without further hesitation proceeds to tell his dreams of the fat and lean-fleshed kine, and of the rank and withered ears of corn.

Ver. 25-31. The answer of Joseph is worthy of the man of God. You perceive no shuffling to gain time, no juggling, no peeping and muttering,

no words of dark or doubtful meaning: all is clear as light, and explicit as the day.—The dreams are one; and they were sent of God to forewarn the king of what he would shortly bring to pass. The seven good kine, and the seven ears, are seven years of plenty; and the seven evil kine, and thin ears, are seven years of famine. And the reason of the dream being doubled is to express its certainty, and the near approach of the events signified by it.

Ver. 32-36. Having made the matter plain, and so relieved the king's mind, he does not conclude without offering a word of counsel; the substance of which was to provide, from the surplus of the seven good years, for the supply of the seven succeeding ones. If he had only interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, he might have gratified his curiosity, but that had been all. Knowledge is of but little use, any further than as it is converted into practice.

With respect to the advice itself, it carried with it its own recommendation. It was no more than what common prudence would have dictated to any people. If they had doubted Joseph's interpretation of the dreams, and whether any such years of plenty and of scarcity would follow, yet they could not, even upon this supposition, object to his counsel; for nothing was to be expended, nor done, but upon the actual occurrence of the plentiful years; which, as they were to come first, afforded an opportunity of which wisdom would have availed itself, if there had been no dreams in the case, to provide for a time of want. Nor is there any reason, from what we know of Joseph's character, to suspect him of interested designs, like those of Haman, who wished to recommend himself. He appears to have had no end in view but the good of the country where God had caused him to sojourn.

Ver. 37, 38. Happily for Egypt, Pharaoh and his ministry saw the propriety of what was offered, and readily came into it. It is a sign that God has mercy in store for that people whose rulers are open to receive good counsel, and know how to appreciate the worth of good men. As Joseph had recommended a wise man to be employed in the business, Pharaoh without further hesitation appeals to his courtiers, whether any man in Egypt was so fit for the work as himself,—a man who had not only proved himself wise in counsel, but had also intercourse with God, and was inspired of him to reveal the secrets of futurity. Such language proves that Joseph's mentioning the true God to Pharaoh had not been without effect. To this, however, the courtiers make no answer. If they felt a little jealous of this young foreigner, it were not to be wondered at. Such were the feelings of the Babylonish nobles towards Daniel. It were easier to see the goodness of the counsel which left a hope to each man of a new office, than to see that Joseph was the only man in the land that could execute it. They knew very well that they had not, like him, "the Spirit of God;" but might think themselves capable, nevertheless, of managing this business. However, they silently acquiesce; and Pharaoh proceeds without delay to carry his purpose into effect.

Ver. 39-45. And now all power, except that which is supreme, is put into his hands, over the house and over the nation; and, as the courtiers had probably discovered a secret reluctance, Pharaoh repeats his determination the more earnestly, that as the dream had been repeated to him, the thing might be established, and immediately put in execution. To words were added *signs*, which tended to fix his authority in the minds of the people. The king took his ring from his hand, and put it upon the hand of Joseph, clothed him in fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. Nor was this all: he caused him to ride in the second chariot through the streets of the city, and that it should be proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee," or "Tender father." The Chaldee translates it, as Ainsworth ob-

serves, "The father of the king, master in wisdom, and tender in years;"—as who should say, Though a youth in age, yet a father in character. In addition to this, Pharaoh uses a very solemn form of speech, such as that which is prefixed or affixed to many of the Divine commands: "I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt!" See Lev. xix. Finally, to crown him with respect, he gave him a new name, the meaning of which was, *a revealer of secrets*; and the daughter of a priest, or prince, to be his wife. Pause a moment, my brethren, and reflect . . . Who, in reading the preceding sufferings and present advancement of Joseph, can forbear thinking of Him who, "for the suffering of death, was crowned with glory and honour—whom God hath highly exalted, giving him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father?" Surely it was the design of God, by these sweet analogies, to lead the minds of believers imperceptibly on, that when the Messiah should come, they might see him in perfection, in their Josephs, and Joshuas, and Davids, as well as in their sacrifices, their cities of refuge, and their jubilees.

Ver. 46-49. Joseph, being thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, was just suited for active life. At such a period, however, and raised from such a situation, many would have been lifted up to their hurt; but he who enabled him to repel temptation, and endure affliction, enabled him also to bear the glory that was conferred upon him with humility. It is observable, that, on going out from the presence of Pharaoh, he did not go hither and thither to show his greatness; but immediately betook himself to business. New honours, in his account, conferred new obligations. The first thing necessary for the execution of his trust was a general survey of the country; which having taken, he proceeded to execute his plan, laying up grain during the seven plentiful years beyond all calculation.

Ver. 50-52. During these years of plenty, Joseph had two sons by his wife Asenath, both which are significantly named, and express the state of his mind in his present situation. The first he called *Manasseh*, that is, *forgetting*; "for God," said he, "hath made me to forget all my toil, and all my father's house." A change from the extremes of either joy to sorrow or sorrow to joy is expressed by the term *forgetfulness*; and a very expressive term it is. "Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I *forgot* prosperity.—A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but, as soon as she is delivered, she *remembereth no more* the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." But what, had Joseph forgotten his father's house? Yes, so far as it had been an affliction to him; that is, he had forgotten the cruel treatment of his brethren, so as no longer to lay it to heart. His second son he called *Ephraim*, that is, *made fruitful*; "for God," said he, "hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction!" In both he eyes the hand of God in doing every thing for him, and gives the glory to him only.

Ver. 53-57. But now the day of prosperity to Egypt is at an end, and the day of adversity cometh: "God hath set the one over against the other," to sweep away its fulness, that man should find nothing after him. And now the people, being famished for want of bread, resorted to Pharaoh. Had not Pharaoh been warned of this evil beforehand, he might have replied as Jehoram did to her that cried, "Help, my lord, O king—If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? Out of the barn-floor, or out of the wine-press?" But provision was made for this time of need; and the people are all directed to "go to Joseph." And here, I may say again, who can

forbear thinking of HIM in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, and to whom those who are ready to perish are directed for relief?

This sore famine was not confined to Egypt, but extended to the surrounding countries: and it was wisely ordered that it should be so; since the great end for which God is represented as *calling for it* (Psal. cv. 16) was to bring Jacob's sons, and eventually his whole family, into Egypt; which end would not otherwise have been answered.

Joseph is now filling up his generation work in useful and important labours; and, like a true son of Abraham, he is *blessed and made a blessing*. Yet it was in the midst of this career of activity that his father Jacob said, with a deep sigh, "Joseph is not!" What a large portion of our troubles would subside, if we knew but the whole truth!

DISCOURSE XLIX.

THE FIRST INTERVIEW BETWEEN JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN.

Gen. xlii.

THINGS now approach fast to a crisis. We hear but little more of the famine, but as it relates to Jacob's family, on whose account it was sent. It is remarkable that all the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, experienced a famine while sojourning in the Land of Promise; a circumstance sufficient to try their faith. Had they been of the disposition of the spies in the time of Moses, they would have concluded it to be a land which ate up the inhabitants, and therefore not worth accepting; but they believed God, and thought well of whatever he did.

Ver. 1, 2. Jacob and his family have well nigh exhausted their provision, and have no prospect of recruiting it. They had money, but corn was not to be had for money in their own country. They could do nothing, therefore, but *look one at another* in sad despair. But Jacob, hearing that there was corn in Egypt, rouses them from their torpor. His words resemble those of the four lepers: "Why sit we here until we die?" It is a dictate of nature not to despair while there is a door of hope; and the principle will hold good in things of everlasting moment. Why sit we here, poring over our guilt and misery, when we have heard that with the Lord there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption? How long shall we take counsel in our soul, having sorrow in our hearts daily? Let us trust in his mercy, and our hearts shall rejoice in his salvation.

Ver. 3, 4. The ten brethren immediately betake themselves to their journey. They are called "Joseph's brethren," and not Jacob's sons, because Joseph is at present the principal character in the story. But when Benjamin is called "his brother," there is more meant than in the other case. It would seem to be assigned as the reason why Jacob is unwilling to part with him, that he was the only surviving child of Rachel, and brother of him that was not! As mischief had befallen him, he was afraid the same should befall his brother, and therefore wished the young men to go without him. Jacob does not say, "Lest you should do him mischief, as I fear you did his brother;" but I suspect there was something of this at the bottom, which, when afterwards urged by a kind of necessity to part with Benjamin, came out: "Me ye he have bereaved Joseph

is not!" ver. 36. At first he appears to have thought that some evil beast had devoured him; but, upon more mature observation and reflection, he might see reason to suspect, at least, whether it was not by some foul dealing on their part that he had come to his end. As nothing, however, could be proved, he at present kept his suspicions to himself; and the matter passed, as it had done from the first, that mischief in some unknown way had befallen him.

Ver. 5. Nothing is said of their journey, except that a number of their countrymen went with them on the same errand; for the famine was in the land of Canaan. Such a number of applicants might possibly excite fears in their minds lest there should not be enough for them all. Such fears, however, if they existed in this case, were unnecessary; and must always be unnecessary, where there is enough and to spare.

Ver. 6. Now, Joseph being governor of the land, they find him on their arrival fully employed in serving the Egyptians. He had assistants; but his eye pervaded every thing. As soon as they could get access to the governor, they, according to the Eastern custom, bow themselves before him, with their faces to the earth.

Ver. 7. We may wonder that Joseph could live all this time in Egypt, without going to see his father or his brethren. We might indeed allege, that while with Potiphar he had probably neither opportunity nor inclination; when in prison, he was not allowed to go beyond its walls; and when advanced under Pharaoh, his hands were so fully employed that he could not be spared. We know that when his father was to come down to him he could only send for him; and when he went to bury him, there was great formality required to attend his movements, a number of the Egyptians going with him. But it was doubtless ordered of God that he should not go, but that his brethren should come to him; for on this depended the whole issue of the affair. And now comes on the delicate part of the story: "Joseph saw his brethren, and knew them." What must have been his feelings! The remembrance of the manner in which he parted from them two-and-twenty years ago, the events which had since befallen him, their prostration before him, and the absence of Benjamin, from which he might be apprehensive that they had also made away with him—all together, must have been a great shock to his sensibility. Let him beware, or his countenance will betray him. He feels the danger of this, and therefore immediately puts on a stern look, speaks roughly to them, and affects to take them for spies. By this innocent piece of artifice, he could interrogate them, and get out of them all the particulars that he wished, without betraying himself, which he could not have done by any other means. The manner in which he asked them, "Whence come ye?" would convey to them an idea of suspicion as to their designs. It was like saying, Who and what are you? I do not like your looks. Their answer is humble and proper, stating the simple truth . . . they came from Canaan, and had no other design in view than to buy food.

Ver. 8. "Joseph knew his brethren," and felt for them, notwithstanding his apparent severity; "but they knew not him!" It was wisely ordered that it should be so, and is easily accounted for. When they last saw each other, they were grown to man's estate, but he was a lad; they were probably in much the same dress, but he was clothed in vestures of fine linen, with a golden chain about his neck; and they had only one face to judge by, whereas he had ten, the knowledge of any one of which would lead to the knowledge of all. Now Joseph sees, without being seen; and now he remembers his dreams of the sheaves, and of the stars.

Ver. 9-14. Determined to continue at present unknown, and yet wishing

to know more of them, and of matters in Canaan, Joseph still speaks under an assumed character, and affects to be dissatisfied with their answer. "Ye are spies," saith he, "to see the nakedness of the land are ye come." They modestly and respectfully disown the charge, and repeat the true and only object of their coming; adding, what is very much in point, "We are all one man's sons." This was saying, Ours is not a political, but a domestic errand; we are not sent hither by a king, but by a father, and merely to supply the wants of the family. Still he affects to disbelieve them; for he does not know enough yet. He therefore repeats his suspicions, in order to provoke them to be more particular; as if he should say, I will know all about you before I sell you corn, or send you away. This had the desired effect. "Thy servants," say they, "are [or were] twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not." This is deeply interesting, and exquisitely affecting to Joseph. By this he learns that his father was yet alive, and his brother too. O these are joyful tidings! This was the drift of his questions, as they afterwards tell their father Jacob: "The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? Have ye another brother? And we told him according to the tenor of these words," chap. xliii. 7. But what must have been his sensations at the mention of the last words, "One is not!" . . . Well, he conceals his feelings, and affects to turn their account of matters against them. They had not told all the truth at first. It seems at first there were only ten of them, and now there were eleven: "That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies."

Ver. 15, 16. He now proposes to prove them. "By the life of Pharaoh," saith he, "you shall not go hence, except your youngest brother come hither. Send one of you and fetch him, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely ye are spies." Some suppose that Joseph had learned the manner of the Egyptians by living among them, or that he would not thus have sworn by the life of Pharaoh; but I see no ground for any such thing. We might as well say that he had learned to speak untruth, because he really had no such suspicions as he feigned; or that he had learned magic, seeing he afterwards talked of "divining;" or that our Saviour had learned the proud and haughty spirit of the Jews, who treated the Gentiles as dogs, because, for the sake of trying the woman of Canaan, he made use of that kind of language. The truth is, Joseph acted under an assumed character. He wished to be taken for an Egyptian nobleman, with whom it was as common to swear by the life of Pharaoh as it was afterwards for a Roman to swear by the fortune of Cæsar.

But wherefore does Joseph thus keep up the deception? and why propose such methods of proving his brethren? I suppose at present his wish is to *detain* them. Yes, they must not leave Egypt thus: had they done this, he might have seen them no more; yet he had no other cause to assign but this, without betraying the truth, which it was not a fit time to do at present.

Ver. 17, 18. Take these men up, said Joseph to his officers, and put them into a place of safe custody: it is not proper they should be at large. Here they lie three days; a period which afforded him time to think what to do, and them to reflect on what they had done. On the third day he paid them a visit, and that in a temper of more apparent mildness. He assures them that he has no designs upon their life, nor any wish to hurt their family; and ventures to give a reason for it, which must to them appear no less surprising than satisfying: "I fear God." What, an Egyptian nobleman know and fear the true God! If so, they have no injustice to fear at his hands; nor can he withhold food from a starving family. The fear of God will ever

be connected with justice and humanity to man. But how mysterious an affair! If he be a good man, how is it that he should treat us so roughly? How is it that God should suffer him so to mistake our designs? Severity from the hand of goodness is doubly severe. Their hearts must surely by this time have been full. Such were the methods which this wise man made use of to agitate their minds, and to touch every spring of sensibility within them; and such were the means which God by him made use of to bring them to repentance. This indeed is his ordinary method of dealing with sinners: now their fears are awakened by threatenings, or adverse providences, in which death sometimes stares them in the face; and now a little gleam of hope arises, just sufficient to keep the mind from sinking; yet all is covered with doubt and mystery. It is thus, as by alternate frost and rain and sunshine upon the earth, that he humbleth the mind, and maketh soft the heart of man.

Ver. 19-24. Joseph, still under a disguise, though he consents that nine out of the ten should go home with provision for the relief of the family, yet, that he may have some pledge for their return, insists on one being detained as a hostage till they should prove themselves true men, by bringing their younger brother; and his will at present must be their law. Having thus determined their cause, he withdraws from their immediate company to a little distance, where perhaps he might stand conversing with some other persons, but still within hearing of what passed among them. As he had all along spoken to them by an interpreter, they had no suspicion that he understood Hebrew, and therefore began talking to one another in that language with the greatest freedom, and, as they thought, without danger of being understood. Their full hearts now began to utter themselves. Perhaps their being obliged to speak of Joseph as "not" might serve to bring him to their remembrance. Whatever it was, the same thoughts had been in all their minds, which probably they could read in each other's looks. As soon, therefore, as one of them broke silence, the rest immediately joined in ascribing all this evil which had befallen them to this cause. "They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us!" God, in dealing with sinners, usually adapts the punishment to the sin, so as to cause them to read the one in the other. Hence adverse providences call our sin to remembrance; our own wickedness corrects us, and our backslidings reprove us. They would not hear Joseph in his distress, and now they could not be heard; they had thrown him into a pit, and are themselves now thrown into prison! These convictions are heightened by the reproaches of Reuben, who gives them to expect blood for blood. Reuben was that, methinks, to his brethren which conscience is to a sinner; remonstrating at the outset, and, when judgment overtakes him, reproaching him, and foreboding the worst of consequences. His words are sharp as a two-edged sword: "Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? Therefore behold, also, his blood is required!" But, that which is still more affecting, Joseph hears all, and understands it, and this without their suspecting it. Such words however were too much for the heart of man, at least such a man as he was, to bear: it is no wonder, therefore, that he "turned himself about from them, and wept!" But having recovered himself, he returned to them, and with an austere countenance took Simeon, and bound him before their eyes. This must be cutting work on both sides. On the part of Joseph, it must be a great force put upon his feelings; and on theirs, it would seem a prelude to greater evils. There might be a fitness in taking Simeon rather than any other. He had proved himself a

ferocious character by his conduct towards the Shechemites; and therefore it is not unlikely he was one of the foremost in the cruelty practised towards Joseph. Perhaps he was the man who tore off his coat of many colours, and threw him into the pit. If so, it would tend to humble him, and heighten all their fears, as beholding in it the righteous judgment of God.

Ver. 25-28. This done, their sacks are ordered to be filled, and their money restored; not by giving it into their hands however, but by putting it into the mouths of their sacks. But why all this mysterious conduct? was it love? It was, at the bottom; but love operating at present in a way tending to perplex, confound, and dismay them. It could not appear to them in any other light than as either an oversight, or a design to insnare and find occasion against them. It was certain to fill their minds with consternation and fear; and such appears to have been the intention of Joseph from the first. It accords with the wisdom of God, when he means to bring a sinner to a right mind, to lead him into dark and intricate situations, of which he shall be utterly unable to perceive the design; to awaken by turns his fears and his hopes; bring his sin to remembrance; and cause him to feel his littleness, his danger, and his utter insufficiency to deliver his soul: and such, in measure, appears to have been the design of Joseph, according to the wisdom that was imparted to him on this singular occasion. If his brethren had known all, they would not have felt as they did; but neither would they have been brought to so right a state of mind, nor have been prepared, as they were, for that which followed. And if we knew all, with respect to the mysterious dispensations of God, we should have less pain; but then we should be less humbled, and less fitted to receive the mercy which is prepared for us.

It is remarkable how this circumstance operates on their minds. They construe it to mean something against them; but in what way they know not. They do not reproach the man, the lord of the land, though it is likely from his treatment of them that they would suspect some ill design against them; but, overlooking second causes, they ask, "What is this that God hath done to us!" To his righteous judgment they attributed what they had already met with, ver. 21, 22; and now it seems to them that he is still pursuing them in a mysterious way, and with a design to require their brother's blood at their hand. Such a construction, though painful for the present, was the most useful to them of any that could have been put upon it.

Ver. 29-35. Arriving at their father's house, they tell him of all that had befallen them in Egypt, that they may account for their coming home without Simeon, and their being required when they went again to take Benjamin with them. But the mysterious circumstance of the money being found by the way in their sacks they appear to have concealed. Mention is made of only one of the sacks being opened; yet, by what they afterwards said to the steward, chap. xliii. 21, it appears that they opened them all, and found every man's money in his sack's mouth. But they might think their father would have blamed them for not returning with it when they were only a day's journey from Egypt, and therefore agreed to say nothing to him about it, but leave him to find it out. Hence it is that they are represented, on opening their sacks, as discovering the money in a manner as if they knew nothing of it before; not only participating with their father in his apprehensions, but seeming also to join with him in his surprise.

Ver. 36-38. If the discovery of the money affected Jacob, much more the requirement of his darling son. This touches him to the quick. He cannot help thinking of the end that Joseph had come to. The reasons he had to suspect some foul dealing, in that affair, had probably made him resolve long ago that Benjamin should never be trusted in their hands!

Yet things are now so circumstanced that he must go with them. It was a distressing case. Jacob speaks, as well he might, in great anguish; having in a manner lost all his earthly hopes, save one; and of that he is now in danger of being deprived. His words have too much peevish sorrow about them; they certainly reflect upon his sons; and the last sentence would almost seem to contain a reflection upon Providence. The words "all these things are against me" must have some reference to the promise, "I will surely do thee good;" and if so, they were like saying, Is this the way? Surely not!—Yet so it was. The conduct of God towards Jacob is covered with as great a mystery as that of Joseph towards his brethren; but all will be right at last. Much present trouble arises from our not knowing the whole truth.

In mentioning the name of Joseph, Jacob had touched a tender place; an old wound, which Providence too had been lately probing. On this occasion, all that were guilty, you will perceive, are silent. Reuben is the only one that speaks, and he dares not touch that subject; but with strong and passionate language seems to aim to divert his mind from it, and to fix it upon Benjamin only: "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee." This language so far answers the end, as that no more is said of their having "bereaved" him of Joseph; but he still dwells upon his being "dead," nor can he at present be persuaded to part with his brother. "If mischief," saith he, "befall him in the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

DISCOURSE L.

THE SECOND INTERVIEW BETWEEN JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN.

Gen. xliii.

VER. 1, 2. The relief obtained by the first journey to Egypt is soon exhausted; for "the famine was sore in the land," and therefore nothing of its native productions could be added to the other to make it last the longer. "Go," said Jacob to his sons, "and buy us a little food." Avarice and distrust would have wished for much, and have been for hoarding it in such a time as this; but Jacob is contented with a little, desirous that others should have a part as well as himself; and, with respect to futurity, he puts his trust in God.

Ver. 3-5. But here the former difficulty recurs, they cannot, must not, will not, go without their younger brother. This is trying. Nature struggles with nature; the affection of the father with the calls of hunger; but the former must yield. Jacob does not appear, however, at present, to be entirely willing; wherefore Judah, considering it as a fit opportunity, urges the matter, alleging the peremptory language of the man, the lord of the land, on the subject.

Ver. 6, 7. This brings forth one more feeble objection, or rather complaint, and which must be the last; "Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?" To which they very properly answer that they could not do otherwise, being so straitly examined; nor was it possible for them to know the use that would be made of it.

Ver. 8-10. While matters were thus hanging in suspense, Judah very seasonably and kindly attempts to smooth the difficulty to his father, by offer-

ing in the most solemn manner to be surety for the lad, and to bear the blame for ever if he did not bring him back and set him before him. In addition to this, he alleges that the life of the whole family depended upon his father's acquiescence, and that they had been too long detained already.

Ver. 11-14. And now Jacob must yield—must yield up his beloved Benjamin, though not without a mixture of painful reluctance; but imperious necessity demands it. He who a few weeks before had said, “My son shall not go down with you,” is now upon the whole constrained to part with him. Thus have we often seen the tender relative, who in the first stages of an affliction thought it impossible to sustain the loss of a beloved object, gradually reconciled, and at length witnessing the pangs of wasting disease, almost desirous of the removal. Thus it is that the wisdom and goodness of God are seen in our bereavements: the burden which at first threatens to crush us into the grave, being let down gradually upon our shoulders, becomes not only tolerable, but almost desirable.

But mark the manner in which the patriarch acquiesces; his is not the sullen consent of one who yields to fate, but in his heart rebels against God. No, he yields in a manner worthy of a man of God; proposing first that every possible means should be used to conciliate the man, the lord of the land, and then committing the issue of the whole to God. Just thus he had acted when his brother Esau was coming against him with four hundred men, chap. xxxii. 6-12. “Take of the best of the fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man at present—take double money in your hands, and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks—take also your brother—and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved, I am bereaved!” The fruits of Canaan, especially in a time of famine, would be a great token of respect; the double money might be necessary, as the continuance of the famine might enhance the price of corn; and the restoration of that which was returned would prove their integrity.

But we must not pass over the concluding part without noticing two or three things in particular. 1. The *character* under which the Lord is addressed: “God Almighty,” or God all-sufficient. This was the name under which Abraham was blessed: “I am God Almighty;” and which was used by Isaac in his blessing Jacob; “God Almighty bless thee, and give thee the blessing of Abraham.” It is natural to suppose that Jacob, in putting up this prayer, thought of these covenant promises and blessings, and that it was the prayer of *faith*. 2. The *mistake* on which the prayer is founded, which yet was acceptable to God. He prayed for the turning of the man's heart in a way of mercy; but the man's heart did not need turning. Yet Jacob thought it did, and had no means of knowing otherwise. The truth of things may in some cases be concealed from us, to render us more importunate; and this importunity, though it may appear at last to have been unnecessary, yet, being right according as circumstances appeared at the time, God will approve of it, and we shall find our account in it. 3. The *resignation* with which he concludes; “If I be bereaved, I am bereaved!” It is God's usual way, in trying those whom he loves, to touch them in the tenderest part. Herein the trial consists. If there be one object round which the heart has entwined more than all others, that is it which is likely to be God's rival, and of that we must be deprived. Yet if, when it goes, we humbly resign it up into God's hands, it is not unusual for him to restore it to us, and that with more than double interest. Thus Abraham, on giving up Isaac, received him again; and David, on giving up himself to God to do with him as seemed good in his sight, was preserved in the midst of peril.

Ver. 15, 16. Jacob's sons now betake themselves to their second journey, and do as their father had directed them. On arriving in Egypt, they are introduced to Joseph. Joseph, looking upon them, beholds his brother Benjamin. It is likely that his eyes would here be in some danger of betraying his heart; and that, being conscious of this, he instantly gives orders to his steward to take these men home to his house, and prepare a dinner, for that they must dine with him at noon. By this means he would be able to compose himself, and to form a plan how to conduct and in what manner to discover himself to them, which it appears by the sequel it was his design at this time to have accomplished. See how fruitful love is of kind contrivance, seeking and finding opportunities to gratify itself by closer and closer interviews. Thus when two of John's disciples were kindly asked, "What seek ye?" they answered, "Master, where *dweltest thou?*" As who should say, We want to be better acquainted with thee, and to say more than could be said in this public place. And thus when Jesus himself would commune with his disciples, he saith unto them, "Children, come and dine!"

Ver. 17, 18 But to Joseph's brethren things still wear a mysterious and confounding aspect; that which he meant in love, they construed as a design to insnare and enslave them. The mind, while in a state of dark suspense, is apt to view every thing through a discouraging medium. It will misconstrue even goodness itself, and find fear where no fear is. Thus it is that souls depressed under God's hand often misinterpret his providences, and draw dismal conclusions from the same things which in another state of mind would afford them relief. When the soul is in such a frame as to "refuse to be comforted," it will "remember *God*, and be troubled," Psal. lxxvii. 2, 3.

Ver. 19-23. Being introduced into the house of Joseph, however, though it excited their fears, yet it afforded an opportunity during his absence of speaking to the steward concerning the money found in their sacks, which was the circumstance that at present most alarmed them. It was wise in them to be first in mentioning this matter, that if any thing were afterwards said by Joseph about it, they might appeal to the steward, and he could declare on their behalf that, without any accusation, they had of their own accord mentioned the whole business to him, and returned the money. But the answer of the steward is surprising. He could scarcely have spoken more suitably, if he had been in the secret. I do not suppose he knew that these were Joseph's brethren; but he would know that they were his countrymen; and perceiving the interest which he took in them, and the air of mystery which attended his conduct towards them, he would be at no loss to conclude that there was no ill design against them. It is likely he knew of the money being returned by Joseph's order; and he knew his master too well to suppose that, whatever might be his design in it, he would hurt the poor men for what had been done by his own order. Moreover, this steward, whoever he was, appears to have learnt something by being with Joseph concerning the true God, the God of the Hebrews. His answer is kind, and wise, and religious. "Peace be unto you, fear not; your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." q. d. Let your hearts be at rest; I will be answerable that you paid what was due; inquire no further about it; providence brought it, and let that satisfy you. To render them still more at ease, Simeon is brought out of his confinement, and introduced to them; which, being done by the order of Joseph, was a proof of his being satisfied. The deliverance of the hostage was an evidence that all was well. Thus the "bringing again from

the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep," was to us a token for good, and therefore is ascribed to God, as *the God of peace*, Heb. xiii. 20.

Ver. 24, 25. While Joseph is busy about his concerns, and thinking how he shall conduct himself towards his brethren, they are busy in washing and dressing themselves to appear before him, and in preparing the present which they had brought for him. What was done required to be done in a handsome manner, and they are disposed to do their best.

Ver. 26, 27. And now, the business of the morning being over, Joseph enters. They immediately request his acceptance of the spices and sweetmeats of Palestine, sent as a present by their father, bowing down their faces to the earth, as they had done before. Thus Joseph's dream, which was repeated to him, is repeated in its fulfilment. There is nothing said of his manner of receiving it; but doubtless it was kind and affable. And as they would present it in the name of their father, this would furnish a fair opportunity to inquire particularly respecting him; a subject on which his feelings would be all alive. It is charming to see how he supports the character which he had assumed, that of an Egyptian nobleman, who remembered what they had said about a venerable old man, of whose welfare he very politely inquires. "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?"

Ver. 28. They answer very properly, and call father *his servant*, and again make obeisance. Thus, in them, Jacob himself bowed down to Joseph; and thereby that part of his dream was also fulfilled.

Ver. 29. When Joseph first saw his brethren, his eyes, perhaps without his being aware of it, were fixed on Benjamin, ver. 16. But having detected himself in that instance, he appears to be more on his guard in this. He receives the present, and converses with them about their father's welfare, without once turning his eyes towards his brother. But having done this, he thinks he may venture a look at him. He "lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said" to the others, but still under the same disguise, "Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me?" If he could have waited for an answer, they would doubtless have told him it was; but his heart is too full. No sooner is the question out of his lips than (it may be with his hand upon his head) he adds, "God be gracious unto thee, my son!" O Joseph, on what tender ground dost thou presume to walk! This benediction, though under the disguise of a good wish from a stranger, was in reality an effusion of a full heart, which in this manner sought for ease. Genuine love longs to express itself.

Ver. 30. This little indulgence of affection, however, had well nigh betrayed him. Ardent desires will always plead hard to go a little way, and presume not to go too far; but to indulge them a little is like letting air into a room on fire. Joseph is so affected by what has passed that he is obliged to quit the company, and retire into his chamber to weep there.

Ver. 31. Having recovered himself, and washed his face, that they might not discover his tears, he re-enters, and behaves with much hospitality and attention.

Ver. 32-34. And now I apprehend it was Joseph's wish to discover himself to his brethren, or rather to enable them to discover him. There are three things in particular, while they were at dinner, each tending to this end, and, as I conceive, designed for it. 1. The order of the tables. One for himself, one for the strangers, and one for the Egyptians. The design of this was to set them a thinking of him, and who he was, or could be. That the Egyptians and Hebrews should eat apart, they could easily account for; but who or what is this man? Is he not an Egyptian? Yet if he be,

why eat by himself? Surely he must be a foreigner. 2. The order in which they themselves were seated: it was "before him," so that they had full opportunity of looking at him; and, what was astonishing to them, every man was placed "according to his age." But who can this be, that is acquainted with their ages so as to be able to adjust things in this order? Surely it must be some one who knows us, though we know not him. Or is he a diviner? Who or what can he be? They are said to have "marvelled one at another," and well they might. It is marvellous that they did not hence suspect who he was. 3. The peculiar favour which he expressed to Benjamin, in sending him a mess five times more than the rest. There is no reason to suppose that Benjamin ate more than the rest; but this was the manner of showing special favour in those times.—See chap. xlv. 22, 23. It was therefore saying, in effect, I not only know all your ages, but towards that young man I have more than a common regard . . . Look at all this, and look at me . . . Look at me, my brother Benjamin. Dost thou not know me?—But all was hid from them. Their eyes, like those of the disciples towards their Lord, seem to have been holden, that they should not know him. Their minds, however, are eased from all apprehensions, and they drank and were cheerful in his company.

DISCOURSE LI.

THE CUP IN BENJAMIN'S SACK.

Gen. xlv. 1-17.

VER. 1, 2. As every measure which Joseph had yet taken to lead his brethren to discover who he was had failed, he must now have recourse to another expedient to detain them. Their sacks are ordered to be filled, and their beasts laden with as much corn as they can carry, their money restored as before, and a silver cup put into the sack's mouth of the youngest. All this is love; but it is love still working in a mysterious way. The object seems to be to *detain* Benjamin, and to *try* the rest.

Ver. 3-6. Having stopped over the night, next morning at break of day they are dismissed, and set off for home. After the treatment which they received, we may suppose they were now all very happy. Simeon is restored, Benjamin is safe, and they are well laden with provisions for the family. They would now be ready to anticipate the pleasure of seeing their father, and easing his anxious heart. But, lo! another dark cloud presently overspreads their sky. They had scarcely got out of the city before the steward overtakes them, and charges them with the heinous crime of having stolen his lord's cup; a crime which would have been highly offensive at any time, but much more so after the generous treatment which they had received. And, to perplex them the more, he intimates as if his lord was a diviner, and must needs be able to find out stolen property! Such we see was heathenism in those early ages; and such heathenism is found even in Christian countries to this day.

Ver. 7-9. At this they are all thunderstruck with surprise; yet, conscious of their innocence, they disown the charge, and express the utmost abhorrence at such a conduct. They appeal also to a fact with which the steward was well acquainted; namely, their having brought again the money which they had found in their sacks. Did this conduct comport with the character of thieves? Can it be supposed after this, say they, that we should steal out

of my lord's house either silver or gold? Search us throughout. On whomsoever it be found, let him die, and we will all consent to become slaves!—Such was their confidence that the charge was unfounded; and their invoking so severe a penalty would be a presumptive evidence that it was so.

Ver. 10, 11. The steward, who is well aware of some profound design on the part of his master, though he knew not the whole of it, humours the thing with much address. He accedes to the mode of trial, but softens the penalty, proposing that none but the guilty should suffer, and he nothing more than the loss of his liberty. With this they readily acquiesce; and being stung with reproach, they, with indignant sensations, hastily unlade every man his beast, in order to disprove the charge. How willing is conscientious innocence that things should be searched to the bottom; and how confident of an honourable acquittal!

Ver. 12. And now search is made from the eldest to the youngest. Ten out of eleven are clear, and enjoy the triumph of a good conscience; but, lo, in the sack of the youngest the cup is found! Every thing seems contrived to give an edge to their sorrow. It was when they were leaving Egypt, in high spirits, that they were stopped; and now when they have disproved the charge, except in one instance, lo, that instance fails them! To have their hopes raised within one step of an acquittal, and then be at once disappointed, was very affecting. "Thou hast lifted me up and cast me down."

But what a confounding event! Could they really think for a moment that Benjamin had been guilty of the mean and wicked action which seems to be proved upon him? I do not suppose they could. They must remember having found the money in their sacks' mouths, when, nevertheless, they knew themselves to be innocent. Nay, and in searching for the cup, though nothing is now said of the money, yet they must have found it there a second time. All this would acquit Benjamin in their account. Yet what can they allege in his favour, without reflecting upon his accusers? The article is found upon him; which is a species of proof that seems to admit of no answer. A deep and dismal silence therefore pervades the company. In very agony they rend their clothes, reload their beasts, and return into the city. As they walk along, their thoughts turn upon another event—an event which had more than once occurred to their remembrance already. It is the Lord! We are murderers; and though we have escaped human detection, yet Divine vengeance will not suffer us to live. There, though guilty, we were acquitted; here, though innocent, we shall be condemned!

Ver. 13–17. Arriving at Joseph's house, where he still was, no doubt expecting their return, Judah and his brethren fell prostrate before him. Judah is particularly mentioned, as having a special interest at stake on account of his suretiship; but neither he nor his brethren can utter a word, but wait in this humble posture to hear what is said to them.

Joseph, having carried matters to this height, once more assumes the tone of a great man, highly offended; suggesting, withal, that they ought to have known that such a man as he could certainly divine, and that therefore it would be in vain to think of escaping with his property undetected.

As Judah appeared foremost on their entrance, Joseph's words would probably be directed to him for an answer. But what answer can be given? The surety and the advocate is here dumb; for he had been a party in guilt; not indeed in the present instance, but in another. He can therefore only exclaim, "What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak, or how shall we clear ourselves? *God hath found out the iniquity of his servants!* Behold, we are my lord's servants; both we, and he also with whom the cup is found!" He did not mean by this to plead guilty to the charge; but neither dare he plead innocent, for that would have been accusing the offended party of having

insnared them, and so have made the case still worse; neither was he able to confront the evidence which appeared against his younger brother. What can he say or do? He can only suggest that it is a mysterious providence, in which it appears to be the design of God to punish them for their FORMER CRIMES. This answer, which was manifestly dictated by what lay uppermost in all their minds, was at the same time the most delicate and modest manner in which he could possibly have insinuated a denial of the charge. While it implied their innocence in the present instance, it contained no reflection upon others, but an acknowledgment of the Divine justice, and a willingness to bear the punishment that might be inflicted upon them, as coming from above. If Joseph had really been the character which he appeared to be, such an answer must have gone far towards disarming him of resentment. How forcible are right words! The simple and genuine utterance of the heart is the most irresistible of all eloquence.

Joseph, in answer, disclaims every thing that might wear the appearance of cruelty. No, he will not make bond-men of them, but merely of him on whom the cup was found. Such is the sentence. They may go about their business; but Benjamin must be detained in slavery. Alas! and is this sentence irrevocable. Better all be detained than he; for it will be the death of his father! What can be said, or done? The surety now becomes the advocate, and that to purpose. Such an intercession as that which follows we shall no where find, unless it be in His whom the Father "heareth always." But I shall here close the present discourse, with only a reflection or two on the subject.

1. We see a striking analogy between the conduct of Joseph towards his brother Benjamin, and that of Jesus towards his people. "Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten." Benjamin must have thought himself peculiarly unhappy to be one day marked out as a favourite, and the next convicted as a criminal; and yet in neither instance able to account for it. It might teach him however, when the mystery came to be unravelled, not to draw hasty conclusions from uncertain premises; but to wait and see the issue of things, before he decided upon them. Such a lesson it will be well for us to learn from it. The Lord often brings us into difficulties that he may detain us, as I may say, from leaving him. Were it not for these, he would have fewer importunate applications at a throne of grace than he has. He does not "afflict willingly," or *from his heart*; but from necessity, and that he may bring us nearer to him.

2. We see also a striking analogy between Joseph's conduct towards his brethren, and that of the Lord towards us. In all he did, I suppose, it was his design to try them. His putting the cup into Benjamin's sack, and convicting him of the supposed guilt, would try their love to him, and to their aged father. Had they been of the same disposition as when they sold Joseph, they would not have cared for him. Their language would have been somewhat to this effect:—Let this young favourite go, and be a slave in Egypt. If he have stolen the cup, let him suffer for it. We have a good riddance of him; and without being under the necessity of dealing with him as we did with his brother. And as to the old man, if he will indulge in such partial fondness, let him take the consequence.—But, happily, they are now of another mind. God appears to have made use of this mysterious providence, and of Joseph's behaviour, among other things, to bring them to repentance. And the cup being found in Benjamin's sack would give them occasion to manifest it. It must have afforded the most heartfelt satisfaction to Joseph, amidst all the pain which it cost him, to witness their tender concern for Benjamin, and for the life of their aged father. This of itself was sufficient to excite, on his part, the fullest forgiveness. Thus God

is represented as "looking upon a contrite spirit," and even overlooking heaven and earth for it, Isa. lxvi. 1, 2. Next to the gift of his Son, he accounts it the greatest blessing he can bestow upon a sinful creature. Now that on which he sets so high a value he may be expected to produce, even though it may be at the expense of our present peace. Nor have we any cause of complaint, but the contrary. What were the suspense, the anxiety, and the distress of Joseph's brethren, in comparison of that which followed? And what are the suspense, the anxiety, and the distress of an awakened sinner, or a tried believer, in comparison of the joy of faith, or the grace that shall be revealed at the appearing of Jesus Christ? It will then be found that our light affliction, which was but for a moment, has been working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

DISCOURSE LII.

JUDAH'S INTERCESSION.

Gen. xliv. 18-34.

JOSEPH, in the character of a judge, has sternly decided the cause, that Benjamin, the supposed offender, should be detained a bond-man, and the rest may go in peace. But Judah, the surety, wounded to the heart with this decision, presumes as an advocate to plead, not that the sentence may be annulled, but that it may be changed with respect to its object. It was a difficult and delicate undertaking; for when a judge has once decided a cause, his honour is pledged to abide by it. He must, therefore, have felt the danger of incurring his displeasure, by attempting to induce him in that stage of the business to alter his purpose. But love to his father, and to his brother, with a recollection of his own engagement, impose upon him the most imperious necessity.

Ver. 18. Prompted by these sentiments, he approaches the judge. His first attempt is to conciliate him: "O my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant; for thou art even as Pharaoh." This brief introduction was admirably calculated to soften resentment, and obtain a patient hearing. The respectful title given him, *My lord*—the entreaty for permission to *speak*—the intimation that it should be but as it were *a word*—the deprecation of his anger, as being in a manner equal to that of *Pharaoh*—and all this prefaced with an interjection of sorrow, as though nothing but the deepest distress should have induced him to presume to speak on such a subject,—showed him to be well qualified for his undertaking.

Ver. 19. And now, perceiving in his judge a willingness to hear, he proceeds, not by passionate declamations and appeals to his generosity, but by narrating a simple tale, and then grounding a plea upon it. Truth is the best weapon wherewith to assail the heart: only let truth be represented in an affecting light. His object, remember, is to persuade the judge so far to reverse the doom as to accept of him, the surety, for a bond-man, instead of the supposed offender. Mark how every thing he says leads to this issue. "My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother?" Here the judge is gently reminded that the occasion of this unhappy young man coming at all into Egypt was what *he himself had said*. He does not mean to reflect upon him for it; but he might hope that merely this circumstance

would have some weight in softening his resentment against him. It is observable, however, that in repeating the questions of Joseph, or their own former answers to him, he does not confine himself to terms. Joseph did not say, in so many words, Have ye a father, &c. . . . nor did they make answer in the exact form as is here repeated; but he pretends only to repeat the tenor of what passed, of the justness of which the judge himself would be well acquainted. Nor is this verbal deviation to be attributed merely to the failure of memory; for he avails himself of it to introduce every affecting circumstance that could possibly touch the heart, which if he had adhered to a mere verbal rehearsal, would have been lost. Of this the following words are a remarkable instance.

Ver. 20. "And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him." All these things were said, I believe, either expressly or by implication, but *not in this order*. As they were said before, they were merely rays of light diffused in the air; but here they are reduced to a focus, which burns every thing before it. I need not repeat how every word in this inimitable passage tells; how it touches every principle of compassion in the human mind; in short, how it rises, like a swelling wave, till it overcomes resistance, and in a manner compels the judge to say, in his own mind, "Well, whatever this young man has done, he must not be detained!"

Ver. 21-29. Having already intimated that the coming of the lad was *occasioned* by the inquiries concerning the family, and made a proper use of that, the advocate proceeds another step, and reminds his judge that it was in *obedience to his command*: "Thou saidst, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him." This circumstance, though it conveyed no reflection, any more than the former, yet would work upon a generous mind, not to distress an aged father by taking advantage of an affair which had occurred merely from a willingness to oblige him. To this he adds, that they discovered at the time a *reluctance*, on their father's account, to comply with this part of his request; but he would have no denial, protesting that, except their younger brother came with them, they should see his face no more. Nor was this all: not only did they feel reluctant on their father's account, but he, when told of it on their return, felt a still *greater reluctance*. The manner in which he introduces his father's objection, repeating it in his own words, or rather in his own words at different times reduced as to a focus, is amazing. We repeated, q. d., the words of my lord to our father; and when, feeling the imperious calls of nature, he requested us to go again, and buy a little food, we answered him that we could not go without our younger brother, for we could gain no admittance except he were with us. On this painful occasion thy servant, our father, addressed us as follows:—"Ye know that my wife bare me two sons. And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces: and I saw him not since. And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave!"

To point out the force of this overwhelming argument requires a view of the human mind, when, like a complicate machine in motion, the various powers and passions of it are at work. The whole calamity of the family arising from obedience to the judge's own command; an obedience yielded to on their own part with great reluctance, because of the situation of their aged father; and on his part with still greater, because his brother was as he supposed torn in pieces, and he the only surviving child of a beloved wife; and the declaration of a venerable, grey-headed man, that if he lose him it

will be his death . . . was enough to melt the heart of any one possessed of human feelings. If Joseph had really been what he appeared, an Egyptian nobleman, he must have yielded the point. To have withstood it, would have proved him not a man, much less a man who "feared God," as he had professed to be. But if such would have been his feelings even on that supposition, what must they have been to know what he knew? What impression must it have made upon his mind to be told of Jacob's words; "My wife bare me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces!"

It is also observable with what singular adroitness Judah avoids making mention of this elder brother of the lad, in any other than his father's words. *He* did not say he was torn in pieces. No; he knew it was not so! But his father had once used that language; and though he had lately spoken in a manner which bore hard on him and his brethren, yet this is passed over, and nothing hinted but what will turn to account.

Ver. 30, 31. The inference of what effect the detention of Benjamin would have on the aged parent might have been left for the judge to make; but it is a part of the subject which will bear a little enlargement, and that to a very good purpose. Thus therefore he proceeds: "When I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us, (seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life,) it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, he will die; and thy servants shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave!" The whole of this intercession taken together is not a twentieth part the length of what our best advocates would have made of it in a court of justice; yet the speaker finds room to expatiate upon those parts which are the most tender, and on which a minute description will heighten the general effect. We are surprised, delighted, and melted with his charming parenthesis: "*Seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life.*" It is true it does not seem to inform us of any thing which we might not have known without it; but it represents what was before stated in a more affecting light. It is also remarkable how he *repeats* things which are the most tender; as, "When I come, *and the lad be not with us.*" "It shall come to pass, when he seeth that *the lad is not with us.*" So also in describing the effect this would produce: "When he seeth that the lad is not with us, *he will die;* and we shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant my father *with sorrow to the grave.*" This last sentence, also, not only repeats the death of the aged parent in a more affecting manner than the first, but contains a plea for Benjamin's release, founded on the cruel situation of their being otherwise forced in a manner to become paricides!

Ver. 32-34. One plea more remains, which will at once contain an apology for his importunity, and make way for what, with humble submission, he means to propose. This is, "Thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father." And, that he may make the deeper impression, he repeats the terms of it: "If I bring him not unto thee, let me bear the blame for ever." And now, having stated his peculiar situation, he presumes to express his *petition*. But why did he not mention that at first, and allege what he has alleged in support of it? Such might have been the process of a less skilful advocate; but Judah's feelings taught him better. His withholding that till the last was holding the mind of his judge in a state of affecting suspense, and preventing the objections which an abrupt introduction of it at the beginning might have created. He might in that case have cut him short, as he had done before, saying, "God forbid that I should do so: the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant." But he could not refuse to hear his tale; and by that he was prepared to hear his petition.

Thus Esther, when presenting her petition to Ahasuerus, kept it back till she had, by holding him in suspense, raised his desire to the utmost height to know what it was, and induced in him a predisposition to grant it.

But what is Judah's petition? That the crime may be passed over, and that they may all return home to their father? No: "Let thy servant, I pray thee, abide instead of the lad a bond-man to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brethren!" If we except the grace of another and greater Substitute, never surely was there a more generous proposal! And when to this is added the filial regard from which it proceeds, "for how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me; lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father!" this in itself, distinct from all which had gone before it, was enough to overcome every objection.

DISCOURSE LIII.

JOSEPH MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO HIS BRETHREN.

Gen. xlv.

VER. 1-3. The close of Judah's speech must have been succeeded by a solemn pause. Every heart is full; but every tongue is silent. The audience, if they understood the language, would be all in tears. The ten brethren, viewing the whole as the righteous judgment of God upon them, would be full of fearful amazement as to the issue. Benjamin would feel both for his dear father and his beloved brother who had offered to give himself for him! But what saith the judge? How does he stand affected? I have no doubt but that he must have covered his face during the greater part of the time in which Judah had been pleading; and now this will not suffice. The fire burns within him, and it must have vent. "Cause every man," said he, "to depart from me!" And then he breaks out in a loud weeping, so that the Egyptians from without heard him. Their minds no doubt must be filled with amazement, and desire to know the cause of this strange affair; while the parties within would be still more confounded, to witness such a burst of sorrow from him, who, but awhile before, was all sternness and severity. But now the mystery is at once revealed, and that in a few words—I AM JOSEPH!!! DO THY FATHER YET LIVE! If they had been struck by an electrical shock, or the most tremendous peal of thunder had instantly been heard over their heads, its effect had been nothing in comparison of that which these words must have produced. They are all struck dumb, and as it were petrified with terror. If he had been actually dead, and had risen and appeared to them, they could not have felt greatly different. The flood of thoughts which would at once rush in upon their minds is past description. No words could better express the general effect than those which are used: "They could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence!"

Ver. 4-8. A little mind, amidst all its sympathy, might have enjoyed the triumph which Joseph now had over them who once hated him, and have been willing to make them feel it; but he has made them feel sufficiently already; and having forgiven them in his heart, he remembers their sin no more, but is full of tender solicitude to heal their wounded spirits. "Come near unto me," saith he, "I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." This painful event he does not seem to have mentioned but for the sake of convincing them

that it was he himself, even their *brother* Joseph, and not another; and lest the mention of it should be taken as a reflection, and so add to their distress, he immediately follows it up with a dissuasive from overmuch sorrow: "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall be neither earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you, to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh," &c.

In this soothing and tender strain did this excellent man pour balm into their wounded hearts. A less delicate mind would have talked of forgiving them; but he entreats them to forgive themselves, as though the other was out of the question. Nor did he mean that they should abuse the doctrine of providence to the making light of sin; but merely that they should eye the hand of God in all, so as to be reconciled to the event, though they might weep in secret for the part which they had acted. And it is his desire that they should for the present, at least, view the subject much in that point of light, which would arm them against despondency and a being swallowed up of overmuch sorrow. Their viewing things in this light would not abate their godly sorrow, but rather increase it: it would tend only to expel the sorrow of the world, which worketh death. The analogy between all this, and the case of a sinner on Christ's first manifesting himself to his soul, is very striking. I cannot enlarge on particulars; suffice it to say, the more he views the doctrine of the cross, in which God hath glorified himself, and saved a lost world by those very means which were intended for evil by his murderers, the better it will be with him. He shall not be able to think sin on this account a less, but a greater, evil; and yet he shall be so armed against despondency as even to *rejoice* in what God hath wrought, while he *trembles* in thinking of the evils from which he has escaped.

Ver. 9-11. It is not in the power of Joseph's brethren to talk at present; he therefore talks to them. And to divert their minds from terror, and gradually remove the effects of the shock, he goes on to tell them they must make haste home to his father, and say thus and thus to him in his name; and invite him and all his family to come down forthwith into Egypt, where he and they shall be well provided for during the five years' famine yet to come, and where he shall be near unto him.

Ver. 12-15. While he is thus talking with his brethren, they would be apt to suspect whether all could be true, and whether they were not in a dream, or imposed upon in some supernatural way. To obviate these misgivings of mind, he adds, "And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth which speaketh unto you, and you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt." The former part of this speech must needs have produced in him a fresh flood of tears. As to them, I know not whether they could weep at present. Nothing is said of the kind; and it is natural to suppose that they had too much fear as yet mingled with their sorrow to admit of its being vented in this manner. He however, having made mention of *Benjamin*, cannot forbear falling upon his neck and weeping over him; and Benjamin, not feeling that petrifying guilty shock which must have confounded them, fell upon his neck, and wept with him.

Joseph had said nothing to his brethren of forgiving them; but he would now express as much, and more, by his actions; giving an affectionate *kiss* to every one of them, accompanied with tears of tenderness. This appears

more than any thing to have removed their terror, so that now they are sufficiently composed to *talk with him*, if not to mingle their tears with his.

Ver. 16-24. The secret, being once disclosed within doors, soon got out; and the news of *Joseph's brethren being come* flies through the city, and reaches the palace. Pharaoh and his court too are well pleased with it; or if there were any who might envy Joseph's high honour, they would not dare to express it.

In other cases, Pharaoh had left every thing to Joseph; and Joseph knowing what he had done, and the confidence which he possessed, had given orders in this case; yet, to save his feelings in having to invite his own relations as it were to another man's house, as well as to express the gratitude of the nation to so great a benefactor, the king in this instance comes forward, and gives orders himself. His orders too were more liberal than those of Joseph: he had desired them to bring with them all the property they had; but Pharaoh bids them to disregard their stuff, for that the good of all the land of Egypt was theirs. Joseph had said nothing about the mode of conveyance; but Pharaoh gives orders for wagons, or chariots, as the word is sometimes rendered, to be sent to fetch them.

Joseph, however, in executing these orders, gives fresh testimonies of affection, not only in furnishing them with "provisions by the way," but to each man changes of raiment, and to Benjamin his brother three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment. And to his honoured father, though he could not on account of business go and fetch him, yet he sends the richest present; namely, ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for him by the way. These things might not be all necessary; Jacob would need no more for himself than any other individual of the family; but, as we saw in the mess which was sent to Benjamin, this was the mode at that time of expressing peculiar affection. To all this kindness he added a word of counsel: "See that ye fall not out by the way." Joseph had already heard from Reuben some severe reflections on his brethren (chap. xlii. 22); and might suppose that such things would be repeated when they were alone. One might be accused of this, and another of that, till all their minds would be grieved and wounded. But he that could find in his heart to love them after all their unworthy conduct, gives them, as I may say, "a new commandment, that they should love one another!"

Ver. 25-28. And now the young people betake themselves to their journey, and in a little time arrive at their father's house. Jacob had doubtless been looking and longing for their return, and that with many fears and misgivings of mind. If the matter was announced as suddenly as it is here related, it is not surprising that "Jacob's heart fainted, and that he believed them not!" It must appear too much to be true. The suddenness of the transition would produce an effect like that of fire and water coming in contact; and though he had suspected that Joseph had not been fairly treated by his brethren, yet he never seems to have doubted that he was dead. It would appear therefore, at first, as if they meant to tantalize him. Perhaps, too, we may partly account for this incredulity from the aptness there is in a dejected mind to believe what is against him rather than what is for him. When they brought the bloody garment, he readily believed, saying, "Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces!" But when good news is told him, it seems too good to be true!

They went on, however, and told him of all the words of Joseph; that is, of the invitations which he sent by them; and, as a proof, pointed to the wagons which were come to take him down. The sight of these overcomes the incredulity of the patriarch, and revives his spirit. "It is enough," said

he: "Joseph my son is yet alive. I will go and see him before I die!" Yes, this was enough, not only to remove his doubts, but to heal his wounded heart, to set all right, to solve all mysteries, and to satisfy his soul. He had no more wishes on this side the grave. No mention is made of how he received the gifts, or what he said of his son's glory: it was enough for him that he was alive. The less must give way to the greater. He seems to have considered death as near at hand, and as though he had nothing to do but to go and see him, and, like old Simeon by the Saviour, depart in peace, chap. xvi. 30. But he must live a few years longer, and reflect upon the wisdom and goodness of God in all these mysterious events.

DISCOURSE LIV.

JACOB'S GOING DOWN INTO EGYPT.

Gen. xvi.

THE patriarch, having resolved to go and see his beloved Joseph, soon gets ready for his journey, and takes with him "all that he had." It was generous in Pharaoh to propose his leaving the stuff behind him, but Jacob was not elated with the riches of Egypt, and might wish to put his friends to as little expense as possible. Those things which Pharaoh would call *stuff* might also have a peculiar value in his esteem, as having been given him in answer to prayer, chap. xxviii. 20. What is given by our best Friend should not be set at naught.

But does not Jacob acknowledge God in this undertaking. It is a very important one to him and to his posterity. Surely he does not "use lightness" in such an affair; and "the thing which he purposeth is not according to the flesh." No, he will solemnly invoke the Divine blessing, but not till he has gone one day's journey. He has doubtless privately committed his way to God, and we hope was satisfied as to the path of duty; but he might have a special reason for deferring his *public* devotions till he should arrive at Beersheba. This was a distinguished spot: what had there taken place would tend to assist him in his approaches to God. It was there that Abraham, after many changes and trials, "called on the name of the everlasting God;" and there that Isaac had the promise renewed to him, "built an altar, and called also upon the name of Jehovah." This therefore shall be the place where Jacob will offer a solemn sacrifice, and invoke the Divine blessing on himself and his children.

Arriving at the appointed place towards evening, he and all his company stop; and having reared an altar, or repaired that which had been built aforetime, "offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac." Jacob, in his approaches to God, did not forget to avail himself of the covenant made with his forefathers, and of the promises already on record. His coming to this place seems to have been with the very design that his eyes, in beholding the surrounding objects, might assist his mind and affect his heart in the recollection. Nor must we in ours forget to avail ourselves of the covenant of God in Christ, in which is all our salvation. The remembrance of the godliness of our predecessors also, in like circumstances with ourselves, may have a happy influence on our devotions. It is sweet to a holy mind to be able to say, "He is my God, and I will exalt him: my father's God, and I will build him a habitation!"

Ver. 2-4. Jacob, having closed the day by a solemn act of worship, retires to rest; and, as in a former instance, God appeared and spake to him in visions of the night; calling him twice by name, "Jacob, Jacob!" To which the patriarch answers, "Here am I," ready to hear what God the Lord will speak unto his servant. And he said, "I am God." To one so well acquainted with the Divine character as Jacob was, this would be cheering; especially as it would indicate his acceptance of the sacrifice, and his being with him in the way he went. It would seem enough for a godly mind to know that God is with him. But, in compassion to Jacob, it is added, "the God of thy father." As such he had sought him, and as such he found him. This language amounted to a renewal of the covenant of Abraham, that "God would bless, and make him a blessing; and that in him, and his seed, all the the nations of the earth should be blessed." And, lest this should be thought too general, it is added, "Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again, and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." Though Jacob's affliction to Joseph made him resolve at first to go and see him, yet it is likely he had afterwards some misgivings of mind upon the subject. Abraham went once into Egypt; but he left it under a cloud, and never went again. Isaac in a time of famine was forbidden to go, chap. xxvi. 2. And though Jacob had sent his sons to buy corn, yet it did not seem to be the place for him. But God removes his fears, and intimates that Egypt is designed to be the cradle of that great nation which should descend from his loins. They were idolaters, and should prove in the end oppressors; but the promise of God to *go with him* was enough. Neither temptation nor persecution need dismay us, when we are led into it by the Lord: if he lead us into it, we may hope that he will keep us in it. The Lord, in promising Jacob that he would *surely bring him up again*, did not mean that he himself should come back again alive; but that his posterity should, after becoming a great nation. With respect to himself, he was given to expect that his beloved Joseph should survive him, and be present at his death to *close his eyes*. But his descendants should be brought back with a high hand; and as what was spoken of bringing him up again respected them, so that of going down with him extended to them also.

Ver. 5-7. After so signal an instance of mercy, Jacob can leave Beersheba with a cheerful heart. He is now so far advanced in life, however, as to be glad of a carriage to convey him, and of all the kind and dutiful assistance of his sons to accommodate him. Time was when he wanted no accommodation of this sort; but set off on a much longer journey with only a *staff*; but sixty years' toil and trouble, added to the seventy which had gone before, have reduced him to a state of feebleness and debility. Nature is ordained to decay; but if grace do but thrive, it need not be regretted. It is wisely and mercifully ordered that the strong should bear the infirmities of the weak, and that those who in infancy and childhood have been borne by their parents should return the kindness due to them under the imbecility of age.

In taking all his substance, as well as all his kindred, he would cut off occasion from those who might be disposed, at least in after-times, to reproach the family with having come into Egypt empty-handed, and thrown themselves upon the bounty of the country.

Ver. 8-27. The name of Jacob's descendants who came with him into Egypt are here particularly recorded. Compared with the families of Abraham and Isaac, they appear to be numerous, and afford a prospect of a great nation; yet, compared with those of Ishmael and Esau, they are but few.

Three-and-twenty years ago there was "a company of Ishmaelites," who bought Joseph: and as to Esau, he seems to have become a nation in a little time. We see hence that the most valuable blessings are often the longest ere they reach us. "The just shall live by faith."

There seems to be some difference between the account of Moses and that of Stephen in Acts vii. 14. Moses says, "All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides his sons' wives, were threescore and six, ver. 26. And all the souls of the sons of Jacob which came into Egypt," that is, first and last, including Jacob himself, his son Joseph, and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who came in his loins, "were threescore and ten," ver. 27. But Stephen says, "Joseph called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls." Moses speaks of him and those who "descended from his loins;" to the exclusion of "his sons' wives;" but Stephen of his *kindred* in general, which would include them.

Ver. 23. Drawing nigh to Egypt, Judah is sent before to apprise Joseph of his father's arrival. Judah had acquitted himself well in a former case of great delicacy, and this might recommend him in the present instance. He who could plead so well for his father shall have the honour of introducing him. It is fitting, too, that the father of the royal tribe, and of the Messiah himself, should not be the last in works of honour and usefulness, but rather that he should have the pre-eminence. When inquiry was made in the times of the judges, "Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first to fight against them? The Lord said, Judah shall go up."

Ver. 29. Joseph, on receiving the intelligence, makes ready his chariot to go and meet his father; for being in high office, he must act accordingly; else another kind of carriage, or perhaps a staff only, would have satisfied him as well as his father: but situations in life often impose that upon humble minds which they would not covet of their own accord. The interview is, as might be expected, tender and affecting. The account is short but appropriate. He presents himself to his venerable father; but, unable to speak, "fell upon his neck, and wept a good while!" And who that reflects on the occasion can forbear to weep with him?

Ver. 30. As to the good old man, he feels so happy that he thinks of nothing but dying. Perhaps he thought he should die soon; having enjoyed as much as he could desire in this world, it was natural now to wish to go to another. Having seen all things brought to so blessed an issue, both in his circumstances and in the character of his children, it is not surprising that he should now desire to quit the stage. "Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!" Yet Jacob did not die for seventeen years; a proof this that our feelings are no certain rule of what shall befall us.

Ver. 31-34. As soon as the tenderness of the interview would permit, Joseph kindly intimates to his father and his brethren what was proper to be done, as to their being introduced to the king; and, that they might be prepared for that piece of necessary formality, he gives them some general instructions what to answer. And here it is observable how careful he is to keep them clear of the snares of Egypt. A high-minded young man would have been for introducing his relations into posts of honour and profit, lest they should disgrace him. But Joseph is more concerned for their purity than their outward dignity. "I will go before you," says he, "and tell the king that you are shepherds," and have been so all your lives, and your fathers before you. This will prevent his making any proposals for raising you to posts of honour in the state; and he will at once feel the propriety of assigning you a part of the country which is suited to the sustenance of

your flocks and herds, and where you may live by yourselves uncontaminated by Egyptian customs. And when you come before the king, and he shall ask you of your occupation, then do you confirm what I have said of you; and as the employment of a shepherd is meanly accounted of in Egypt, and those that follow it are despised and reckoned unfit for the higher offices of the state, this will determine the king to say nothing to you on that subject, but to grant you a place in Goshen.

Thus, while men in general are pressing after the highest stations in life, and sacrificing every thing to obtain them, we see a man who had for nine years occupied one of these posts, and felt both its advantages and its disadvantages, carefully directing his dearest friends and relations into another track; acting up to Agur's prayer; "Give me neither poverty nor riches; but give me food convenient." The cool and sequestered path of life is the safest, happiest, and most friendly to true religion. If we wish to destroy our souls, or the souls of our children, let us seek, for ourselves and them, great things; but if not, it becomes us, having food and raiment, therewith to be content. A rage for amassing wealth, or rising to eminence, is a whirlpool in which millions have perished.

DISCOURSE LV.

JOSEPH'S CONDUCT IN THE SETTLEMENT OF HIS BRETHREN, AND IN THE AFFAIRS OF EGYPT.

Gen. xlvii.

VER. 1, 2. Joseph having adjusted matters with his father and his brethren, with respect to their appearance before the king, takes with him five of the latter, and introduces them. His object is not merely a compliance with the rules of respect which were proper on such an occasion, but to obtain for them a residence in Goshen, where they might pursue their usual avocations, and be near unto him. To this end he mentions that they were then in that part of the country with their flocks and their herds; hoping that this might induce the king to consent to their continuance there.

Ver. 3, 4. The young men appearing before Pharaoh, he asks them, as Joseph supposed he would, what was their occupation. A very proper question to be put by a magistrate to young men at any time; but the object in this case seems to have been to ascertain what posts in the state they were qualified to fill. He took it for granted that they were of some lawful calling; and every government has a right to require that those who enjoy its protection should not be mere vagrants, but by their industry contribute in some way to the public good. Their answer accords with their previous instructions; they were "shepherds, both they and their fathers." To this they added what was their wish, if it might please the king, which was, not to be naturalized, but merely to *sojourn* for a season in the country, with their flocks and their herds, which were starved out by the severity of the famine in their own land. This language implies their faith in the Divine promises; for they that say such things declare plainly that they seek another country. It would also tend to second the endeavours of Joseph, in removing from the king's mind all thoughts of promoting them to places of honour, and obtaining for them a residence in Goshen. Their answer concludes with an express petition for this object.

Ver. 5, 6. Pharaoh, turning himself to Joseph, with much politeness and frankness, thus addressed him: Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee; the land of Egypt is before thee. In the best of the land, in the land of Goshen, seeing they prefer it, let them dwell. And as to promoting them, it does not seem to suit their calling or their inclinations to be raised in the manner which I might have proposed on their behalf; I will therefore leave it to you to make them happy in their own way. If there be one or more of them better qualified for business than the rest, let them be appointed chief of my herdsmen.

Ver. 7-10. The grand object being accomplished, all hearts are at rest, and now Joseph introduces to the king his aged father; not upon business, but merely in a way of respect. When the young men were presented, they *stood* before him; but Jacob, in honour of his years, and in compassion to his infirmities, is placed upon a *seat*. The first object that meets his eyes is Pharaoh, sitting in his royal robes before him. The sight of a prince who had shown such kindness to him and his, in a time of distress, calls forth the most lively sensations of gratitude, which he is prompted to express by a solemn blessing! How befitting and how affecting is this! It was reckoned by the apostle as a truth "beyond all contradiction, that the less is blessed of the better," or greater. In one respect Pharaoh was greater than Jacob; but, in another, Jacob was greater than he; and Jacob knew it, and thought it no presumption to act upon such a principle. He was a son of Abraham, whose peculiar honour it was that he and his posterity should be blessings to mankind: "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." He was also himself a man who, "as a prince, had power with God and men, and prevailed." The blessing of such a man was of no small account; for God suffered not the words of his servants to fall to the ground.

It would seem at first sight as if Pharaoh was not struck with the blessing, but merely with the venerable aspect of the man, and therefore proceeded to inquire his age: but I incline to think he was chiefly struck with the former. He must have perceived a wide difference between this and any thing he had ever met with from the Egyptian sages, something heavenly and Divine: and as the steward appeared to be well acquainted with the religion of the family, telling the brethren that "their God, and the God of their father, had given them the treasure in their sacks" (chap. xliii. 23); so we may suppose was Pharaoh himself. He would see, also, in this solemn blessing, in which Jacob no doubt made use of the name of the Lord, something perfectly correspondent with what might have been expected from the father of "a man in whom was the Spirit of God." If he felt the force of these things, it would overcome him, and render him scarcely able to speak; and hence it would be natural, in order to recover himself, to turn the conversation upon a less affecting topic, inquiring, "How old art thou?" The answer to this question is very pathetic and impressive: "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." We have a comment upon this answer in Heb. xi. 13, 14, where it is called a *confession*, and its implication is insisted on: "They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." We may see in it a charming example of spirituality, and how such a state of mind will find a way of introducing religion, even in answer to the most simple and common questions. We go into the company of a great man, and come away without once thinking of introducing religion; nay, it would seem to us almost rude to attempt it. But wherefore? Because of our want of spiritual-mindedness. If our spirits were imbued with a sense of Divine things, we should

think of the most common concerns of life in a religious way; and, so thinking of them, it would be natural to speak of them. Jacob, in answer to this simple question, introduces several important truths, and that without any force or awkwardness. He insinuates to Pharaoh that he and his fathers before him were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth; that their portion was not in this world, but in another; that the life of man, though it extended to a hundred and thirty years, was but a few days; that those few days were mixed with evil; all which, if the king properly reflected on it, would lead him to set light by the earthly glory with which he was loaded, and to seek a crown which fadeth not away. It is admirable to see how all these sentiments could be suggested in so prudent, so modest, so natural, and so inoffensive a manner. If Pharaoh was affected with Jacob's blessing him, and wished by his question to turn the conversation to something less tender, he would be in a manner disappointed. He is now in company with a man who, talk on what he will, will make him feel: and yet it shall be in a way that cannot hurt him, for he says nothing about him, but speaks merely of himself.

Having thus made a suitable *confession*, the patriarch, whose heart was full, could not take leave of the king without repeating his solemn blessing. Whether Pharaoh ever saw him again we are not told; but if what was then said had a proper effect, he would remember this interview as one of the most interesting events of his life.

Ver. 11, 12. Joseph, having obtained the consent of the king, places his father and his brethren in the situation he intended, and there continues to nourish and cherish them, "as a little child is nourished." And thus he is made, more than at the birth of Manasseh, to forget all his toil and all the distresses which he had met with in his father's house.

Ver. 13-26. The sacred writer informs us, as a matter by the by, of the state of things in Egypt during the remaining five years of famine, under Joseph's administration. The famine was so sore in the land, that, to purchase the necessities of life, the inhabitants first parted with all their money; and not only they, but the countries adjacent; so that the king's treasury became greatly enriched. And when money failed, their cattle were required; and last of all their lands, and their persons, save only that of the lands of their priests, or princes, were not sold; for being, according to the laws of the country, considered as a part of the royal household, they were not under the necessity of selling their estates, but were participants of all the advantages which Pharaoh derived by Joseph.

This part of Joseph's conduct has been thought by some very exceptionable, as tending to reduce a nation to poverty and slavery. I am not sure that it was entirely right, though the parties concerned appear to have cast no reflection upon him. If it were not, it only proves that Joseph, though a good and great man, yet was not perfect. But difference of time and circumstances may render us incompetent to judge of his conduct with accuracy. The following remarks, if they do not wholly exculpate him, may at least serve greatly to extenuate the evil of his conduct. 1. He does not appear to have been employed by the country, but by the king only, and that for himself. He did not buy up corn during the plentiful years at the public expense, but at that of the king, paying the people the full price for their commodities, and, as it would seem, out of the king's private purse. 2. If the Egyptians had believed the word of God, as the king did, they had the same opportunity, and might have laid by grain enough, each family for itself, during the seven plentiful years, fully to have supplied their own wants during the years of famine. But it seems they paid no regard to the dreams nor to the interpretation, any more than the antediluvians did to the prepa-

rations of Noah. All the plenty which had been poured upon them, according as Joseph had foretold, did not convince them: the only use they made of it was to waste it in luxury as it came. It was just, therefore, that they should now feel some of the consequences. 3. In supplying their wants, it was absolutely necessary to distribute the provisions not by *gift*, but by *sale*; and that according to what we should call the market price: otherwise the whole would have been consumed in half the time, and the country have perished. 4. The slavery to which they were reduced was merely that of being tenants to the king, who accepted of one-fifth of the produce for his rent. Indeed it was scarcely possible for a whole nation to be greatly oppressed, without being driven to redress themselves; and probably what they paid in after-times as a rent was much the same thing as we pay in taxes, enabling the king to maintain his state and support his government, without any other burdens. There is no mention, I believe, in history, of this event producing any ill effects upon the country. Finally, Whatever he did, it was not for himself, or his kindred, but for the king by whom he was employed. The utmost, therefore, that can be made of it to his disadvantage does not affect the disinterestedness of his character.

Ver. 27, 28. The sacred historian, now returning to Israel, informs us that they "dwelt in Goshen, and had possessions, and grew and multiplied exceedingly;" and this during the lifetime of Jacob, who lived seventeen years in Egypt. The vision which he had at Beersheba contained an intimation that he should die in that country, else we may suppose he would have been for returning as soon as the famine had subsided; but Jacob is directed by the will of Heaven, as his descendants were by the cloud in the wilderness.

Ver. 29-31. And now, the time drawing nigh that Israel should die, he sends for his son Joseph, and engages him by a solemn oath to bury him, not in Egypt, but in the sepulchre of his fathers. This request was not merely the effect of natural affection, but of faith. As it was *by faith that Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones*, doubtless this arose from the same principle. The patriarch, relying on the covenant made with his fathers, and believing that his posterity would hereafter possess the land, wished to lie among them, and to have his body carried up, to take a kind of previous possession on their behalf. To this request of his father Joseph readily consents. The venerable man, however, is not yet at the point of death, but is desirous of setting things in order, that when he comes to die, he may have nothing else to think about.

DISCOURSE LVI.

JOSEPH'S INTERVIEW WITH HIS DYING FATHER, WITH THE BLESSING OF HIS SONS.

Gen. xlviii.

VER. 1. Jacob did not die immediately after having sent for his son Joseph; but he seems at that time to have been confined to his "bed," and probably it was by the same affliction which issued in his death. Joseph, as soon as he was told of his father being sick, without waiting to be sent for another time, proceeded to the place, and took his two sons to obtain his dying benediction.

Ver. 2. On entering the house his name is announced; the mention of which gives the venerable patriarch a portion of new life. He "strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed." And now we may expect to hear something worthy of attention. The words of dying men to their children are, or should be, interesting, especially of good men, and still more of men inspired of God.

Ver. 3. The man of God has neither time nor strength to lose in ceremony; he comes therefore immediately to the point. "God Almighty," said he, "appeared unto me at Luz, in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, and said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee; and I will make of thee a multitude of people, and will give this land to thy seed after thee, for an everlasting possession." Observe, 1. The appearance at Luz, or Beth-el, chap. xxviii. If it was not the first time in which God made himself known to Jacob, it was certainly the most remarkable epoch in his life; and almost all that had gone before it was nothing, or worse than nothing. 2. Though the mention of Luz, or Beth-el, must ever be sweet to Jacob, and though he could have told what a support the promise there made had been to him through the pilgrimage of life, yet he confines himself at present to the aspect which it bore to his posterity, whom he was now about to bless. The promise made to Abraham's seed involved all the goodness intended for the world in after-ages; and this occupies the chief attention of Jacob. The dying words of David dwell upon the same thing; the everlasting covenant, which contained "all his salvation and all his desire," was that in which God had promised of his seed to raise up the Messiah, whose kingdom should endure to all generations. To "see the good of his chosen, to rejoice in the gladness of his nation, and to glory with his inheritance," is enough for a servant of God; and for an aged parent, after seeing much evil in his family, to be able to take leave of them in the full expectation of the Divine blessing attending them, is a death which better characters than Balaam might wish to die. 3. The mention of Canaan to Joseph was designed to draw off his attention from a permanent settlement in Egypt, and to fix his faith upon the promise; that, like his fathers before him, he might pass his life as a pilgrim till it should be accomplished.

Ver. 4-7. And now, having given this general intimation to Joseph, he solemnly adopts his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own, constituting them two tribes in Israel. Thus Joseph had a double portion, the first birthright being taken from Reuben, and given to him, 1 Chron. v. 1, 2. And thus his sons, as well as himself, were taught to fix their faith and hope, not in Egypt, whatever might be their expectations as the descendants of Joseph by an Egyptian princess, but in Canaan, or rather in the promise of the God of Israel. The mention of the death and burial of Rachel might be partly to furnish Joseph with another motive of attachment to Canaan; and partly to account for this double portion being conferred upon him, she being in the most proper sense his wife, and he in a sense his first-born son.

Ver. 8-11. Jacob had made mention of Ephraim and Manasseh before, but he had not seen them. Lifting up his eyes, he perceives two young men standing by the side of his beloved Joseph, and inquires who they are. "They are my sons," said Joseph, "whom God hath given me in this place." On this he requests them to be brought unto him, that he might bless them. He could scarcely see them, for his eyes were dim of age; but his heart was full of tenderness towards them, for their father's sake, and for the sake of the hope of which they were heirs; therefore he kissed and embraced them. And being full of holy affection, he looks back upon his past sorrows, and admires the grace of God towards him and his. "I had not thought," said

he to Joseph, "*to see thy face*; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed." How much better is God to us than our fears! Only let us wait with faith and patience, and our desponding thoughts will be turned into songs of praise.

Ver. 12-14. After this affectionate embrace, Joseph brought forth the two young men from between his father's knees, and bowed himself with his face to the earth, in token of thankfulness for the kindness conferred upon himself and his sons, and in expectation of a further blessing. And having probably observed the order in which his father had spoken of them, putting Ephraim before Manasseh, ver. 5, he wished to correct it as a mistake; and therefore placed the young men according to their age, Ephraim towards Israel's left hand, and Manasseh towards his right hand, and in this manner presented them before him. But the conduct of the patriarch was not thus to be corrected. God, from whom the blessing proceeded, directed him in this case to cross hands. Nor is this the only instance in which the order of nature is made to give way to that of grace; for of this Jacob himself had been an example.

Ver. 15, 16. In this attitude Jacob proceeds to bless the lads. "And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads! And let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." Observe, I. Though Ephraim and Manasseh were both constituted heads of tribes, yet they were blessed *in the person of their father Joseph*: He blessed *Joseph*, &c. In this, as in many other instances, God would exemplify the great principle on which he designed to act in blessing mankind in the name and for the sake of another. 2. Jacob, though now among the Egyptians, and kindly treated by them, yet makes no mention of their gods, but holds up to his posterity "the living and true God." In proportion as Egypt was kind to the young people, such would be their danger of being seduced; but let them remember the dying words of their venerable ancestor, and know whence their blessedness cometh. 3. The God whose blessing was bestowed upon them was not only the true God, but "the God of their fathers;" a God in covenant with the family, who loved them, and was loved and served by them. "God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk." How sweet and endearing the character! and what a recommendation of these holy patterns to the young people! Nor was he merely the God of Abraham and Isaac, but Jacob himself also could speak well of his name; adding, "The God who fed me all my life long unto this day!" Sweet and solemn are the recommendations of aged piety. "Speak reproachfully of Christ," said the persecutors to Polycarp, when leading him to the stake. "Eighty-six years I have served him," answered the venerable man, "during all which time he never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme him who is my King and my Saviour?" Harken, O young people, to this affecting language! It is a principle dictated by common prudence, "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not;" and how much more forcibly does it apply to the God of your fathers! 4. This God is called "the Angel who redeemed him from all evil." Who this was it is not difficult to decide. It was the Angel, no doubt, with whom Jacob wrestled and prevailed, and concerning whom he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved," chap. xxxii. 24-30; Hos. xii. 2. 5. The blessing of God, under all these endearing characters, is invoked upon the lads, their forefathers' names put upon them, and abundant increase promised to them. Surely it

is good to be connected with them that fear God; yet those only who are of faith will ultimately be blessed with their faithful predecessors.

Ver. 17-20. Joseph's enjoyment of this sweet and solemn blessing was sadly interrupted by the unpleasant circumstance of his father's crossing his hands, and he could not refrain from respectfully remonstrating. Thus our frail minds are liable to be ruffled by some trivial event, even on the most solemn occasions, and so to lose the advantage of some of the happiest opportunities. Jacob, however, is not to be dissuaded. He had been guided by an unseen hand; and, like Isaac after having blessed him, he could not repent. "I know it, my son," said he, "I know it—He shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he." God is as immutable as he is sovereign. It does not become us to contend with him; and it is to the honour of Joseph, that as soon as he perceived his father knew what he did, believing him to be directed from above, he acquiesced. Hence the patriarch went on without further interruption, saying, "In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim, and as Manasseh!"

Ver. 21. A word or two more to Joseph, and the present interview is closed. "I die," said Israel; "but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers." All that he had said before tended to break off their attachment to Egypt, and to fix their faith in the Divine promise: such also was the design of these words. How satisfactory is it to a dying saint to consider that God lives, and will carry on his cause without him as well as with him. The great JOHN OWEN, two days before he died, (which was in 1683, a time when popery and arbitrary power threatened to overspread the land,) thus wrote in a letter to a friend:—"I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm; but whilst the great Pilot is in it, the loss of a poor under-rower will be inconsiderable."

Ver. 22. One more special token of love is added to Joseph's portion; namely, a parcel of ground which had been originally bought of the sons of Hamor; but, as it would seem, being seized by some of their descendants, Jacob was necessitated to recover it by force of arms, chap. xxxiii. 18-20. This portion he gave to Joseph, and the tribe of Ephraim afterwards possessed it, John iv. 5. The hazard at which this portion was obtained would no doubt endear it to Joseph; for we prize those things which they who were dear to us acquired at a great expense. On this principle we have often been admonished to hold fast our civil liberties. On this principle especially it becomes us to value our religious advantages, for which so much blood has been shed. And on this principle we are called to prize, more than any other thing, the hope of the gospel, to obtain which our Saviour laid down his life!

DISCOURSE LVII.

JACOB'S BLESSING ON THE TRIBES.

Gen. xlix.

VER. 1, 2. Jacob having blessed Joseph's sons, and feeling that he drew near his end, sent for the rest of his children, that he might in the same prophetic style declare to them what should befall them, and their posterity after them. The solemn manner in which he called them together and bespoke their attention shows that, being under a Divine inspiration, he would deliver

things of great importance, and such as, corresponding in many instances not only with the meaning of their names, but with their personal conduct, would furnish matter for reflection and encouragement.

Ver. 3, 4. *Reuben*, being his first-born son, is first addressed. He is reminded of his superior advantages. He was the first effect of "his might," or "the beginning of his strength;" and to him as such naturally belonged "the excellence of dignity, and the excellence of power." But as Esau and others forfeited the birth-right, so did Reuben. His character did not answer to the dignity of his situation. He is charged with being "unstable as water." The word is used I believe in only three other places in the Old Testament (Judg. ix. 4; Jer. xxiii. 32; Zeph. iii. 4); and in them it is rendered *light*, or *lightness*; denoting not only a readiness to turn aside for want of solid principles, but that species of levity in particular which belongs to a lascivious mind, and which is ordinarily denominated *looseness*, or *lewdness*. Such was the spirit of Reuben, or he could not have acted as he did towards Bilhah, his father's wife, chap. xxxv. 22. The manner in which the patriarch expatiates upon this crime shows how heinous it was in his eyes. "Thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it." And, to show his abhorrence, he turns away from him, and addresses his other sons, as it were by way of appeal: "He went up to my couch!" For this lewd behaviour he is told *he shall not excel*. It is a brief mode of expression, alluding to the excellence of dignity and of power which pertained to him as the first-born; and denotes that all his advantages were reversed by his base conduct, and that which would otherwise have been a blessing was turned into a curse. The double portion was taken from him, and given, as we have seen, to Joseph, (chap. xlvi. 5-7,) the kingdom to Judah, and the priesthood to Levi; and thus the excellence of dignity, and the excellence of power, were separated from his tribe, which never sustained any conspicuous character in Israel.

From what is said of Reuben we may learn the offensive, the debasing, and the dangerous nature of that light-mindedness which indulges in filthiness and foolish talking, jesting, and lewd behaviour. Such appears to have been the spirit of the false prophets in the times of Jeremiah, whose "lies and lightness" caused God's people to err, Jer. xxiii. 32. And such, alas! is the character of too many who sustain the name of Christians, and even of Christian ministers, at this day. Assuredly they shall not excel; and, without repentance, woe unto them when God shall call them to account!

Ver. 5-7. The next in order of years are *Simeon and Levi*, who also in their posterity shall reap the bitter fruits of their early sins; and having not only descended from the same parents, but been associates in iniquity, they, according to the meaning of the name of the latter, are joined together in receiving the reward of it. At the time when these young men, with equal treachery and cruelty, took each his sword and slew the Shechemites, Jacob expressed his disapprobation of the deed; but now he censures it in the strongest terms. "Instruments of cruelty are in their habitations;" which is saying that they were bloody men. Ainsworth renders it, "sojourning habitations," which heightens the sin, as being committed in a place where they had no residence but by the courtesy of the country. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!" What we cannot prevent, we must be contented to disavow, having "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." These young men took counsel together: they were very careful to conceal their design from Jacob their father, knowing beforehand that he would be certain to oppose their schemes; and now Jacob is no less careful to disavow all connexion with them in the horrid deed. Such a disavowal, though it must

give the most acute pain to the sons, yet was worthy of the father. A great deal of evil had been wrought in his family; but be it known to all the world, by the dying testimony which he bears against it, that it was altogether contrary to his mind. And let young people hear and know that the crimes of youth will some time find them out. If they repent and obtain mercy, as there is reason to believe these young men did, yet they shall reap the bitter fruits of their sin in the present life; and if they remain impenitent, tribulation and anguish will overtake them in the next.

The crime of these brethren is thus described: "In their anger they slew a man," even Hamor, king of the country, as well as Shechem his son; and that not in the open field of contest, but by assassination! Anger in general is outrageous; but in young men, whose immature judgment and slender experience afford but little check to it, it is commonly the most mischievous. "In their self-will they digged down a wall," or, as some render it, "they houghed the oxen."* The former would express their breaking into houses to murder the inhabitants, and the latter their cruelty extending even to the dumb animals. Anger, when accompanied with *self-will*, rages like fire before the wind. How important is the government of one's own spirit! and, considering what human nature is, what a mercy it is that the wrath of man is under the Divine control! If Simeon and Levi had not repented of this sin, it is likely that the curse, like that of Noah on Canaan, would have fallen upon their persons; but, as it was, it alights only upon their dispositions and actions: "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel!" God in mercy forgave them, but took vengeance of their inventions. And, with respect to the tribes of which they were the heads, they were to be "divided and scattered in Israel." "The Levites," says Mr. Henry, "were scattered throughout all the tribes, and Simeon's lot lay not together, and was so strait that many of that tribe were forced to disperse themselves in quest of settlements and subsistence. This curse was afterwards turned into a blessing to the Levites; but the Simeonites, for Zimri's sin, had it bound on, Numb. xxv. Shameful divisions are the just punishment of sinful unions and confederacies."

Ver. 8-12. From what was said of the first three sons, the rest might begin to tremble, lest the whole should be a succession of curses instead of blessings. But in what respects *Judah* we see a glorious reverse. The blessedness of this tribe principally consists in that blessing which was in it, the Lord Messiah. "Judah," saith the patriarch, "thou art he whom thy brethren shall *praise*; thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies: thy father's children shall bow down before thee." In the first sentence allusion is had to his name, which signifies *praise*: and the meaning of the whole is, that this tribe should be distinguished, first by its victories over the Canaanites, and afterwards by its being the tribe which God would choose to bear *rule* in Israel. Hence also it is represented, in verse 9, by a *lion*, the most majestic of animals, and the proper emblem of royalty. Much of this prophecy was doubtless fulfilled in David and his successors; but all was prefigurative of the Messiah, who, in allusion to this passage, is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." In him all that is said of Judah is eminently fulfilled. He is indeed the object of praise, his hand has been in the neck of his enemies, and before him his brethren have bowed down. Grappling with the powers of darkness, we see him as a lion tearing the prey; ascending above all heavens, as a lion going up from the prey; and seated at the right hand of God, as a lion couchant, or at rest after his toils, where it is at the peril of the greatest monarchs to rouse him up, Psal. ii. 10-12.

* 'Ενευροκόπησαν ταῦρον.—LXX. But rather, "They exterminated a prince."

That which before is represented under strong figures is in verse 10 declared plainly, viz. that Judah should be the governing tribe, and that its chief glory should consist in the Messiah, who should descend from it; yea, the very time of his coming is marked out. The sceptre, or government, should not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh came. The government departed from ten tribes, out of the twelve, during the reign of Hezekiah, and has never been restored; but Judah continued to rule with God. At length they also were carried into captivity; yet God's eye was upon them, and in seventy years they were restored. And notwithstanding the many overturnings of the diadem by the successive monarchies of Persia, Greece, and Rome, yet it continued till the coming of Christ. The theocracy then being dissolved, and the power given to him whose right it was, Judah in a few years ceased to be a body politic, or to have any government of its own. If there be such a thing as an irrefragable proof, surely this is one, that SHILOH, the *peaceable*, the *prosperous*, the *Saviour*, is come; and it is a mark of judicial blindness and hardness of heart in the Jews that they continue to disbelieve it.

Of Shiloh it is added, "To him shall the gathering of the people be." As all the tribes of Israel gathered together, and anointed David king in Hebron; so all the tribes of man shall sooner or later submit to the kingdom of Christ. During his ministry, his enemies, touched with fear and envy, were ready to say, Behold, the world is gone after him! And no sooner was he lifted up upon the cross than he began to draw all men unto him. Multitudes of his own countrymen, who had before seen no form or comeliness in him, now believed on him. Now also began to be fulfilled all the prophecies which had gone before, of the calling of the Gentiles. For such was the value of his sacrifice and mediation, that it was considered as a light thing for him merely to raise up the tribes of Jacob: he must be a light to the Gentiles, and God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Nor has this promise yet spent its force: probably the greater part of it is yet to be fulfilled. What is foretold to the church in the 60th of Isaiah, of multitudes of all nations gathering together unto her, will be the accomplishment of this promise concerning Christ; for those that are gathered to her are first gathered to him.

The 11th and 12th verses are expressive of the great plenty of wine and milk which the tribe of Judah should possess. Vines, even the most choice, should be so common that you might have tied your beasts to them, as you would here tie them to an elm or ash; or so abundantly productive, that it should be the ordinary practice to bind a colt to the vine, and load it with its fruits. Wine with them should be so plentiful that you might have washed your garments in it. The inhabitants, even the common people, might drink of it till their eyes were red; and such an abundance should there be of the milk of kine, that their teeth might be white with it.* This *plenty* of milk and wine may have a further reference, however, to the plenty of evangelical blessings under the reign of the Messiah, in the same manner as the dominion ascribed to Judah has an ultimate reference to his dominion. The language used by Isaiah, "Come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price," certainly refers to the great plenty of those articles in the Land of Promise, and seems to allude to the very words of Jacob, in this prophecy.

Ver. 13. The blessing of *Zebulun* predicts the situation of that tribe in the Promised Land. They should be a maritime people, bordering upon

* Or it may be rendered,

His eyes shall be more sparkling than wine,
And his teeth whiter than milk. See LXX.

the sea of Galilee eastward, and upon the Mediterranean on the west. Its "*border reaching unto Zidon*" does not mean the city, but the country of that name, that is, Phœnicia. If the future settlement of the tribes had been of *choice*, it might have been said that they contrived to fulfil these predictions; but being *by lot*, the hand of God is seen, both in them and their accomplishment. There seems to be a distinction made between Zebulun being "*at the haven of the sea*," and his being "*for a haven of ships*." The former may denote his advantages; and the latter, the benevolent use he should make of them, opening his harbours for the reception of distressed mariners. We have all our situations and advantages according to the will of God, and should be concerned to employ them to a good purpose. This tribe had also its disadvantages; being far from the seat of Divine instruction, its inhabitants are described as "*sitting in darkness*." Upon them, however, the light of the gospel, by the personal ministry of our Lord, sprung up.

Ver. 14, 15. Next follows the blessing of *Issachar*. The character given to this tribe intimates that it should be addicted to husbandry, as Zebulun was to the dangers and perils of the sea. He is compared to a "*strong ass, couching down between two burdens*," not on account of any thing mean in him, but for his industrious, patient, and peaceable disposition. This situation would neither require the heroic qualities of Judah, nor the enterprising ones of Zebulun; and his disposition should coincide with it, preferring the fruits of peace and industry, though obliged to pay tribute for them, to the more splendid fortunes of commerce, or triumphs of war. Some men would pronounce Issachar, and those of his mind, mean spirits; but let not this part of the community be thought light of. If it be less brilliant, it is not less useful than the others. The king is served by the field. No condition of life has fewer temptations, nor is any more friendly to true religion. Though the people of this tribe were still and peaceable, yet there were among them "*men who had understanding of the times, and who knew what Israel ought to do*;" nor was it any disparagement to their "*brethren to be at their commandment*," 1 Chron. xii. 32.

Ver. 16, 17. The blessing of *Dan* alludes to the meaning of his name, that is, *judging*, and signifies that he should maintain his authority; not only in respect of his rank among the tribes, but in the preservation of order in his own territory. His being compared to "*a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse-heels, so that his rider shall fall backward*," would seem to intimate, however, that the Danites would be a subtle and mischievous people, carrying on their wars more by stratagem and artful surprise than by conflict in the open field. Such were the wars of Samson, who was of this tribe, against the Philistines.

Ver. 18. Here the man of God seems to have paused, perhaps on account of bodily weakness; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, said, "*I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord*." Had these words followed the blessing of Judah, we might have supposed that the salvation he referred to was the coming Messiah; but standing where it does, it appears to have been merely a sudden ejaculation, sent up at the close of his pilgrimage, in a view of being delivered from all its evils. It serves to show the state of the patriarch's mind; and that while pronouncing blessings on his posterity, in respect to their settlement in the earthly Canaan, he was himself going to a better country, even a heavenly one. When he thought that Joseph was dead, he talked of "*going down into his grave mourning*;" and afterwards, when he found him alive, he seems as if he could have descended into it rejoicing (chap. xxxvii. 35; xlvii. 30); but it was not for him to determine the time of his departure, but to wait his appointed time. Old age is the time for the

patience of hope to bear its richest fruits; and a pleasant thing it is to see this and other graces in full bloom, while the powers of nature are falling into decay.

Ver. 19. The patriarch, resuming his subject, proceeds to bless the tribe of *Gad*. His name signified a *troop*, and it is intimated that they should be a warlike people. Their situation was east of Jordan, where they were exposed to the incursions of the neighbouring nations; particularly those of the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Syrians. But it is predicted that, however they might for a time be overcome, yet they should overcome at last; and this exactly accords with their history, Judg. x., xi., xii.; 1 Chron. v. 18-22. In this blessing we see not only an example of the life of every believer, but the wisdom of God in so ordering it, as an antidote to presumption and despair. Present defeats have a tendency to preserve us from the one, and the promise of being finally victorious from the other.

Ver. 20. Next follows *Asher*, whose name signifies *the happy*, or *the blessed*, or *making happy*; and with his name corresponds his blessing. The meaning is, that his lot should be a rich one; yielding not only necessities, but dainties, even royal dainties. Such is the lot of a few in this world, and it is well that it is but a few; for while men are what they are, great fulness would soon render them like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Ver. 21. *Naphtali* is described by "*a hind let loose*," and is said to "give goodly words." The description would seem to hold up, not a warlike tribe, nor a tribe noted for its industry; but rather a people distinguished by their vivacity, timidity, and softness of manners. The diversity of natural dispositions contributes upon the whole to human happiness. Men have their partialities, some to this, and others to that; and if their wishes could be gratified, would commonly shape all others by their own favourite model; but, after all, variety is the best. As the delicate could not subsist without the laborious and the resolute, so many a rugged spirit, both in the world and in the church, would be worse than useless, but for its union with others more gentle and affectionate.

Ver. 22-26. We next come to the blessing of *Joseph*, and on this the patriarch delights to dwell. His emblem, taken from the meaning of his name, is that of "*a fruitful bough*," situated by a well, by which its roots were watered, and its branches caused to run over the wall. The meaning is, that his posterity should be distinguished by their extraordinary increase. But now the imagery is dropped, or rather changed, and his personal history reviewed. He was attacked at an early period, as by a band of archers, who "*sorely grieved him, shot at him, and hated him*." There is a delicacy in his speaking of the brethren (who were standing by) in the third person rather than the second, and that under a figure; let him express it, however, in what form he will, they must feel it. He adds, "*But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the mighty God of Jacob; from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel*." As his brethren were a band of archers, he is described under the same character, but as one only against many. Their arrows were those of *hatred*; but his of love, overcoming evil with good. They strengthened one another in an evil cause; but he was strengthened by "*the mighty God of Jacob*." In these particulars, surely, he was a type of Christ; and still more in being, by the blessing of the God of Jacob, "*the shepherd and stone of Israel*;" *providing* for their wants, and *supporting* their interests.

In blessing Joseph, Jacob feels his heart enlarged; pouring upon him the blessings of Almighty God, the God of his father; blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb; intimating also that his power of blessing when terminating on him

exceeded that of his fathers, extending not only to the land in general, but to the very mountains, on which his children should reside. And that which drew upon his head all these blessings was the painful, but endearing, circumstance, of his having been "separated from his brethren."

Joseph considered his separation as ordered of God for the good of others (chap. xlv. 7, 8); and he seems all along to have acted upon this principle; but a life so spent shall lose nothing by it in the end. God will take care of that man, and pour the richest blessings upon his head, whose great concern it is to glorify him, and do good in his generation. Jacob felt much for Joseph's *separation*. The spirit of his benediction was, By how much he was afflicted for the sake of others, by so much let him be blessed and honoured, and that to the latest posterity!—And such is the mind of God, and all his true friends, concerning a greater than Joseph. "For the suffering of death, he is crowned with glory and honour.—And I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying, *WORTHY is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!*—Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to *Him* be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Ver. 27. The last blessing is that of *Benjamin*. Of him it is said, "He shall raven as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil." In this we see that it should be a warlike tribe; and this it was, or it could not have resisted all the tribes of Israel in the manner it did, as recorded in the last chapters of Judges. But this is saying no more than might have been said of many of the heathen nations. If Jacob had been influenced by natural affection, there had doubtless been something tender in the blessing of Benjamin, as well as in that of Joseph; but he was guided by a spirit of prophecy, and therefore foretold the thing as it was.

Ver. 28. Such were the tribes of Israel, and such "the blessings wherewith their father blessed them." But how blessed them? It might be thought that the first three at least were cursed, rather than blessed. No, they were rebuked, but not cursed, nor cast off, like Esau; they still continued among the tribes of Israel. It must have been very affecting for these brethren thus to stand by and hear, as from the mouth of God, what would be the consequences of their early conduct on their distant posterity; and as their minds were now tender, it may be supposed to have wrought in them renewed repentance, or gratitude, as the subject required.

Ver. 29–33. The patriarch now gives directions concerning his burial. He desires to be interred, not in Egypt, but in the burying-place at Mamre, where lay Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Leah. If he had been governed by natural affection, he might have chosen to lie by the side of his beloved Rachel; but he "died in faith," and therefore requests to mingle dust with his fathers, who had been heirs with him of the same promise. Having said all he had to say, he cheerfully resigned his soul into the hands of him that gave it, and was numbered with his departed ancestors.

Thus died Jacob; a man whose conduct on some occasions was censurable, whose life was filled up with numerous changes, but whose end was such as his worst enemies might envy.

DISCOURSE LVIII.

THE BURIAL OF JACOB.—JOSEPH REMOVES THE FEARS OF HIS BRETHREN.—
THE DEATH OF JOSEPH.

Gen. 1.

VER. 1. We have seen the venerable patriarch yielding up the ghost; and now we see the expressions of affection toward him by the survivors. Let the memory of the just be blessed. It was revealed to Jacob in his lifetime that Joseph should "put his hand upon his eyes;" and Joseph not only did this, but, in the fulness of his heart, "fell upon his face after he was dead, and wept upon him, and kissed him." This is all that we can do towards the most beloved objects, when death has performed his office. The mind is gone; the body only remains; and of this we must take a long farewell. Faith, however, looks forward to a joyful resurrection, and teaches us not to sorrow as those that have no hope.

Ver. 2. Joseph next proceeds to have the dead body embalmed with sweet spices. This was an art carried to great perfection in Egypt: the effects of it are not totally extinct even to this day. It was suitably applied in the present instance, not only as an honour done to a great and good man, but as a means of preserving the body from putrefaction, during its removal to Canaan.

Ver. 3. Nor was this the only honour that was paid to him. The family no doubt mourned very sincerely for him; and, to express their respect for Joseph, the Egyptians, probably the court and the gentry, went into mourning; and not merely forty days, which was customary it seems for every one who had the honour of being embalmed, but, in this instance, another month was added. The customs of polite nations, though often consisting of mere forms, yet serve in some instances to show what *should* be. They express, in this case, a respect for departed worth, and a sympathy with afflicted survivors, weeping with them that weep.

Ver. 4-6. The days of formal mourning being ended, Joseph next proceeds to the burial of his father. But for this he must first obtain leave of absence from the king; and, desirous of conducting the business with propriety, he applies to some of the royal household to make the request for him; not, as some have supposed, because it was improper for him to appear before the king in mourning apparel; for "the days of his mourning were past;" but with a view of honouring the sovereign, and cultivating the esteem of those about him. A modest behaviour is said to be rarely found in royal favourites; but by the grace of God it was found in Joseph. The plea he urged was nothing less than his being under a solemn oath, imposed upon him by the dying request of his father; a plea to which Pharaoh could make no objection, especially as it was accompanied with a promise of a return.

Ver. 7-11. We now behold the funeral procession. The whole family (except their little ones, who, with their cattle, were left behind) were, as we should say, the first followers; but all the elders of respectability, of the court, and of the country, with both chariots and horsemen, were in the train. It was "a very great company," not only in number, but in quality. For grandeur and magnificence it is said to be without a parallel in history. This great honour was not in consequence of any wish on the part of Jacob:

all he desired was, to be carried by his sons, and buried in the Land of Promise. His desire was that of faith, not of ambition. But, as in the case of Solomon, seeing he asked for that which God approved, he should have his desire in that, and the other should be added to it. Thus God delights to honour those who honour him. And as it was principally *for Joseph's sake* that this great honour was conferred on his father, it shows in what high esteem he was held in Egypt, and serves to prove, that whatever modern adversaries may say of his conduct, he was considered at the time as one of the greatest benefactors to the country.

Nothing remarkable occurred in the procession till they came to the threshing-floor of Atad, which was within the land of Canaan, near to Jericho, and not many miles from the place of interment. Here they stopped, it would seem, for seven days, performing funeral obsequies, or "mourning with a great and sore lamentation." So great was it that it drew the attention of the Canaanites, who, on seeing and hearing what passed, observed one to another, "This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians;" (for such they considered them, seeing they came from Egypt;) wherefore the name of the place was afterwards called *Abel-Mizraim*—"the mourning of the Egyptians."

Ver. 12-21. Joseph and his brethren, having buried their father in the place where he requested to lie, return to Egypt, with the company which went with them. The pomp and hurry of the funeral, while it lasted, would occupy their attention; but, this having subsided, the thoughts of the ten brethren were directed to other things. The death of great characters being often followed by great changes, conscious guilt being always alive to fear, and the chasm which succeeds a funeral inviting a flood of foreboding apprehensions, they find out a new source of trouble: Peradventure, all the kindness hitherto shown us has been only for our father's sake . . . Peradventure, Joseph, after all, never forgave us in his heart . . . and now our father is dead, so as not to be grieved by it, peradventure he will feel that hatred to us which we once felt to him; and if so, he will certainly requite the evil which we have done unto him. O jealousy! is it not rightly said of thee, Thou art cruel as the grave?

But how can they disclose their suspicions? To have done it personally would have been too much for either him or them to bear, let him take it as he might. So they "sent messengers unto him," to sound him. We know not who they were; but if Benjamin was one of them, it is no more than might be expected. Mark the delicacy and exquisite tenderness of the message. Nothing is said of their suspicions, only that the petition implies them; yet it is expressed in such a manner as cannot offend, but must needs melt the heart of Joseph, even though he had been possessed of less affection than he was. 1. They introduce themselves as acting under the direction of a mediator, and this mediator was none other than their deceased father. He commanded us, say they, before he died, that we should say thus and thus. And was it possible for Joseph to be offended with them for obeying *his* orders? But stop a moment—May not *we* make a similar use of what our Saviour said to us before he died? He commanded us to say, "Our Father—forgive us our debts." Can we not make the same use of this as Jacob's sons did of their father's commandment? 2. They present the petition as *coming from their father*: "Forgive, I pray thee, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil." And was it possible to refuse complying with his father's desire? The intercessor, it is to be observed, does not go about to extenuate the sin of the offenders; but frankly acknowledges it, and that, if justice were to take its course, they must be punished. Neither does he plead their subsequent

repentance as the ground of pardon; but requests that it may be done for *his* sake, or on account of the love which the offended bore to him. 3. They unite their own confession and petition to that of their father. It was certainly proper that they should do so; for though they no more plead their own repentance as the ground of forgiveness than the mediator had done, yet it was fit they should repent, and acknowledge their transgressions, ere they obtained mercy. Moreover, though they must make no merit of any thing pertaining to themselves; yet if there be a character which the offended party is known to esteem above all others, and they be conscious of sustaining that character, it will be no presumption to make mention of it. And this is what they do, and that in a manner which must make a deep impression upon a heart like that of Joseph. "And now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father!" It were sufficient to have gained their point, even though Joseph had been reluctant, to have pleaded their being children of the same father, and that father making it, as it were, his dying request; but the consideration of their being *the servants of his father's God* was overcoming. Were we to look back to some former periods of their history, we could not have considered them as entitled to this character; but since that time God had brought them through a series of trials, by means of which he had turned them to himself. And though they are far from considering their present state of mind as obliterating the guilt of their former crimes, yet, knowing that Joseph was himself a servant of God, they knew that this consideration would make a deep impression upon him. It is no wonder that, at the close of this part of the story, it should be added, "And Joseph wept when they spake unto him!"

But this is not all; they go in person, and "fall before his face," and offer to be his *servants*. This extreme abasement on their part seems to have given a kind of gentle indignancy to Joseph's feelings. His mind revolted at it. It seemed to him too much. "Fear not," saith he; "for am I in the place of God?" As if he should say, It may belong to God to take vengeance; but for a sinful worm of the dust, who himself needs forgiveness, to do so, were highly presumptuous; you have therefore nothing to fear from me. What further forgiveness you need, seek it of him.

Ver. 20, 21. There was a delicacy in the situation of the ten brethren, in respect to this application to Joseph, as it would imply a doubt of his former sincerity. They were aware of this, and therefore in every thing they say, whether by messengers or in personal interview, are careful to avoid touching upon that subject. Nor is there less delicacy in Joseph's answer. He does not complain of this implication, nor so much as mention it; but his answering them nearly in the same words as he had done seventeen years before, "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive;" I say, his answering them in this language was saying, in effect, Your suspicions are unfounded; what I told you seventeen years ago I meant; and the considerations which then induced me to pass over it induce me still to do the same. "Now, therefore, fear ye not; I will nourish you and your little ones." I will not be your *master*, but your brother, and, as it were, your father. In this manner did he "comfort them, and spake kindly unto them."

Ver. 22, 23. Joseph was about fifty-six years old when his father died; he must therefore have lived fifty-four years afterwards; during which period he saw Ephraim's children, of the third generation; and the grandsons of Manasseh were brought up, as it were, upon his knees.

Ver. 24-26. And now the time draws near that Joseph also must die; and, like his worthy ancestors, he dies *in faith*. 1. He is persuaded of the truth of God to his covenant promises. "I die," saith he; "and God shall

surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 2. Under the influence of this persuasion he takes "an oath of the children of Israel," that when they should depart from Egypt they would take his "bones with them." Such a desire might have arisen merely from a wish to mingle dust with his forefathers; but we are directed to attribute it to a higher motive. It is in reference to this exercise of faith that his name is enrolled in the catalogue of believing worthies, Heb. xi. 22. Having said all he wished to say, "he died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." As the burial of Jacob in Canaan would attract the minds of Israel to that country, so the depositing of Joseph in a moveable chest, together with his dying word, would serve as a memento that Egypt was not their home.

CONCLUSION.

I HAVE endeavoured to intersperse reflections on the various subjects as they have occurred; but there are a few others which arise from a review of the whole, and with these I shall conclude.

First, *The truth of revelation, and its leading doctrines.* That which accounts for things as they are, or as they actually exist in the world, and that in such a manner as nothing else does, carries in it its own evidence. Look at things as they are, and look at this, and you will find that as face answereth to face in water, so doth the one answer to the other.

Look at the material creation around you, and ask the philosophers of all ages how it came into being. One ascribes it to a fortuitous assemblage of atoms; another conceives matter to have been eternal; another imagines God himself a material being. But revelation, like the light shining upon chaos, dissipates in a few words all this darkness, informing us that, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

Look at human nature as it now is; depraved, miserable, and subject to death. Ask philosophy to account for this. This task will be found to surpass its powers. None can deny the fact that men are what they ought not to be; but how they came to be so cannot be told. To say, as many do, that the stock is good, but that it gets corrupt in rearing, is to reason in a manner that no one would have the face to do in any other case. If a tree were found which in every climate, every age, every soil, and under every kind of cultivation, brought forth the fruits of death, nobody would hesitate to pronounce it of a *poisonous nature*. Such is the account given us by revelation, and this book informs us how it became so. It is true it does not answer curious questions on this awful subject. It traces the origin of evil as far as sobriety and humility would wish to inquire. It states the fact, that God hath "made man upright," and that he "hath sought out many inventions;" but there it leaves it. If men will object to the equity of the Divine proceedings, and allege that what is in consequence of their first father's transgression is on their part guiltless, they must go on to object. Every man's conscience tells him he is accountable for all he does from choice, let that choice have been influenced by what it may; and no man thinks of excusing his neighbour in his ill conduct towards him because he is a son of Adam. Out of their own mouth, therefore, will such objectors be judged. But if the doctrine of the fall, as narrated in this book, be admitted, that of salvation by free grace, through the atonement of Christ, will follow

of course. I do not say that redemption by Christ could be inferred from the fall itself; but being revealed in the same sacred book, we cannot believe the one without feeling the necessity of the other.

Look at the page of history, and you will find yourselves in a world of the existence of which you can find no traces till within about four thousand years. All beyond is darkness; and all pretensions to earlier records carry in them self-evident marks of fable. These things are accounted for in this book. If the world was destroyed by a flood, there could no nations have existed till a little before the times of Abraham. Nay, this book gives us the origin of all the nations, and calls many of them by the names which they sustain to this day.

Finally, Look at the antipathy which is every where to be seen between the righteous and the wicked, between them that fear God and them that fear him not. All the narratives which have passed under our review, as those of Cain and Abel, Enoch and his contemporaries, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, are pictures of originals which the world continues in every age to exhibit. But this book traces this antipathy to its source, and gives us reason to expect its continuance till Satan and his cause shall be bruised under our feet.

Secondly, *The peculiar characters of sacred history.* It is the most *concise*, and yet *comprehensive*, of any record that has ever yet appeared in the world. In the Book of Genesis only we have gone over the history of two thousand, three hundred and sixty-nine years. A common historian might have used more words in giving us an account of one of Nimrod's expeditions. Yet it is not like the abridged histories of human writers, which often contain a string of unconnected facts, which leave no impression, and are nearly void of useful information. You see human nature, as created, as depraved, and as renewed by the grace of God; you see the motives of men, and the reason of things, so as to enable you to draw from every story some important lesson, some warning, caution, counsel, encouragement, or instruction in righteousness.

The reason of so much being included in so small a compass is, it is *select*. It is not a history of the world, but of persons and things which the world overlooks. It keeps one great object always in view, namely, *the progress of the church of God*, and touches other societies and their concerns only incidentally, and as they are connected with it. The things which are here recorded are such as would have been mostly overlooked by common historians, just as things of the same kind are overlooked to this day. If you read many of even our Church Histories, you will perceive but little of the history of true religion in them. There are more of the genuine exercises of grace in a page of the life of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, than you will frequently find here in a volume. If the world overlooks God and his cause, God, in return, overlooks them and theirs. His history holds up an Enoch, and preserves a Noah, while a world lying in wickedness is destroyed by an overwhelming flood. It follows an Abraham, an Isaac, a Jacob, and a Joseph, through all their vicissitudes, narrating the trials and triumphs of faith in these holy men; while the Ishmaels, the Esaus, and all who apostatized from the true God, are given up, and lost in the great world. It traces the spiritual kingdom of God to its smallest beginnings, and follows it through its various obstructions; while the wars, conquests, and intrigues of the great nations of antiquity are passed over as unworthy of notice. In all this we see that the things which are highly esteemed among men are but lightly accounted of by the Lord; and that He who hath heaven for his throne, and earth for his footstool, overlooks both, in comparison of a poor and contrite spirit.

Lastly, *The slow but certain progress of the Divine designs.* God promised Abraham a son when he was seventy-five years old; but he was not born till he was a hundred. And when he is born, he lives forty years unmarried; and when married, under an expectation of great fruitfulness, it is twenty years more ere Rebecca bears children; and then it is not without earnest prayer. And now that he has two sons born, Jacob, in whom the promise is to be fulfilled, lives seventy-five years single, and his life is a kind of blank: and when he goes to Padan-aram for a wife, he must wait seven years longer ere he obtains her: and when he has a family of children, they prove some of the worst of characters. The only one that is any way hopeful is taken away, he knows not how; and a long series of afflictions follow, one upon another, ere any thing like hope makes its appearance. Yet all this while the Lord had promised, "I will surely do thee good;" and in the end the good is done. God's ways fetch an astonishing compass. His heart is large, and all his plans are great. He does not make haste to fulfil his counsels: but waits, and causes us to wait, the *due time*. But at that time they are all fulfilled.

We may observe a difference, however, as to the time taken for the fulfilment of different promises. Those which were made to Abraham's other children, and which had no immediate relation to God's spiritual kingdom, as has been remarked in the course of the work, were very soon accomplished, in comparison of that which was confined to Isaac. Small legacies are often received and spent before the heir comes to the full possession of his inheritance. And even those which are made to the church of God, and have respect to his spiritual kingdom, vary in some proportion to their magnitude. "God made promise of a son to Abraham: *five-and-twenty years* elapse ere this is accomplished. He also promised the land of Canaan for a possession to his posterity: there the performance required a period of *nearly five hundred years*. At the same time Abraham was assured that the Messiah should descend from his loins, and that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed: this promise was *nearly two thousand years* ere it came to pass. These events resemble the oval streaks in the trunk of a tree, which mark its annual growth: each describes a larger compass than that which precedes it, and all which precede it are preparatory to that which follows. The establishment of Abraham's posterity in Canaan was a greater event than the birth of Isaac, and greater preparations were made for it. But it was less than the coming of Christ, and required less time and labour to precede it."

From this ordinary ratio, if I may so speak, in the Divine administration, we are furnished with motives to patience, while waiting for the fulfilment of promises to the church in the latter days. The things promised are here so great and so glorious that they may well be supposed to fetch a large compass, and to require a period of long and painful suspense ere they are accomplished. The night may be expected to bear some proportion to the day that succeeds it. It is a consolation, however, that the night with us is far spent, and the day is at hand. The twelve hundred and sixty years of antichrist's dominion, and of the church's affliction, must needs be drawing towards a close; and a season so dark, and so long, augurs glorious times before us. We may have our seasons of despondency, like the patriarchs; but there will come a time, and that probably not very distant, when what is said of Israel in the times of Joshua shall be fulfilled on a larger scale. "And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers.—There failed not aught of any good thing which *the Lord* had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass."

EXPOSITORY DISCOURSES

ON

THE APOCALYPSE.

TO THE

BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST AT KETTERING.

DEAR BRETHREN,

It is at your request that these Discourses appear in print. When in the course of exposition I first entered on them, it was not from an idea that I at that time sufficiently understood the prophecy, but from a hope that by this means I might understand it better. And now that I have ventured to publish, it is not because I am fully satisfied of having given the true meaning in every instance. There are parts in which I can only say, I have done the best I could. If, however, I had not been satisfied as to the general meaning of the prophecy, or had been conscious of having thrown no new light upon it, I should have felt it to be my duty to withhold my papers from the public eye.

Observing the blessing pronounced on "him that readeth, and on them that hear, the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein," I had a desire to enter upon it, accompanied, I think, with some sense of my dependence upon the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit. The reason also assigned why we should study this part of the Holy Scriptures in particular,—that "the time is at hand," seemed to have greater force after a lapse of above seventeen hundred years than it could have at the time of its being written. I conceived also that the events of the present times, though we should beware of illusive hypotheses founded upon them, yet called for a special attention to prophecy. They might also be expected to throw some light upon it. Some late writers upon the subject appear to understand many things which earlier ones did not; and there is reason to expect that prophecy will be understood much better in years to come than it is at present.

The method I pursued was, first to read it carefully over, and, as I went on, to note down what first struck me as the meaning. After reducing these notes into something like a scheme of the prophecy, I examined the best expositors I could procure, and, comparing my own first thoughts with theirs, was better able to judge of their justness. Some of them were confirmed, some corrected, and many added to them.

I have dealt but little in quotations, refusing nothing, however, from any writer, which appeared to me to be just. And as to what appeared other-

wise, I have generally passed it over without attempting to refute it, as being rather desirous of giving the true meaning than of proving that other men's opinions were founded in mistake.

The exposition of a prophecy, delivered in symbolical language, must be liable to many mistakes. A style so highly figurative furnishes great scope for the imagination, which, unless it be accompanied with a sober and just judgment, will lead us into labyrinths of error. How far I have been enabled to avoid them, and to succeed in throwing light upon any part of the prophecy, it is not for me to decide. This I know, my object has been to obtain its true meaning, and to communicate it in a manner suited, not to the curious, but to the Christian reader.

The manuscript has lain by me between four and five years, during which I have frequently re-examined its contents, and availed myself of any further light which by reading or reflection has appeared on the subject. During this period several of our most highly esteemed friends, who joined in the request, are gone the way of all the earth. We shall soon follow them. We have seen enough, amidst all the troubles of our times, to gladden our hearts; and trust that our children will see greater things than these.

I am your affectionate Pastor,

Kettering, March 21, 1815.

ANDREW FULLER.

SCHEME OF THE PROPHECY.

THE addresses to the seven churches are applicable to all other churches in similar circumstances in all ages, but not prophetic.—The things which the apostle was commanded to write being those which he *had seen*, those which *were*, and those which *should be hereafter*, prove that the prophecy commences, not from the time of the vision, but probably from the ascension of Christ, in like manner as the four monarchies of Daniel commenced from the rising up of the Babylonish empire, many years before the time of the vision.—Chapters i.—iii.

The book of *seven seals* contains the whole of the prophecy, the trumpets being only a subdivision of the seventh seal, and the vials of the seventh trumpet.—Chapters iv., v.

The opening of the *first seal*,—on which appeared “a white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering and to conquer,” represents the great progress of the gospel in the apostolic age.—Chapter vi. 1, 2.

The opening of the *second seal*,—on which there appeared “a red horse, and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another,”—signifies the wars between the Jews and the Romans, who had united in persecuting Christ and his followers.—Chap. vi. 3, 4.

The opening of the *third seal*,—on which there appeared a “black horse, and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand,” &c.,—denotes a famine, or scarcity approaching to famine, in which the necessaries of life would be required to be weighed out with the utmost care, and which was fulfilled during the reigns of the *Antonines*.—Chap. vi. 5, 6.

The opening of the *fourth seal*,—on which there appeared “a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and hell followed,”—signifies great mortality, owing to the intrigues and intestine wars in the empire, between the years 193 and 270, which produced famine and pestilence, and by diminishing the number of men, gave ascendancy to the beasts of prey.—Chap. vi. 7, 8.

The *fifth seal* was opened, on which were seen “under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them, and it was said unto them that they should rest [or wait] yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also, and their brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” This seal represents the state of the church about the year 270, when it had endured nine out of the ten heathen persecutions, and was about to endure the tenth, under Dioclesian and Maximian, after which God would avenge their cause, by an utter overthrow of their persecutors.—Chap. vi. 9–11.

The opening of the *sixth seal*,—on which appeared “an earthquake,” and as it were a day of judgment,—signified the revolution of Constantine, when the pagan empire was overthrown, and the prayers of the souls under the altar were answered.—Chap. vi. 12–17.

The “sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads” portends danger to the spiritual interests of the church from its outward prosperity, and distinguishes the faithful from the crowd of nominal Christians that would now be pressing into it.—Chap. vii. 1–8.

This chapter concludes with a vision of the martyrs who had overcome, serving to strengthen the servants of God to encounter new trials.—Chap. vii. 9–17.

The *seventh seal* is opened.—A solemn pause ensues.—It is then subdivided into *seven trumpets*, which are put into the hands of seven angels; and the sounding of them is prefaced by “another angel’s offering up the prayers of the saints with much incense, filling his censer with fire, and casting it into the earth,” denoting that the judgments to be brought by the trumpets would be in answer to their prayers.—Chap. viii. 1–5.

The sounding of the *first four trumpets*, which affect “the earth, the sea, the fountains of waters, and the sun, moon, and stars,” denote the judgments on the *continental*, the *maritime*, and the *mountainous* parts of the empire, by the invasion of the northern nations, the issue of which was the eclipse of the *government* supreme and subordinate. As the seals overthrew the pagan empire, these overthrow the Christian.—Chap. viii. 6–12.

The sounding of the *fifth*, or *first woe-trumpet*, on which followed “smoke from the bottomless pit, and locusts,” represents popery as filling the world with infernal darkness, and thus preparing the way for Mahomedan delusion and depredation.—Chap. ix. 1–12.

The *sixth*, or *second woe-trumpet*, is complex, relating partly to the “loosing of the four angels in Euphrates,” followed by “an army of horsemen,” and partly to the conduct of “the rest of the men, who were not killed by these plagues,”—the former denoting the rise and ravages of the Turks, by whom the eastern empire, and with it the Greek church, were overthrown; and the latter, the idolatries and cruelties of the members of the western church, who, instead of taking warning from the fate of the eastern, repented not, but persisted in corrupting the religion of Jesus Christ, and in persecuting his witnesses.—Chap. ix. 13–21, to chap. xi. 14.

The vision of the angel with “a little book open,” whose cry was fol-

lowed by "seven thunders," refers to the western or papal church, which the prophecy now goes some ages back to take up, and which occupies the whole of what follows till the beast and the false prophet are taken, or down to the times of the Millennium.—The "thunders" may probably refer to the same things; in the form of a general threatening, which are afterwards particularly disclosed under the vials; for it appears to be of their execution that the angel swears by Him that liveth for ever and ever that there shall be *no delay*: but that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, (that is, in the times of the pouring out of the vials,) the mystery of God should be finished. This accounts for the command "not to write them," as they would be particularized under the vials.—Chap. x.

The eleventh and three following chapters are considered as *three general descriptions* of the false church, chiefly under the 1260 years of antichristian usurpation, together with the state of the true church during the same period. These general descriptions of course are not confined to the times of this or that trumpet, but comprehend those of the greater part of the trumpets.

The *first general description*, contained in the eleventh chapter, denominates the false church "Gentiles," and the true church "witnesses," who bear testimony against them. It leaves out of "the temple of God" the place occupied by the former. It represents, by the "slaughter of the witnesses," the prevalence of the antichristian party; by their "resurrection and ascension to heaven," the protestant Reformation; and by the "earthquake," in which a tenth part of the city fell, (and which, by the way, marks the termination of the sixth, or second woe-trumpet,) the revolution in France. By the sounding of the seventh angel, a signal is given of the progress of the gospel. And, by the song of the heavenly choir, are intimated the judgments which should be inflicted on the antichristian party, and the Millennial glory that should follow.—Chap. xi.

The *second general description*, contained in the twelfth chapter, represents the true church, prior to the introduction of antichristian corruptions, as "clothed with the sun, having the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." These corruptions originate in a third part of the stars of heaven being drawn from their orbits by the tail of the dragon, and cast upon the earth; or by the rulers of the church being seduced by the riches and honours of the Roman empire. The dragon, having thus prevailed over a part of the Christian church, aims to devour the other. The true church fleeth into the wilderness, where she exists without legal protection or toleration till the Reformation in the sixteenth century, when Michael fights her battles, and the dragon is cast down. Succeeding persecutions are the effect of his defeat.—Chap. xii.

The *third general description*, contained in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters, represents a "beast rising out of the sea, with seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, &c., signifying that secular government by which the false church has been all along supported, namely, the Roman empire under its last head, after it had been divided into ten independent kingdoms, each of which was a horn of the beast. When paganism was overthrown, the beast in one of its heads was "as it were wounded to death;" but, when Christianity became so corrupted as to be paganized, "the deadly wound was healed."—Chap. xiii. 1-10.

Another beast "rose out of the earth, with two horns like a lamb, but who spake as a dragon,"—denoting the hierarchy, or false church itself, which is contemporary, and all along acts in concert, with the first or secular beast.—Chap. xiii. 11-18.

During the ravages of these beasts, and in opposition to them and their followers, appears "a Lamb standing upon Mount Zion, and with him 144,000, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." Their victory over antichristian error and corruption at the Reformation is signified by "the voice of many waters, like thunder, and of harpers harping with their harps." The spirit lately excited to carry the gospel to the heathen is thought to be denoted by the evangelical "angel." The diminution and approaching dissolution of the antichristian power is represented by "another angel following, and saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen!" And the danger of symbolizing and tampering with antichristianism is suggested by the solemn warnings of a "third angel." Then follows that of which the signal only had been given in the cry of the second angel—namely, the overthrow of Babylon, which is denoted by a harvest and a vintage.—Chap. xiv.

Three general descriptions having been given, each of which carried us to the end of the 1260 years, the series of the prophecy, from the time of the sounding of the seventh, or third woe-trumpet, is now resumed. This trumpet wears a twofold aspect; it is partly a woe-trumpet, and partly what may be called a jubilee-trumpet. In the former view the SEVEN VIALS are a subdivision of it—in the latter it comprehends the Millennium, and all that follows to the end of the prophecy.—Chap. xv.

The sounding of the seventh angel is the signal for the commencement of the pouring out of the vials, and is supposed to have taken place within the last five-and-twenty years. The vials are interpreted on the principle of their resemblance to the trumpets:—namely, the *first*, poured out on the "earth," is supposed to denote the late wars on the continent, between France and the other continental powers; the *second*, poured upon the "sea," the wars carrying on in the maritime nations of Spain and Portugal; the *third*, poured upon the "rivers and fountains of waters," the wars which, if the principle here adopted be just, will ere long befall Italy and Savoy, the countries where was shed in shocking profusion the blood of the Waldenses; the *fourth*, poured upon the "sun," the oppression of the supreme government to which the antichristian church will be subjected at the time; the *fifth*, poured on the "seat of the beast," such judgments as will either drive him from his den, or render him very miserable in it; the *sixth*, poured on "Euphrates," and producing the battle of "Armageddon," partly the overthrow of the Turkish empire, and partly the temporal ruin of the adherents of popery; the *seventh*, poured into the "air," the overthrow of the spiritual power of popery, and of every other species of false religion.—Chap. xvi.

The three following chapters are considered as *Notes of Illustration*, containing more particular accounts of several subjects which have been already introduced. In the first of them (chap. xvii.) the false church is described under the opprobrious name of "the great whore," and the powers which support her under that of "a beast with seven heads and ten horns." This beast, namely, the Roman empire, "was, and is not, and yet is." When it was pagan, it existed with all its beastly properties; when it became Christian, it was supposed to have lost them, and to be a beast no longer; but by the corruptions introduced into Christianity, and which were supported by it, the beast still continued.

The "seven heads" of the beast have a twofold application.—First, they are said to be "seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth;" referring to the seven hills on which Rome, when in its full extent, is well known to have stood, and so pointing out the seat of the hierarchy.—They are also said to be "seven kings," that is, governments, under which the empire had subsisted, did subsist, or would subsist hereafter. The forms under which

it had subsisted, but which were passed away at the time of the commencement of the prophecy, were *kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, and military tribunes*; the form under which it then subsisted was that of *emperors*; and that which was "yet to come, and to continue a short space," was the government which succeeded the overthrow of the emperors, and continued under various changes for about 300 years, till the days of Charlemagne; when a government was established which combined all the nations of Europe in support of the antichristian hierarchy. This short-lived intermediate power might, on some accounts, be considered as the "seventh" head of the beast, and as such be distinguished from its last head, which, in this view, would be the "eighth;" but upon the whole it was rather to be considered as belonging to that in which it terminated, and which in this view would be "of the seven."

The "ten horns" are the kingdoms of Europe, which, till the Reformation, all united with the empire in supporting the harlot; but which have already begun and will go on to hate her, to eat her flesh, and to burn her with fire.—Chap. xvii.

The second of these *Notes of Illustration* (contained in the 18th chapter and the first eight verses of the 19th) is a *sacred ode*, sent, as it were, from heaven, to be sung at the overthrow of the antichristian church, in which are celebrated not only the "fall of Babylon," but "the marriage of the Lamb;" that is, not only the termination of the reign of the beast, but the introduction of the Millennial reign of Christ, which shall follow upon it.—Chap. xviii.; xix. 1-8.

The third and last of these *Notes* (which begins at the ninth verse of the 19th chapter) describes the *actual accomplishment* of the fall of Babylon, which the foregoing ode had anticipated. He whose name is the Word of God goes forth "riding upon a white horse," (the appropriate symbol for the success of the gospel,) joined by his faithful followers. This provokes the adherents of the beast and of the false prophet, who, gathering together their forces to oppose them, perish in the attempt.—Chap. xix. 9-21.

As the overthrow of the antichristian hierarchy was celebrated in the preceding ode, under the symbol of "the fall of Babylon," prior to its actual accomplishment; so was the Millennium under that of "the marriage supper of the Lamb." This glorious period is now introduced as *actually taking place*. The "beast and the false prophet," or the secular and ecclesiastical powers, being fallen, the dragon himself is next seized and thrust into a state of confinement.—"Thrones" may denote stations of importance both in the world and in the church, which will now be filled by righteous men; thus "the kingdom is given to the people of the saints of the Most High;" and as the public mind will favour it, righteousness will every where prevail; corruptions, oppressions, wars, tumults, and rebellions, will cease from the earth, and all nations feel towards each other as children of the same family.—Now "judgment" is given to the martyrs, inasmuch as the cause for which they were slain is vindicated, and their memory honoured; while "the rest," or the remnant of the antichristian party, who escaped from the battle in which their leaders were "taken," will be as dead men till the thousand years are ended. To them this glorious period will be a burial, but to the other a "resurrection."

After the Millennium, Satan is loosed for a little season, and makes one more desperate effort to corrupt the world, and to destroy the church.—This brings on the general conflagration—the resurrection of the dead—and the last judgment.—Chap. xx.

After this appear "the new heavens and the new earth," spoken of by Peter, "wherein dwelleth righteousness." The world, purified from sin and

its effects, becomes the everlasting abode of the righteous, who, having been raised from the dead, are immortal.—The whole animate and inanimate creation, in so far as it has been “made subject to the vanity” of subserving the cause of evil, is emancipated, and possesses that for which it has “travailed in pain,” from the fall of man until now.—No more shall the earth be polluted and desolated by a succession of *beasts*; but lo, “the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God!”

CONCLUSION.—The present the period of the vials; or that space of time which begins with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, and ends in the Millennium.—The termination of the 1260 years probably uncertain. A time of persecution to be previously expected.—Great success will attend the preaching of the gospel before the Millennium.—Aspect of the present times.—The Millennial glory.—Concluding reflections on the recent changes in Europe.

DISCOURSE I.

THE INTRODUCTION AND PREPARATORY VISION.

Revelation i.

I HAVE lately expressed a wish to enter upon this difficult part of the Holy Scriptures; not because I conceive myself at present equal to the undertaking, but because I think I understand something of it, and hope, by going through it in the way of exposition, to understand more. I enter on it with fear; but as I shall not attempt to explain that which appears to me of doubtful import, I hope it may not be presumptuous, but a profitable undertaking.*

Ver. 1-3. The book takes its title, it seems, from the first verse. All Scripture is a revelation, in some sense, but this is a disclosure of things to come.

Christ is the great Prophet of the church. He it was, as we shall see, that was found worthy to open the sealed book. It is necessary to distinguish between the knowledge of Christ as a Divine person, and that which he possesses as the Prophet of his church. As Divine he knows all things; all things are naked to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do; but as a Prophet he receives his messages from the Father, and makes them known to us. In this sense he knew not the day of judgment; that is, it was no part of the revelation which God gave to him to make known to men. As Christ in the character of a Prophet has these things revealed to him, so, in communicating them after his ascension, he made use of an angel. It might have been too much for a mortal man to be admitted directly to converse with him in his glorified state.

The writer introduces himself to the churches in the character of a *witness*, declaring that the things which he was about to communicate were from above—they were “the word of God,” and therefore might be depended upon—“the testimony of Jesus Christ,” on the fulfilment of which he rested the truth of the gospel, and which he himself in vision plainly “saw.”

* These Discourses were delivered in the years 1809 and 1810, drawn out in 1811, and have lain by from that time to the present (1815).

To induce us to give the most serious attention to the subject, a blessing is pronounced on those who "read, and hear, and keep" the words of this prophecy, especially as the time of its fulfilment was at hand. I recollect no other part of Scripture that is prefaced with such an inducement to read and understand and practically regard it. The prophecy must be of immediate concern to the church of Christ, and requires to be read and heard, not for the gratifying of curiosity, but for the obedience of faith. We must "keep" it, as one engaged in a voyage through dangerous seas keeps his chart, and consults it on all necessary occasions. It is that to the New Testament church which the pillar of the cloud was to the church in the wilderness, guiding it through the labyrinths of antichristian errors and corruptions. It must not be neglected under a notion of its being hard to be understood. As well might the mariner amidst the rocks neglect his friendly chart under an idea of its being difficult to understand and apply it.

It would seem, too, from this promise, that the successful study of the prophecy depends not merely on literary attainments, but on a practical regard to the things contained in it. Whatever advantages attach to the former, and these are many and great, they will not succeed nor obtain the blessing without the latter.

Ver. 4-7. The proconsular Asia had probably been the chief seat of the writer's labours since the death of the apostle Paul. To the churches in this province, therefore, he was directed to address the prophecy. The benediction is affectionate and appropriate. The periphrasis used of God the Father, "Who is, and who was, and who is to come," is singularly appropriate as an introduction to a prophecy concerning the mutability of creatures. The "seven Spirits" are the abundant gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit in respect of his abundant gifts and graces. The number seven is not only a well-known symbol of perfection, but corresponds with the number of the churches; and as they represent the whole church, so these describe the Holy Spirit in his rich and abundant influences.

To the blessing from the Father and the Holy Spirit he adds, "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth." By the first of these appellations our Lord accredits the prophecy as being his testimony; and by the last two cheers his suffering followers, by reminding them of his having emerged from death and obtained a complete ascendancy over all his and their enemies.

And now, having mentioned the name of Jesus Christ, he cannot leave it without adding a sweet doxology on his dying love, and its interesting effects—"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Nor has he yet taken leave of this subject; Christ's suffering people must be directed to his second coming, when the persecuting Jews who pierced him in his person, and the persecuting Gentiles who were now piercing him in his members, will be called to account. To their just punishment, dreadful as it will be, the servants of God will add their "Amen."

Ver. 8. The apostle, after expatiating on the glory of Christ in his salutation, now introduces him as speaking himself. That these are his words, and not those of the Father, will appear from comparing them with chap. i. 1, and xxii. 6-16. It was Jesus Christ, and not the Father, who communicated, through the angel, with his servant John. The Father is sometimes referred to in the prophecy; but, if I mistake not, it is in the third person only; not as speaking, but as spoken of. Jesus Christ therefore is "the

Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty;" and consequently is able to preserve his church, and to execute the punishments denounced in this prophecy against her enemies.

Ver. 9-20. It was usual for the most eminent prophets to be introduced to their work by an extraordinary vision. Such was the introduction of Isaiah, (chap. vi.) of Jeremiah, and of Ezekiel; and such is that of John. Having been banished to the Isle of Patmos by Domitian for preaching Christ, the Spirit of prophecy came upon him on the Lord's day, when he heard from behind him a great voice as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and what thou seest write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia. Turning to see whence the voice proceeded, he saw "seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of them one like unto the Son of Man." It was from him therefore that the great voice proceeded. In short, he saw the Lord Jesus Christ, who as to his human nature had lived and died on earth, but who as to his Divine person was "the first and the last," standing, as the great High Priest over the house of God, in the midst of his churches, clothed with ineffable glory.

The effect of such a vision was more than a frail mortal could sustain. He who when his Lord was upon earth leaned familiarly on his bosom, now "fell at his feet as dead." But, laying his right hand upon him, he said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." This impressive vision would not only excite in his mind a deep interest in the kingdom of Christ, and so prepare him for what he was to see, and hear, and write; but must have tended greatly to relieve him from his anxieties for his brethren and companions in tribulation from whom he had been separated. All the apostles were dead: he only was left, and the heathen rulers had banished him. Hell and death threatened to swallow up the church. In this situation he is told not to fear, for that his Lord lived, and had the control of both the invisible and visible world.

Being commanded to write "the things which he *had seen*, the things that *were*, and the things that *should be hereafter*," we may conclude that what he wrote respected not only the future state of the church from the time of the vision, but the whole gospel dispensation, from the ascension of Christ to the end of the world.

What is said of the "seven stars and seven golden candlesticks" would tend greatly to encourage both the ministers and the churches of Christ. There was a golden candlestick in the tabernacle, and in the second temple, Exod. xxv. 31-40; Zech. iv. 2. That was but one candlestick, though it had seven branches; but these are seven candlesticks; agreeing with the different constitutions of the Old and New Testament church, the former being national, and the latter congregational.

DISCOURSE II.

THE EPISTLES TO THE CHURCHES.

Rev. ii. 1-17.

BEFORE we enter on these epistles distinctly, it is proper to make a few general remarks.

First, Some have considered these churches as *prophetically representing the different states of the church at large under the gospel dispensation*. There is no doubt but analogies may be found between them; but it appears to me that the hypothesis is unfounded. The church of Ephesus, if designed to represent the whole Christian church in the age of the apostles, might be expected to sustain as high a character at least as any that follow; whereas Smyrna, in respect of its purity, is manifestly superior to it. Every thing addressed to the latter is in its praise; which is not the case with the former. But surely it is not true that any age of the church since that of the apostles is to be compared with it, much less that it has excelled it in evangelical purity.

• Others, doubting the justness of this hypothesis, have considered the epistles to the churches as referring to *the then present state of the church*, and the sealed book to that which was *future*. And this they consider as agreeing with the division of the book into “things which the writer *had seen*, things which *were*, and things which *should be hereafter*,” chap. i. 19. This is Mr. LOWMAN’s view of it. When I entered upon these Discourses from the pulpit I adopted this opinion; but before I had proceeded far in the work I was compelled to give it up; the reasons for which will appear when we enter on the opening of the seals, in chap. vi., under the fifth general remark in Discourse VI.

Instead of considering the epistles to the seven churches either as prophetic, or as descriptive of the state of the *church at large as it then was*, I should rather consider them as descriptive of *the state of those seven churches as they then were*, and as designed to furnish encouragements, reproofs, warnings, and counsels to *all other churches and Christians, in all future ages, as their cases are found to resemble theirs*. The application ought not to be confined to one age more than to another, nor even to collective bodies: every one, in every age, that hath an ear to hear, is called to “hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

In applying them to ourselves, we should consider the great Head of the church as watching over us, and closely observing the state of our hearts towards him, with all our proceedings, whether good or evil; and inquire what would be his address to us were he to commission an angel or an apostle to write to us.

Secondly, By the epistles being addressed to the *angels*, we are not to understand them as concerning the pastors only, in distinction from the churches, but to consider them as their representatives. That which the Spirit saith in these epistles is “to the churches.”

Thirdly, In every address to the churches Christ assumes a distinct *character*, taken from some one part of the description given of him in the preceding vision; each of which, if we rightly understand it, will be found to be appropriate to the character or circumstances of the church addressed.

Fourthly, Every address begins with *commendation*, provided there be any thing to commend. This shows that Christ knows all, and notices that which is good amongst us as well as that which is evil; nay, that he takes more pleasure in noticing the good than in complaining of the evil—an example worthy of our imitation in dealing with one another. If we wish to reclaim our brethren who have fallen into sin, we must begin by appreciating the good in them, and by candidly commending it, before we reprove them for their faults. Such was the conduct of Paul to the Corinthians, when about to censure them for their abuse of the Lord's supper—"Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you."

Fifthly, Most of the churches have somewhat on account of which they are *censured* and *admonished*. This is a humbling truth, even of the first and purest churches; how much more of those in our times! If the Son of God, whose eyes are as a flaming fire, were to pronounce our character, would there not be "somewhat against us?" We can see each other's errors and defects; but it were to much more advantage if we could detect our own.

Finally, Every epistle concludes with a *promise* to him that overcometh, and an *exhortation* to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Professing Christians in this world are soldiers enlisted under the banner of Christ. Some have proved deserters; many have been partially overcome; the Captain of the Lord's host here addresses them, holding forth the glory which awaits them who are finally victorious.

Ver. 1-7. *Ephesus* was the metropolis of the Proconsular Asia; and it is probable that all these churches were planted by the labours of the apostle Paul, during his two years' residence at Ephesus, when "all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks," Acts xix. 10.

The Ephesians appear to have been in a good state when the apostle Paul took leave of their elders at Miletus; but he then gave them to expect a time of trial after his departure, and which by this time seems to have come upon them.

The *character* which our Lord here assumes is taken from chap. i. 16, 20, and seems to contain both encouragement and warning; which fitly applies to *their* character, as partly commendable and partly blamable. They had been distinguished by their exertions in promoting the cause of Christ, and their sufferings on account of it. They "worked," yea, they "laboured" for Christ, and, when called to encounter persecution, bore it with "patience." They were zealous also in the exercise of a strict and holy discipline, not suffering evil characters and impostors to remain amongst them; and in this course of obedience they had "not fainted." Altogether, this is a high character. Yet even here is something amiss; they had "left their first love." We see here that the Lord looketh at the heart. We may retain our character and respectability among the churches, while yet, as to the state of our minds, Christ hath somewhat against us. To leave our first love is a very common case, so much so that some will give young Christians to expect it as a matter of course; but Christ treats it as a *sin*, and calls on the parties to "repent" of it, yea, and threatens to "remove their candlestick out of its place except they repented." To decline in our attachment to Christ, his gospel, his ordinances, his people, and his cause, is practically reproaching him; it is saying to those around us, We have not found that in his religion which we once expected to find. "O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me!"

A declension in love is followed by a degeneracy in good works. If this had not been the case, they would not have been admonished to do their "first works." Either they were neglected, or attended to in a half-hearted manner, different from what they were at the beginning.

The Lord, to show that he did not find fault with them with pleasure, again commends them as far as they were commendable: they hated the doctrine of the *Nicolaitanes*, which he also hated. Clemens of Alexandria, as quoted by Eusebius, speaks of these as a people who practised a community of wives, living in fornication and adultery. It is thought, and with some probability, that they were the people to whom Peter and Jude refer—the Antinomians of the primitive church.

If we have an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto this church, we shall learn from it, among other things,—that works are the chief test of character—that in serving the Lord in this world there is great occasion for patience under sufferings, and discrimination of characters—and that, while justly censuring others, we may decline in spirituality ourselves.

The promise to him that overcometh is, that he shall "eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." That which grew in the earthly paradise became inaccessible by sin; but no flaming sword nor cherubim prevent access to this.

Ver. 8–11. Of the church of *Smyrna*, as well as several others, no mention is made except in these epistles.—Polycarp, the disciple of John, was pastor of it, and suffered martyrdom. Whether he was the angel here addressed is uncertain; but when he suffered, which was about the year 162, he speaks of himself as having served Christ eighty-six years, and Irenæus speaks of him as having been ordained bishop of Smyrna by the apostles. This church seems distinguished by its *persecutions*; all that is said has respect to them.

The character under which Christ addresses them is taken from chap. i. 11, 18: "These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and is alive." The former is expressive of his Godhead, and suggests how vain it is for the enemies of the gospel to oppose him. In the latter he holds up himself as an example of persecution before them, and as an earnest of deliverance from it.

The commendation of their "works" in the midst of tribulation and poverty (poverty, it is likely, arising from their persecutions) is much to their honour. We see here of what little account worldly wealth is in the estimation of Christ. We hear much of *respectable* congregations and churches, when little else is meant but that they are numerous or opulent; but the estimation of Christ goes on quite another principle. What a contrast there is between this church and that at Laodicea! They were rich in this world's goods, but poor towards God; these were poor in this world, but rich towards God.

It is intimated that they had not only to contend with heathens, but *Jews*, who had a synagogue in this city; and it is remarkable that, in the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, the Jews are spoken of as being very active in it, and as joining the heathens in kindling the fire. We see here to what a state of mind that people were left after having rejected Christ: they had been the people of God, but were now no longer such, but blasphemers: their synagogues had been places where God had been worshipped; there our Lord himself attended, and to them the friends of God in heathen countries had been used to resort; but hence they became the synagogues of Satan!

They are given to expect more persecutions, but are encouraged to meet them with fortitude. The devil would stir up his agents to imprison some

of them for a season, and some of them might expect to die for the name of Christ; but if faithful unto death, they are promised a crown of life.

It was about sixty-seven years after this that Polycarp, and other members of this church, suffered martyrdom; the account of which is given by Eusebius in a letter from the church of Smyrna. When Polycarp was apprehended by his persecutors, they set him on an ass, and brought him to the place of judgment. He was met by some of the magistrates, who took him into their carriage, and tried to persuade him to deny Christ and save his life, but which he resisted. On his approaching the place of execution, the proconsul, ashamed of putting so aged and venerable a man to death, urged him to blaspheme Christ. It was then that he answered, "Eighty-six years I have served him, during all which time he never did me injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" When further urged, his answer was, "I am a Christian." When threatened with wild beasts, he said, "Bring them forth." When with fire, he reminded them of the eternal fire that awaited the ungodly. His last address to God had more of praise in it than of prayer.

It is a high honour to this persecuted people, that nothing is said to them in a way of reproof. To be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in an evil generation," is great, even in respect of our fellow creatures; but to be without rebuke from Christ himself is much greater.

To this suffering church Christ saith, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Let every one that hath an ear hear this language, and be armed by it against the fear of man.

Ver. 12-17. *Pergamos* was a city of Mysia, not far from *Troas*. We find the apostle Paul at this latter city more than once; and "a door was here opened to him of the Lord, to preach Christ's gospel," 2 Cor. ii. 12. Here it was that he afterwards commemorated the Lord's death with the disciples: and as he had to wait seven days for their coming together, it would seem as if they had to come from some great distance. The church at *Pergamos* might therefore be planted about the same time.

The character under which our Lord addresses them is taken from chap. i. 16,—“He that hath the sharp sword with two edges”—and wears a terrible aspect towards a corrupt party amongst them, against whom he threatens to wage war.

Kind and encouraging things however are addressed to the body of them. Christ knew their “works,” and their firm adherence to him under great trials and persecutions, in which one of their number in particular, and probably their pastor, had suffered martyrdom. *Pergamos* was a city said to be “sacred to the gods:” here therefore we might expect to find the headquarters of idolatry and persecutions; and their standing firm in such a place, and at such times, was much to their honour.

But there were “a few things” amongst them which displeased Christ. Some of the members tampered with idolatry and its ordinary attendant, fornication; and the rest connived at it. This is called “the doctrine of Balaam,” because it was in this way that that wicked prophet drew Israel into sin. They had also some of the “Nicolaitanes” amongst them, whose principles and practices the Lord abhorred.

They are called upon to repent on pain of Christ's displeasure, who threatens, except they repent, to come unto them quickly, and to execute the judgments of his word against them, even against the transgressors themselves, and all who favoured them.

These warnings and threatenings require our attention, and that of all who are guilty in a greater or less degree of the same evils; nor do the encourage-

ments to them that overcome require it less. The "hidden manna," the "white stone," and the "new name," being promised as the reward of them that overcome, seems to refer to the blessedness and honour of a future state, rather than of the present; though Christians doubtless have a foretaste of them even in this life. The "hidden manna" refers to those who should deny themselves of "eating things sacrificed to idols," and other carnal enjoyments, for Christ's sake; and denotes that there is a feast in reserve for them, which shall infinitely exceed the pleasures of flesh and sense. The Romans in judgment are said to have given their suffrage for condemnation by casting black stones into an urn, and, for absolution, by casting in white stones. White stones are also said to have been given by the Greeks to the conquerors in the Olympic games, with their names upon them, and the value of the prize they won. The application of this is easy.

DISCOURSE III.

THE EPISTLES TO THE CHURCHES CONTINUED.

Rev. ii. 18-29; iii.

THE character under which our Lord addresses the church of *Thyatira* is taken from chap. i. 13-15, with this variation: there he is described as "one like unto the Son of man;" but here he is called "The Son of God;" as denoting his Divine personality. With this agrees what is said of him, that "his eyes were like unto a flame of fire," discerning the secrets of the heart; "and his feet like fine brass," denoting the stability and glory of his proceedings. It is like saying, "All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom you have to do." "Seeing then that ye have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, hold fast your profession!"

It is a high commendation that is given of this church, for its "works, and charity, and service, and patience, and works." Nor is this last word repeated without cause; it denotes their *persevering* and even *abounding* in good works; "the last were more than the first." There are few churches, I fear, of which this can be said. Christ may know our works—and our works; but in most cases the first are more than the last!

Yet, with all this excellence, Christ has a few things against them. With all this positive good, there was a mixture of relative evil. "The woman Jezebel" seems to relate to a corrupt part of the church, who though united to God's people, as Jezebel was by marrying an Israelitish prince, yet were in heart attached to idolatry, and laboured to seduce others into it. As a corrupt part of the Christian church is described as a harlot, so a corrupt part of a particular church may be thus designated; and as Jezebel pretended to Divine authority, and had her prophets to draw the servants of God into literal and spiritual fornication, so these had a kind of religion which would comport with eating and drinking at idolatrous temples, and so with occasional conformity to idolatry. They had had space to repent; the Lord had long borne with them; but his forbearance operated, as it often does, to harden them in their sin. This forbearance, however, will not continue always; Jezebel, with her adulterous paramours, will, except they repent, be cast together into a bed of devouring fire; and this for a warning to the churches.

It seems that, like some among the Corinthians, they boasted of their *knowledge*, as being able to distinguish between eating at an idol's temple and worshipping it (1 Cor. viii. 1); they spoke of their *depths* in knowledge; but Christ calls them "the depths of Satan," and virtually disowns their abettors, distinguishing the faithful from them—"Unto you, I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have hold fast till I come."

The promise to them that overcome the temptations of the present life is a final triumph. They shall judge the world of the ungodly; and those who have persecuted them, and set themselves against them, will then fall before them. As a potter's vessel is broken to shivers, so shall they be destroyed; and all this according to the commission which Christ received of his Father.

Nor is this all: Christ will give unto them that overcome "the morning star." As this is one of the names assumed by himself, (chap. xxii. 16,) it may denote that he himself will be their portion.

The exhortation "He that hath an ear, let him hear," &c., may in this case direct our attention to the following important particulars:—That we may be members of a true church, and yet not true members of the church; that the mixture of evil characters and evil things which at present is found in Christ's visible kingdom greatly tarnishes its glory, but in the end he will gather them out, and then shall the righteous shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father; that we may have space given us for repentance, and yet never repent, which will greatly aggravate our doom; that there is a species of knowledge with which it is our honour and happiness to be unacquainted; finally, that the hope of victory is sufficient to stimulate us under all our conflicts.

Chap. iii. ver. 1-6. The church of *Sardis* lies under the heavy charge of having "a name to live while it was dead." The address to it is taken from chap. i. 4, 20, and may be designed to direct them and their pastor where to look for reviving grace. Nothing is said, in a way of commendation, except to individuals amongst them. This indicates a bad state indeed. There are not many churches but individuals might be found in them who love the Lord. The "works" which Christ knew appear to be the same as those which he had "not found perfect before God." Though therefore he knew them, he did not approve of them. It is bad for the world to be dead; but for a church to be so is worse: this is salt without savour, which is neither fit for the land nor the dunghill. It is bad for individuals to be dead; but for the body of a church to be so is deplorable. It is implied that they were not only destitute of spirituality, but had defiled their garments by worldly conformity.

There had been some good amongst them, or they would not have been called to "remember how they had received and heard;" and some remains of it might continue. As no complaint is made of false doctrine, it is likely they continued orthodox, and kept up the forms of godliness. There seem to have been something of truth, love, and zeal; but they were like dying embers, ready to expire.

Christ admonished them to awake from their supineness, to take the alarm, and to strengthen the things which remained, that were ready to die. This is done by each one beginning with himself, and ending with one another.

The means of recovery from such a state are, "remembering how we received and heard" the gospel at the first. Call to remembrance the former days, not to get comfort under our declensions, but to recover those views and sensations which we had at the beginning of our Christian course. There

were many, also, who at first had received the gospel with much heart, and had heard it with delight, but who in the course of forty years would be removed by death. Let them call to remembrance the love and zeal of their fathers, and be ashamed of their own declensions. If these admonitions did not awaken them, they are given to understand that Christ will come upon them in an unexpected hour, even as a thief cometh in the night.

The "few names which had not defiled their garments" are highly commended. To walk with God at any time is acceptable to him; and to do this while others around us are corrupt is more so. This is being faithful among the faithless. They shall walk with Christ in glory, honour, and purity. With this agrees the promise to them that overcome: "They shall be clothed in white raiment; and Christ will not blot out their names from the book of life." The blessed God is represented as keeping a register of his servants, not as elect, or as redeemed, or as called, but as his *professed followers*. When any turn back, their names are blotted out. Hence at the last judgment it is made the rule of condemnation. "Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire," chap. xx. 15. Some were never there, having never professed to be the followers of Jesus, while others who had been there were blotted out; in either case their names would not be found there. Hence also it is the rule of admission into the New Jerusalem, chap. xxi. 27.

"He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear." Let us beware of judging ourselves by what others think of us. We may have a name to live amongst our brethren, and yet be dead. Our names may be written among the professed followers of Christ, and yet be blotted out when he comes to judgment. But let faithful individuals know, that whatever may be the end of others, Jesus will confess them before his Father, and before his angels.

Ver. 7-13. There is a great difference between the church at *Philadelphia*, and that at *Sardis*: in that there was nothing to commend, in this nothing is censured. The character under which they are addressed is taken from chap. i. 18, and accords with the address itself. "He that was holy and true" approved of them; and "he that had the keys of David, who opened, and no man shut," had "set an open door before them."

The Lord knew and approved of their works, and would make them more and more successful. They were not distinguished by opulence, nor perhaps by any of those things that render a people respectable in the eyes of the world; but of their "little strength" they had made good use; they held fast the truth, and stood firm under persecution, which is of more account in the esteem of Christ than all other things.

This; and most of the primitive churches, met with great opposition from the Jewish synagogue, which is here again called "the synagogue of Satan;" whose members, having rejected the Messiah, were no longer worthy of the name of Jews. They that say they are what they are not, whether it be Jews or Christians, are commonly the bitterest of persecutors. Their "coming" to them in a way of cringing submission may refer to a state of things in which, a door being opened in a way of success, the Christians should be increased in number and in power; while the Jews, owing to their wars with the Romans, would be glad of their friendship.

The gospel is called "the word of Christ's patience," in respect of what it was to them. The retention of it under a succession of cruel persecutions required great patience: yet they had kept it, and the Lord promised in return to keep them in a particular time of trial that was coming upon the world. It might be by a renewal of persecution in the empire, or by the prevailing of corruptions in the church. As the Lord punishes sin by giving men up to sin, so he rewards righteousness by preserving them in the

paths of it. We have had many of these hours of temptation, and may have many more: blessed are they that are preserved through them!

They are directed to look for the coming of their Lord, and to hold fast truth and true religion, lest their adversaries should wrest it out of their hands, and so deprive them of their reward.

The promise to them that overcome is, that they shall be "pillars" in the celestial temple; and, unlike those of the Jewish temple, which were removed by the Chaldeans and by the Romans, shall "go no more out." We are not to reckon the future greatness of men according to their talents in this life, but according to the use made of them. Those who have here had but "a little strength" may there become pillars in the temple. The pillars of the church on earth go out and leave it by death; but those of the church above will abide for ever.

The writing upon them of the name of God, and the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, and of his own new name, doubtless means as much as this—that they shall be treated as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, and as those who are redeemed from among men.

It is for us, both as individuals and as churches, to take encouragement from this address to hold that fast which we have, that no man take our crown.

Ver. 14-22. The Laodicean church appears to have been in the worst state of any of the seven. Sardis, though it had nothing to commend, had a few excellent names: but Laodicea is censured without distinction. Yet even this church is not given up, but *rebuked in love*.

The character under which the Laodiceans are addressed is that of "the Amen, the faithful and true witness." Being lifted up with their riches, they might be tempted to refuse this faithful witness that was borne against them; but, however disagreeable, it was "true." Christ is here called "The beginning of the creation of God." It is true that as to his human nature he was himself created; the name here assumed, however, does not refer to this, but to his being the Head ($\alpha\rho\chi\eta$) and First Cause of creation. Thus, in Col. i. 15, he is called "the first-born of every creature;" not as being himself a creature, but the First Cause of creation: "For (it is added) by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." A message from such a character deserved their serious attention.

Christ knew their works, but could not approve of them; for they were "neither cold nor hot." They may be said to be cold who have no religion, and pretend to none; and they to be hot who are zealously engaged in Christ's work: but these people were neither this nor that. They were not decidedly religious, and yet would not let religion alone.

This state of mind is represented as being peculiarly offensive to Christ. To halt between truth and error, God and the world, is worse in many respects than to be openly irreligious. Corrupt Christianity is more offensive to God than open infidelity. No man thinks the worse of religion for what he sees in the openly profane; but it is otherwise in respect of religious professors. If he that nameth the name of Christ depart not from iniquity, the honour of Christ is affected by his misconduct.

These people appear to have been very proud, and with a very ignorant of themselves. Their opulence seems to have lifted them up. Religion seldom thrives with much worldly prosperity. Men covet such things, and value themselves upon them; but they are commonly snares to their souls. It is

a hard thing for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. If these were the "riches" of which they boasted, it shows that the estimate of worldly greatness, formed by the faithful and true witness, is very different from that of the generality of men. Of what account is it in his sight to be rich and increased in goods, while as to our spiritual concerns we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?

Being charged with *blindness*, and counselled to use means to remove it, it would seem, however, that the riches of which they boasted included those of the mind; and that they were proud of their *knowledge* and *gifts* as well as of their wealth. Like the Corinthians, "they were full, they were rich, they reigned as kings" without the apostles. There is much of this still among professing Christians. One party looks down upon another, and values itself for its superior light; one declaims against Pharisaism in the true spirit of a Pharisee; another is busy about the mote in his brother's eye, regardless of the beam in his own. The sentence of the faithful and true witness, concerning all that are wise and righteous in their own eyes, is, Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and knowest it not!

In respect of the *counsel* offered them, they are addressed like sinners in common, who knew not the Saviour. This was probably the case with many of them; and if some had known him, yet, being in a backsliding state, the best counsel that could be given them was, that they should come as sinners *immediately* to the Saviour. They are directed to seek the true *riches*, the true *righteousness*, and the true *wisdom*, and to deal with Christ for them; not as giving him any valuable consideration for them, (for this as being *poor* they could not,) but as parting with all for them. This is "buying without money and without price." This is the way in which sinners come to Christ at first, and this is the way for backsliders to be restored. The child that has been ill taught must begin anew, and go over every rule again.

To reconcile them to this sharp and humbling reproof, they are assured that these were not the words of an enemy, but of one that bore them goodwill. It shows the great forbearance and long-suffering goodness of our Lord, even towards them that have greatly dishonoured him. It also teaches us to put a right construction on Divine rebukes, receiving them as the rod of correction to bring us to repentance.

To counsel is added a word of encouragement and of warning;—"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Here again they seem to be treated rather as sinners than as Christians. If the common invitations of the gospel be acceptable, they are welcome to them. Jesus stands at their door, and knocks for admission. Do they hear him? and will they open the door and welcome him? If so, he will come in, and be their guest. But if they are so taken up with their present company as not to hear him, or at least not to open to him, he will go away as he did from the Jewish temple—"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

If this serious and tender address did not reclaim them as a body, yet the promise to them that should overcome, that they should "sit down with him in his throne, as he also had overcome, and was set down with his Father in his throne," might encourage individuals to return and hold out to the end.

Let these censures, warnings, and encouragements, addressed to the seven churches in Asia, as a specimen of the whole, be heard and regarded by the churches of Christ, and by every individual member of them, to the end of time.

DISCOURSE IV.

THE VISION PRECEDING THE BOOK WITH SEVEN SEALS.

Rev. iv.

THE whole of this chapter is introductory to what follows. The scene of the vision is the heavenly world. No where else could it have been with equal propriety. Where, but at the fountain of intelligence and influence, should a creature learn the secrets of futurity? When Ahab's destiny was revealed to Micaiah, the scene of the vision was laid in heaven, 1 Kings xxii. 19-22.

A door being opened, the apostle is invited to enter in. Having entered, he immediately finds himself under prophetic inspiration. He was not removed from the earth as to his body; but as Ezekiel was carried by the spirit to Jerusalem, and saw what was transacting there, while his body was still in Chaldea, so it was with him; he was still in the Isle of Patmos, while rapt up by Divine inspiration, and introduced into the immediate presence of God.

In this supernatural state of mind he beheld a "throne," and one "sitting upon it," who was the supreme Disposer of all the concerns of creatures. Such a sight would impress him with the conviction that whatever should befall the church, or the world, it was all according to his will who ruled in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, ver. 1, 2.

No description is given of the ever-blessed God, only that his glory seemed to resemble the lustre of certain precious stones; and this may allude to the visible glory of the God of Israel as displayed in the temple. A rainbow was also round about the throne, in appearance like an emerald. We know that this from of old was a sign of peace and good-will to men. It may here denote that the glorious majesty of God, which in itself was too much to be endured, would be displayed towards his church in connexion with covenant mercy, ver. 3.

Having spoken of the king eternal, immortal, and invisible, sitting on his throne, he next describes his retinue. Here are twenty-four seats, or subordinate thrones, on which sat twenty-four elders, clothed in white, and with crowns of gold upon their heads. The "lightnings, and thunderings, and voices," may denote not only the awful majesty of God, as when he appeared at Sinai, but that from him proceeded all the terrible judgments which would shortly afflict the earth. Besides these, there were "seven lamps of fire before the throne," which are said to be "the seven spirits of God;" answering, it may be, to the seven candlesticks, and being as it were a lamp to each candlestick. The light imparted by the churches is all derived from the Holy Spirit. These seven lamps enlighten the world, ver. 4, 5.

"Before the throne was a sea of glass like unto crystal." This crystal sea, as it was in appearance, but which was so solid that the harpers are afterwards described as standing upon it, may be opposed to the troubled, tumultuous sea out of which the beast would rise, and may denote the grandeur and immutability of the Divine throne as opposed to the turbulence and uncertainty of earthly thrones. The four living creatures seem to be the same as those described by Ezekiel, and to allude, as they did, to the cherubim in the holy of holies. That which the wheels were to the one, the elders are to the other; connected with them, like horses in a chariot, in

all their movements. Of the former it is said, "When the living creatures went, the wheels went by them; when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, these were lifted up over against them; for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels," Ezek. i. 21. Of the latter it is said, "When those living creatures give glory, and honour, and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four-and-twenty elders fall down before him, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

The living creatures cannot be angels, for both they and the elders are distinguished from them in chap. vii. 11, where all the angels are said to "stand round about the throne, *and* about the elders, and the four living creatures." Besides this, the living creatures and the elders speak of themselves as "redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," chap. v. 9. Those who led the worship under the Old Testament might be meant by the living creatures of Ezekiel; and those who lead the worship under the New Testament may be signified by those of John. They and the elders, like the stars and the candlesticks, appear to be the representatives of Christ's ministers and churches in the heavenly assembly. They are not described as being themselves on earth, or in a state of affliction, but as before the throne of God, as though a number of the spirits of just men made perfect had been chosen of God to represent in his immediate presence their brethren upon earth, and who, as things should be described which concerned the church, would express the interest they felt in them.

The description of the living creatures as bearing a resemblance to certain animals, and as having each six wings, which wings were "full of eyes within," would naturally express their useful properties, particularly the union of zeal and knowledge; and their unceasing ascriptions of glory to God may denote the tendency of their ministerial labours. The elders were crowned, but they cast their crowns before the throne. Such appear to be the scene and scenery of this preparatory vision, ver. 6-11.

DISCOURSE V.

THE BOOK WITH SEVEN SEALS.

Rev. v.

THAT which is here called "a book" must not be supposed to resemble our books, which since the invention of printing have been very different from those of the ancients. Conceive of seven skins of parchment, written upon on one side,* and rolled up, suppose on wood. At the end of every skin a seal is affixed on the backside, so that the contents of it cannot be read till the seal is opened. This book, or roll, or volume, being "in the right hand of him that sat on the throne," denotes that futurity is known

* By the punctuation in our translation it would seem as if they were written upon on both sides; but this would not comport with the contents being secret, which they were till the seals were unloosed. It seems, therefore, that a comma is necessary after the word "within," in verse 1. Several other versions, and some editions of our own, read it, *A book written within, and on the backside sealed with seven seals.*

only to God. The proclamation made for one that should be worthy to open the book, shows how desirable it was that the mind of God in regard to futurity should be revealed, for strengthening the faith and supporting the hope of his church upon earth; and as John had been invited for the very purpose of learning "the things that should be hereafter," things which related to the church of Christ, which he had been employed in raising, it must be peculiarly interesting to him. He must needs be anxious to know the things that should befall these his people in the latter days. To see a book therefore which contained them, and yet none in heaven or earth found worthy to open it, might well make him weep, ver. 1-4.

This want of a suitable person to open the book is introduced for the purpose of *doing honour to the Lamb*, whose success gives universal joy and satisfaction. The work of making known the mind of God was an honour too high for any mere creature in heaven or on earth; it was given to Christ as the reward of his obedience unto death, ver. 9. The honour of preaching the gospel is represented as being of *grace*: "Unto me, (said Paul,) who am less than the least of all saints, is this *grace* given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." That which Christ received as the reward of his death, we receive in our measure of grace, and for his sake; and a great favour it is to be bearers of such good tidings.

One of the elders, perceiving the apostle to weep under an apprehension that all must remain unknown, saith unto him, "Weep not; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." John was not so unacquainted with the Scriptures as to be at any loss whom this could mean. Probably, however, he expected to behold his Lord in some majestic form corresponding to the imagery; but lo, instead of a lion, he saw a lamb, a lamb as it had been slain! yet invested with perfect authority, and possessing perfect knowledge, so as to qualify him for the work; for he had "seven horns, and seven eyes," ver. 5, 6.

This glorious personage, in whom are united the majesty of the lion and the gentleness of the lamb, approaches him that sat upon the throne, and takes the book out of his right hand; denoting on his own part the undertaking of the work, and on that of God his perfect approbation, ver. 7.

And now the whole church of God by their representatives are described as falling down before the Lamb, and joining in a chorus of praise. "The golden vials full of odours" doubtless allude to those of the priests who offered incense, and denote that the church on earth is ever employed in presenting its petitions before the throne. They had also "harps" as well as vials, and "sung a new song," denoting the great occasion there now was for joy and praise. A new song is suited to a new manifestation of mercy. The Lamb is found worthy to take the book, and to open the seals; and they perceive the ground of it to lie in his having redeemed them at the expense of his blood. For this they bless his name, as also for his having made them kings and priests unto God, and given them to expect that, however they were at present oppressed on earth, they should even there be finally victorious, ver. 8-10.

Nor could the angels on such an occasion be silent, but must join in the choir. Myriads of myriads, a number that no man could number, unite in ascribing worthiness to the Lamb, and that on the same ground as redeemed men had done, namely, his having been "slain;" a proof this of disinterested affection, both to the Redeemer and the redeemed. "He took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham;" yet angels unite in praising him for his love to men.

In enumerating the things which he was worthy to receive, it is remarkable how they keep their eye on those perfections of which he had *emptied* himself in his humiliation. He did not lay aside any thing pertaining to his *goodness*, but merely what belonged to his greatness. He was no less holy, just, faithful, and merciful, when on earth, than he is now in heaven; but he emptied himself of "power," as laying aside his authority, and taking upon him the form of a servant—of "riches," as becoming poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich—of "wisdom," as making himself of no reputation—of "strength," as becoming weak and subject to death like other men—of "honour," as not appearing in his native Divinity, but as a man, and a man of obscure birth, despised of the people—of "glory," as subjecting himself to shame and disgrace—and of "blessing," as receiving not the benedictions so much as the execrations of those among whom he sojourned. The purport of the song is, By how much he hath emptied himself on earth, by so much let him be magnified and exalted in heaven! ver. 11, 12.

Nor is the song confined to angels; the whole creation joins in praising him that sitteth on the throne, and the Lamb, for ever; while at every pause the representatives of the redeemed add their emphatic "Amen," adoring in humble prostration him that liveth for ever and ever, ver. 13.

Such an august and affecting representation expresses the sentiments which become the friends of Christ while contemplating that great cause which is carrying on in the world, and which the world in a manner overlooks. To this may be added, If such be the glory ascribed to the Saviour whilst events are merely foretold, what will it be when they are actually accomplished, and when they shall be reviewed in the heaven of heavens to all eternity!

DISCOURSE VI.

THE SEALS OPENED.

Rev. vi.

BEFORE we enter on the opening of the seals, the sounding of the trumpets, or the pouring out of the vials, it will be proper to make a few general remarks.

First, The whole series of events here revealed is included in the sealed book. We are not to conceive of the seals as containing one series of events, the trumpets another, and the vials another; but as all being included in the seals: for the seven trumpets are only subdivisions of the seventh seal, and the seven vials of the seventh trumpet.

Secondly, This division into seals, and subdivision into trumpets and vials, appears to be the *only one* which the prophecy requires, or even admits. Not to mention its division into *chapters*, which are sometimes made in the midst of a subject, the scheme of dividing it into *periods*, which Mr. LOWMAN and many others have favoured, seems to be merely a work of the imagination. There are doubtless some remarkable periods in the prophecy, such as that of the 1260 years, &c.; but to make them *seven* in number, and for this purpose to reckon the day of judgment, and the heavenly state, as periods, is fanciful. It is by the division of the prophecy itself into seals, and the

subdivision of the seventh seal into trumpets, and of the seventh trumpet into vials, that we must steer our course.

Thirdly, In tracing the events symbolized by the seals, trumpets, and vials, there is no necessity for supposing that every preceding one must be finished before that which follows it can have begun. It is enough if they succeed each other in the manner of the four monarchies predicted in the seventh chapter of Daniel. The Babylonish empire was not extinct before that of Persia began; nor that of Persia before that of Macedonia began; nor that of Macedonia before that of Rome began. The latter end of each would be contemporary with the beginning of that which followed; yet upon the whole they succeeded each other *in the empire of the world*; and this was sufficient to justify their being represented in succession. Thus the wars of the *red* horse in this chapter might commence before the conquests of the *white* horse were ended, and continue in part while the events signified by the *black* horse occurred. The beginnings and endings of each might run into the other, while yet upon the whole they were successive. It is on this account that I am not solicitous to determine the year when each begins or ends.

Fourthly, So far as the seals, trumpets, or vials respect the world, it is *as connected with the church*. The plan of this prophecy is much the same as that of the Old Testament; it follows religion, and what concerns religion only. Why is there so much said in the Scriptures of *Nineveh* and *Babylon* rather than of other heathen cities in those times, but because these powers had to do with the people of God? Why are the ravages of the four beasts predicted by Daniel, but for the same reason? Had it not been for this, they might have risen and fallen unnoticed by the Scriptures, as much as *Carthage*, *Palmyra*, or *Pekin*. It is this that accounts for so much being said by Daniel of Antiochus Epiphanes. It is this that accounts for so much being said by John of the Roman empire rather than of the other great empires of the earth; for it was here that Christianity would be principally embraced. And as the Roman empire and the profession of Christianity would in the latter ages be in a manner confined to Europe, so the greater part of what respects the world in the latter part of these prophecies is in a manner confined to that quarter of the earth. The Scriptures, foreseeing that Europe would be the seat of both the Christian church and the anti-christian beast and harlot, predict events concerning this part of the world while they overlook the other parts.

Nor must we expect to find *all* the great events even of those parts of the world which are connected with the church. As the Old Testament history, in respect of the nations connected with Israel, is *select*, so we may expect to find the New Testament prophecy. If some of the mightiest changes in Europe have no place in this prophecy, we are not to consider the omission of them as a defect, but rather take it for granted that God did not judge the introduction of them necessary for his purpose.

Fifthly, The commencement of the prophecy is, I apprehend, to be reckoned from the ascension of Christ. It has been common, I am aware, to reckon it from the time of the vision, which is supposed to have been under the reign of Domitian, about the year 95. On this principle Mr. LOWMAN proceeds. Hence he confines the opening of the first seal, on which it is said "there appeared a *white* horse, and he that sat on him had a bow, and a crown, and went forth conquering and to conquer," to the success of the gospel *after the year 95, leaving out the whole of that which accompanied the labours of the apostles*. In like manner the opening of the second seal, on which there went forth "a *red* horse, and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one an-

other," is confined to those wars between the Jews and Romans which occurred between the years 100 and 138, *leaving out the whole of those which issued in the destruction of Jerusalem*.* But surely it must appear singular that in a prophetic description of the success of the gospel in the early ages the most glorious part of it should be left out; and that in a like description of the wars between the Jews and Romans the most terrible part should be omitted. The reason given by Mr. Lowman for its being so is, "The destruction of Jerusalem, *being past*, can hardly be supposed to be denoted by a prediction of a judgment to come." Doubtless it is in general true that prophecies are predictions of things to come; in some instances, however, they may refer to events *the beginnings of which* are already accomplished. There is a remarkable instance of this in the prophecies of Daniel concerning the four monarchies. He speaks of his seeing them all "rise up out of the sea," chap. vii. 1-3; yet at the time of the vision the first of them, namely, Babylon, had risen, and reigned, and was near its end; for it was in the first year of Belshazzar, who was its last king. And why should not the apostle in like manner commence the prophecy with the commencement of the Christian dispensation, though he wrote above sixty years after it? This makes the sealed book to contain a perfect system of New Testament prophecy, from the ascension of Christ to the end of all things. By this we include the success of the apostles in the conquests of the man on the white horse under the first seal, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in those of the red horse under the second seal. By this too we are furnished with an easy interpretation of the division of the book into "things which the writer *had seen*, things which *were*, and things which should be *hereafter*." He had actually seen the great progress of the gospel from the time of Christ's ascension, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans; he then saw the church struggling under a cruel persecution; and that which should be revealed to him would carry on those struggles till she should rise triumphant over all opposition in her New Jerusalem glory.

Ver. 1, 2. There is no doubt of this being meant of the glorious success of the gospel in the early ages of the church, even when it had to encounter the most bloody persecutions. Of this the *white horse* is the appropriate symbol, chap. xix. 11, 12. "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty: with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness: and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things," Psal. xlv. 3, 4. I need not show how truly this accords with historic fact. Suffice it to say, that from the beginning, as the Jews alleged against the apostles, "Jerusalem was *filled* with their doctrine." It was foretold that, before the destruction of that city, the gospel should be preached in all the world, Matt. xxiv. 14. Paul himself preached it, and that fully, "from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum," and, as he says in behalf of himself and his fellow labourers, "God always caused them to triumph in every place." The Cæsars set themselves against it; yet in spite of all their efforts there were, even in Paul's time, saints in Cæsar's household.

The epistles of Pliny and Tiberianus, governors of Asia Minor and Syria, to Trajan the emperor, within ten or twelve years after the banishment of John to the Isle of Patmos, furnish a striking and unexceptionable proof of the progress of the gospel in those times. By the amazing number of persons who avowed themselves Christians, and so exposed themselves to death, they were moved with compassion, and wrote to know what they were to do

* See Lowman's History of the First and Second Seals, pp. 40-42.

with them. "The number is so great," says Pliny, "as to call for the most serious deliberation. Informations are pouring in against multitudes, of every age, of all orders, and of both sexes: and more will be impeached; for the contagion of this superstition hath spread, not only through cities, but villages, and hath even reached the farm-houses." He also speaks of the temples as having been almost desolate, the sacred solemnities [of idolatry] as having been intermitted, and the sacrificial victims as finding but few purchasers. "I am quite wearied," says Tiberianus, "with punishing and destroying the Galileans."

Ver. 3, 4. This and the two following seals relate to the judgments of God upon the church's enemies. Great and terrible wars are as naturally suggested by the symbol of a *red* horse as the success of the gospel was by a white one. The wars particularly alluded to appear to be those between the Jews and Romans, who having united in persecuting the church, as well as in crucifying its Head, were now permitted to "kill one another." It is well known that in the reign of *Vespasian*, the Jews having rebelled against the Romans, Jerusalem was taken and destroyed, the temple reduced to ashes, and an immense number of persons slain.* Forty or fifty years after this, in the reign of *Trajan*, the Jews in Egypt and in Cyprus rebelled, and are said to have slain, with great marks of cruelty, *four hundred and sixty thousand men*; yet the Jews were every where subdued: a far greater number, therefore, must have been slain amongst themselves. Soon after this, in the reign of *Hadrian*, the Jews who were left in Palestine after the destruction of their metropolis were drawn into a new rebellion, by adhering to a pretended Messiah, whose name was *Barchocab*. In these wars, besides what were lost on the side of the Romans, the Jews are said to have had a thousand cities and fortresses destroyed, with the slaughter of above *five hundred and eighty thousand men*. The Jews having employed the Roman power to crucify the Lord of glory, God employed it to destroy them and their city. Their carnal policy told them that if they let him alone all men would believe on him, and the Romans would come and take away both their place and nation. Whether guilty or not guilty, it was judged expedient that he should die, and that the whole nation should not perish. The whole nation however *did* perish, and that by means of the Romans. Such was the result of that policy which was employed against the Lord, and against his Christ: and thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel,—“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,” chap. ix. 26.

DISCOURSE VII.

THE OPENING OF THE SEALS CONTINUED.

Rev. vi.

VER. 5, 6. A *black* horse is the symbol of famine, or of a scarcity approaching to famine, by which the necessaries of life required to be dealt out by weight and measure, and special orders to be given that nothing

* Mr. Lowman, from *Usher's Annals*, says, "A million and a half according to some, according to others two millions, besides what were slain on the side of the Romans."

should be wasted, Lam. vi. 10; Lev. xxvi. 26. Such appears to have been the state of things in the Roman empire for a long time, during the reigns of the *Antonines*. It is in reference to these, among other calamities, that *Tertullian* speaks, representing the heathens as ascribing them to the Christians, because they taught men to despise the gods.*

The "measure" here referred to is the *chœnix*, which contained the ordinary allowance of corn to a man for a day; and as the price of a measure of wheat in those times was a Roman "penny," which was the amount of a day's wages, it follows that for a poor man to have lived on wheaten bread would have required all his labour, without any thing for other necessities, or even bread for his family!

Ver. 7. 8. The *pale* horse was the symbol of great *mortality*, by various means; particularly by the sword, by hunger, by pestilence, and by the beasts of the earth. The facts were, that between the years 193 and 270, that is, in less than eighty years, there were more than twenty emperors, and at one time thirty pretenders to the throne. It is said also there were thirty usurpers, who raised war for themselves in different parts of the empire. Such a state of things is sufficient to account for all that is here predicted; for intestine wars must needs produce famine and pestilence, and by destroying men give an ascendancy to the beasts of prey. In this manner the enemies of the gospel were visited, who continued, with but little intermission, to persecute the church of God.

In understanding the symbols of the *white*, the *red*, the *black*, and the *pale* horses, of the success of the gospel, and the judgments of God on its enemies, there is sufficient unity of design. They all bear a relation to the church, and to the Jews and Romans only as persecuting it.

Ver. 9-11. A view of an *altar*, and the *sacrifices* that had been made upon it, fitly represent the numerous martyrdoms which had been made at the time under the heathen emperors. The "souls under the altar" are the departed spirits of those Christians who had fallen in the arduous contest, which are supposed to cry aloud for retribution. The "white robes" denote the heavenly honours conferred upon them. The answer to their appeal, in which they are encouraged to expect a retribution "after a little season, and when the number of their fellow servants and brethren, who should be killed as they were, [by the hands of paganism,] should be fulfilled," determines the period to which the vision refers. It is supposed that they had suffered under *nine* of the ten persecutions, and had only to wait for the completion of their number under the *tenth*, which being accomplished, God would take vengeance on their persecutors. The opening of this seal, therefore, would refer to about the year 270, when the ninth persecution was past, and the tenth, under *Dioclesian* and *Maximian*, was approaching; and which is said to have been more extensive and bloody than any which had gone before it. Its professed object was nothing less than the utter extirpation of Christianity. The places for Christian worship were every where demolished, Bibles destroyed, and an immense number of Christians put to death. "It were endless and almost incredible," says *Echard*, "to enumerate the variety of sufferers and torments: they were scourged to death, had their flesh torn off with pincers, and mangled with broken pots; were cast to lions, tigers, and other wild beasts; were burnt, beheaded, crucified, thrown into the sea, torn in pieces by the distorted boughs of trees, roasted by gentle fires, and holes made in their bodies for melted lead to be poured into their bowels. This persecution lasted ten years under *Dioclesian* and some of his successors; and the number of Christians who suffered death and punishment

* Apology, Ch. XL. Lowman's History of the Third Seal, p. 46.

made them conclude that they had completed their work; and in an ancient inscription they tell the world *that they had effaced the name and superstition of the Christians, and had restored and propagated the worship of the gods.* But they were so much deceived, that this hastened the destruction of paganism.*

This was the first persecution that reached Britain, then a Roman colony, in which *Alban* suffered, and great numbers after him. "Our stories record," says Fox the martyrologist, "that all Christianity almost in the whole island was destroyed, the churches subverted, all books of Scripture burned, and many of the faithful, both men and women, slain."

Ver. 12-17. "An earthquake" is the appropriate symbol of a revolution; and an earthquake accompanied with an eclipse of the sun and moon, and, what was more than an eclipse, the "falling of the stars to the earth," as though nature itself were dissolved, denotes, I conceive, the overthrow of the *pagan* empire by the arms of Constantine. The ruling powers of the world are that to the common people which the sun, and moon, and stars are to the earth: hence great changes in nations are expressed by God's "shaking the heavens and the earth," and sometimes by the very imagery here used. "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment," Isa. xxxiv. 4, 5. The revolution that took place in the time of Constantine was not of a civil, so much as of a religious character. The government was still imperial, and the difference between one emperor and another would be of little or no account. But it was an eclipse of those powers which had so long endeavoured to crush the cause of Christ. It is language applicable to the last judgment; and was to them actually a day of judgment in miniature. The bloody enemies of Christ must now have felt, whether they would or not, that they had incurred the wrath of the Lamb. Now the number of the martyrs under the pagan persecutions is completed, and the prayers of the souls under the altar are answered.

DISCOURSE VIII.

THE SEALING OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD.

Rev. vii.

VER. 1-8. This chapter is a continuation of the sixth seal; and bears a relation to the great revolution which had taken place by the accession of a Christian emperor. Considering what the church had had to encounter under a succession of heathens, this event would appear to be most auspicious. Christians would now look forward to times of peace, happiness, and prosperity. And true it is that during the life of this emperor there was not only a season of peace, but considerable accessions to the Christian profession. On this account, it seems, Mr. LOWMAN and others have been led to interpret this sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads of the

* *Roman History*, Vol. II. p. 550. Eusebius, in the VIIIth book of his *Ecclesiastical History*, gives a particular account of this persecution, of which he was an eye-witness.

numerous *conversions* made in those times to the Christian faith. But sealing denotes, not conversion, but the *preservation* of those who are converted. Those who were sealed did not by this *become* the servants of God, but are supposed to be such already. Instead of signifying the enlargement of the church, the object is to prevent it from being utterly swept away. It portends danger no less than the striking of the door-posts of the Israelites when the destroying angel should pass through the land; or than the marking of those who "sighed and cried" when Jerusalem was to be destroyed by the Chaldeans. It was for the *preservation* of a seed for God amidst a flood of corruption. Hence, when these evils had actually deluged the church, we find the sealed servants of God standing in triumph upon Mount Sion, chap. xiv. 1. God seeth not as man seeth; that which man is apt to think a great acquisition, God often knows to be a great temptation.

It is remarkable that, instead of a congratulation of the church on its recent victory, by the striking up of the heavenly choir, (as is usual in the prophecy when new and glorious events occur,) the choir on this occasion is mute. It is described, indeed, as a day of judgment to the persecuting heathens, and in itself doubtless afforded matter of thankfulness to Christians; but had they known what would arise out of it, the joy of that day would have been turned into mourning.

From this time men were ripe for such speculations as those of *Arius*, who argued, *that if Christ was begotten of the Father, there must have been a time when he was not*; and for all the intrigues, wars, and persecutions which on both sides by turns were practised. From this time our Lord's doctrine of the new birth seems in a manner to have been laid aside, and conversion to Christianity was little more than being baptized, or consenting to wear the Christian badge. From this time conversions were mostly produced by authority, or by the hope of worldly advantage, or by exhortations addressed to kings that they should convert their subjects. From this time the glory of the church seems to have been placed more in splendid edifices and pompous ceremonies than in conformity to its Head. In short, from this time she became a courtier, and, laying aside her own simple garb, appeared in a dress more befitting the mother of harlots than the bride of Christ. "What she gained in outward splendour and prosperity," says Mr. FABER, "she lost in purity of manners and doctrine. The holy simplicity of primitive Christianity was no more; and the heresy of *Arius* introduced a succession of crimes disgraceful alike to humanity and religion."—See Mosheim's Account of the Fourth Century.

Doubtless there were hypocrites and merely nominal Christians in all ages of the church; but they were never before so designated as they now are. "The servants of God" are from this time distinguished from "the men who had not the seal of God in their foreheads." This distinction might not take place immediately after the accession of Constantine, but from that time the seeds of it were sown. The alliance between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, described in the thirteenth and seventeenth chapters by a woman riding on a beast, originated here. Here, therefore, we must look for the grand origin of that apostacy which the apostle Paul foretold, and which succeeding ages witnessed. If the account given of the state of things by MOSHEIM be just, it requires a great stretch of charity to believe that what was called the catholic church, even in the fourth century, was the church of Christ. Christ certainly had a people at that time, but they seem to have consisted of *individuals* rather than of that visible community which called itself the church. They were "the servants of God whom he sealed in their foreheads."

These ideas will be confirmed by attending to the manner in which the

sealing of the servants of God is introduced. Four angels are seen "standing on the four corners of the earth." Angels are the executioners of the Divine Providence. Their number answering to the four quarters of the earth may express its extending over the whole world. Their "holding the winds" would denote that they were commissioned of God to afflict the earth with evils, or to withhold them, according to his will. The short period in which they held back the winds seems to refer to that season of tranquillity which the church enjoyed on the government's becoming Christian, and before the temptations of its new situation had had time to operate, ver. 1, 2. But as the principal part of the commission of the four angels was to "hurt the earth and the sea," they stand ready, only waiting till the *greater* angel has sealed the servants of God ere they execute it.

The "winds," which were to be let loose upon the earth and the sea, were *spiritual* rather than temporal judgments, and would principally grow out of the new order of things; namely, errors, superstitions, corruptions, divisions, and a conformity to the manners and habits of the world. These were the winds which in the end swept away the great body of nominal Christians into the gulfs of popery and Mahomedism, ver. 3.

And as many of the symbols in the prophecy are taken from the *Jewish* temple, so the servants of God are symbolized by a certain number for an uncertain, taken from the twelve tribes of Israel. The Christian church, being now the true "Israel of God," were to the apostate Christians what Israel was to an apostate world; namely, God's witnesses, ver. 4-8.

Ver. 9-17. After the sealing of God's servants is accomplished, the saints and martyrs of Jesus, who during the preceding persecutions had overcome and been received into glory, joining with the whole heavenly chorus, engage in a triumphant song of praise to God and to the Lamb. The reason of their being here introduced seems to be that the sealed servants of God, who were yet on earth, and had to pass through a series of trials, might by a view of their happy end be strengthened to follow their example. As great *numbers* would be against them in this world, they are directed to view the numbers of friends which they have in heaven; who not only look back to their own deliverance, and ascribe it to God, but seem to look down to their brethren upon earth, and to say, "Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering!"

The view of such a holy and happy assembly is supposed to excite in the apostle emotions of admiration and joy. On this one of the elders asks him what he conceives them to be, and whence they come. It would seem as if they must be pure celestial beings, whose whole existence had been filled up with righteousness and blessedness. He does not presume, however, to say what he thought they were, whether men or angels, nor to offer any opinion as to whence they came, but modestly refers it to his instructor to inform him. The answer is, in effect, that they are men—men who were lately upon earth, exposed to great tribulations, but who had come out of them. And as to their "white robes," they had been once impure, but were washed and made white, not in their own blood, though that in innumerable instances had been shed, but "in the blood of the Lamb." It was as believing in his death that they were justified and sanctified; and having lived by faith on him, they were without fault "before the throne of God."

Still more to stimulate the servants of God in this world to persevere, he adds, "And he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!"

DISCOURSE IX.

THE SUBDIVISION OF THE SEVENTH SEAL INTO SEVEN TRUMPETS.

Rev. viii.

VER. 1-6. We are now come to the opening of the last of the seven seals, and which is longer, and includes far more, than the preceding six. They have reached but little beyond three hundred years; whereas this will reach thence to the end of all things.

“Silence in heaven about the space of half an hour” seems to denote a solemn pause preparatory to other events. It is like saying, And now prepare thee for another scene!—This scene is, “the appearance of seven angels standing before God, to whom were given seven trumpets.” As nothing is said on the opening of the seventh seal but what follows under the trumpets, the latter must be considered as a subdivision of the former.

But, prior to the sounding of the trumpets, “another angel” comes forward, and stands at the altar, “having a golden censer, to whom much incense is given, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar before the throne.” There were two altars belonging to the temple-worship; one for sacrifice, called “the altar of burnt-offering,” and the other for burning incense, called “the golden altar before the throne.” The allusion here is to the latter. Our great High Priest, having offered himself without spot to God, passed into the heavens, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Through him our prayers ascend with acceptance before God.

The “prayers” here referred to appear to have a special relation to the events about to be predicted by the sounding of the trumpets. The events would occur in answer to those prayers; which might be so many intercessions for the success of Christ’s cause, and against that of its adversaries. Heathen Rome was overthrown in answer to the prayers of the souls under the altar, and Christian Rome may fall in the same manner. Should it be objected that in the latter there would be less to pray against, it may be answered that those who, under the name of Christians, corrupted and debased Christianity, modelling it to their fleshly minds, and converting it into an engine of state policy, might incur more of the Divine displeasure than those who, under the name of heathens, openly opposed it. For the persecutions of Pagan Rome the persecutors only were punished, having their power taken from them, and given to the Christians; but for the corruptions of Christian Rome we shall see the empire itself dissolved, and divided amongst the barbarians.

The symbolical language under which these events are represented is that of the angel taking the censer, filling it with fire of the altar, and casting it into the earth; on which follow voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. “Fire” cast into the earth by an angel would be the precursor of dreadful wars; and an “*earthquake*” is the well-known symbol of a revolution, or such an overturning in matters of government as should introduce a new order of things. Such were the events which distinguished the times between Constantine and Augustulus, especially those between the years 400 and 476. Whatever virtues attached to Constantine or his successors, and whatever obligations the Christians were under for the protection afforded them by their government, yet the system which from those

times was adopted proved ruinous both to the church and to the empire. The corruptions of the former, as we have seen already, required the servants of God to be sealed in their foreheads; and the calamities of the latter we shall see described under the sounding of the first four trumpets.

Ver. 7-12. The fulfilment of these predictions must, according to the chronological series of the prophecy, be looked for in the fourth or fifth centuries. They are the same things particularly described as those which followed the fire cast by the angel into the earth. Moreover, as the seals went to destroy the empire as pagan, the trumpets will go to overturn it as Christian. Both issue in an "earthquake," (chap. vi. 12, with viii. 5,) the ordinary symbol of a revolution.

The Roman empire, as being now the seat of Christianity, is here considered as a world of itself; having not only its earth, its sea, and its rivers, but its sun, and moon, and stars. By the *earth* we may understand those parts of the empire which were *continental*, as Gaul and the southern parts of Germany. On these fell the effects of the *first* trumpet, burning up the trees and the grass, or destroying great numbers among the middle and lower orders of men. By the *sea* we may understand those parts of the empire which were *maritime*, such as Spain, Portugal, and the lower parts of Italy. On these fell the effects of the *second* trumpet, turning the waters into blood, and destroying whatever was in them. By the *rivers and fountains of waters* may be understood the *mountainous* parts of the empire, as Upper Italy, and the countries about the Alps; at no great distance from which rise the Loire, the Po, the Rhine, the Rhone, and the Danube. On these fell the effects of the *third* trumpet, imparting to their streams a mortal bitterness. By the *sun, moon, and stars* we may understand the governing powers, supreme and subordinate. On these fell the *fourth* trumpet, smiting them with darkness, or with a general eclipse. Finally, By a *third part* only being affected at once may be meant, not only that the events should take place by several successive calamities, but that the effect of the whole would not be to *destroy* the western empire, but merely to *subvert* it. The empire was to continue, though under another form, namely, as composed of the ten kingdoms. Mr. CUNINGHAME very properly remarks the difference between the effects of the trumpets, which refer to the *subversion* of the empire, and those of the vials, which refer to its *final dissolution*. The former are partial, the latter total.—Dissertation, pp. 80, 81.

Whether the events pertaining to each trumpet can be exactly ascertained or not, thus much is certain, that the ravages of the Goths, the Vandals, and the Huns were that to the empire which a terrible hail-storm, accompanied with thunder and lightning, is to the "trees and the fields;" which a burning mountain, thrown into the sea, would be to the waters; and which a blazing meteor that should fall upon the rivers and fountains of waters, and imbitter them, would be to a country; while the effects of these successive ravages on the government would resemble a great though not a total eclipse of the heavenly bodies.

APPENDIX TO DISCOURSE IX.

Containing a Sketch of the History of the First Four Trumpets.

In the northern and north-eastern parts of Europe, bordering on the Baltic and the Euxine seas, there were many barbarous nations which were never subdued by the Roman arms: such were the Saxons, the Visigoths, the Ostrogoths, the Vandals, the Burgundians, the Huns, the Alans, &c.; and who were often associated in their enterprises. About the year 376, during the reign of the Eastern emperor Valens, the Goths having been driven from their own country by the Huns and Alans, a body of not fewer than two hundred thousand of them, besides women and children, under *Alavivus* and *Fritigern*, two of their chiefs, obtained permission to settle in Thrace, a province of the Roman empire. To the imprudence of admitting such a body of hostile emigrants were added several instances of injurious treatment after their arrival. These first produced resistance, and that a battle, in which the Romans were defeated, and the emperor lost his life. By the prudent and energetic measures of Theodosius the Great, who succeeded Valens, the Gothic emigrants were so far subjugated as to be rendered serviceable to the empire. But after his death the jealousies between Rufinus and Stilicho, ministers of state at Constantinople and Rome, under Arcadius and Honorius the emperors, afforded them opportunity to renew their hostilities.

Alaric, an Arian Christian, the successor of *Fritigern*, had been in the Roman service for several years, having commanded a body of his countrymen in the wars of Theodosius; but thinking himself not sufficiently rewarded by that prince, and perceiving as he thought a fair opportunity, he was disposed to carve for himself. To this he is said to have been encouraged by Rufinus, principal ruler under Arcadius at Constantinople, whose duty it was to oppose him. Marching his army into Macedonia and Thessaly, he laid waste the country as he went. Through the treachery of Rufinus the straits of Thermopylæ were left unguarded, and so opened a free passage for him into Greece, where the villages were plundered and burnt, the males who were capable of bearing arms massacred, and the females led captive. His successes obtained for him a command in the Eastern empire, which having improved to the strengthening of his own army, he resolved to invade that of the west. Having laid waste Epirus and Pannonia, he in 402 entered Italy. Italy however was for this time delivered from his depredations. The Romans under Stilicho, after twice defeating him, suffered him to quit the country with the remnant of his army.

In 406 another vast army, composed of Goths, Huns, Vandals, Suevi, Burgundians, Alani, &c., under *Radagaisus*, a heathen, attempted the invasion of Italy. The number of fighting men is said to have been two hundred thousand, besides slaves, women, and children, who are reckoned to have amounted to as many more. But neither were they successful. *Radagaisus* was defeated and slain, and a great part of his army either perished or were sold for slaves.

But though the capital of the western empire was by these events once more saved, yet its provinces were reduced to desolation. Gaul was at this time invaded by the *Vandals*, the *Suevi*, the *Alani*, and the *Burgundians*, who, with the remains of *Radagaisus's* army, destroyed all before them. "On the last day of the year, (says *Gibbon*,) when the waters of the Rhine

were probably frozen, they entered without opposition the defenceless provinces of Gaul. This memorable passage of the Suevi, the Vandals, the Alani, and the Burgundians, *who never afterwards retreated*, may be considered as the fall of the Roman empire in the countries beyond the Alps; and the barriers which had so long separated the savage and the civilized nations of the earth were from that fatal moment levelled with the ground.—The banks of the Rhine were crowned, like those of the Tiber, with elegant houses, and well cultivated farms. This scene of peace and plenty was suddenly changed into a desert; and the prospect of the smoking ruins could alone distinguish the solitude of nature from the desolation of man. The flourishing city of Mentz was surprised and destroyed; and many thousands of Christians were inhumanly massacred in the church. Worms perished after a long and obstinate siege; Strasburgh, Spire, Rheims, Tournay, Arras, and Amiens experienced the cruel oppression of the German yoke; and the consuming flames of war spread from the banks of the Rhine over the seventeen provinces of Gaul. That rich and extensive country, as far as the ocean, the Alps, and the Pyrenees, was delivered to the barbarians, who drove before them in a promiscuous crowd the bishop, the senator, and the virgin, laden with the spoils of their houses and altars.”—Decline, &c., chap. xxx.

Thus far events appear to answer to the “hail and fire mingled with blood” under the *first* trumpet, which, as they are said to be on the *earth*, correspond with the calamities which in those times were brought upon the *continental* parts of the empire.

Alaric, the king of the Visigoths, had made peace with the emperor Honorius, and been made master-general of the Roman armies in Illyricum. In the invasion of Radagaisus he took no part, but was attentive to the recruiting of his own army. In 408 he made large demands on the Roman government, accompanied with intimations of what would follow if they were not complied with. Stilicho persuaded the senate to comply with them, and four thousand pounds of gold were promised him under the name of a subsidy. But, before the promise was fulfilled, Stilicho was disgraced and slain. Of the measures of his successors, Alaric is said to have had just cause of complaint. The result was, he determined again to invade Italy. Passing over the Alps, he pillaged the cities of Aquileia, Altinum, Concordia, and Cremona, which yielded to his arms; increased his forces by the accession of thirty thousand auxiliaries; and without opposition marched to the gates of Rome. Here, encompassing the city, he reduced it to a state of famine, of which many thousands died. To this succeeded a destructive pestilence. At length the siege was raised on a large sum of money being paid him; but his terms of peace being rejected by Honorius, who had shut himself up in Ravenna, Rome was a second time besieged. After this it was taken, and for three days given up to the plunder of the besiegers. Vast numbers of the Romans were slain, not only by the Goths, but by their own slaves, forty thousand of whom, being liberated, fell upon their masters.

About ten months before this terrible calamity on Rome and the lower parts of Italy by the Goths, Spain and Portugal were invaded by the *Vandals*, the *Suevi*, and the *Alani*. These nations had already desolated Gaul, whence passing over the Pyrenees they conquered the Peninsula. *Echard* says, “The Vandals took Galicia, where they settled; the Suevi pushed their conquests farther; and the Alani fixed themselves in Portugal and Andalusia. From these barbarians (he adds) descended the ancient kings of Spain.”

The calamities of this invasion are thus described by *Gibbon* from a

Spanish historian;—"The barbarians exercised their indiscriminate cruelty on the fortunes of the Romans and Spaniards, and ravaged with equal fury the cities and the open country. The progress of famine reduced the miserable inhabitants to feed on the flesh of their fellow creatures; and even the wild beasts, that multiplied without control in the desert, were exasperated by the taste of blood, and the impatience of hunger, boldly to attack and devour their human prey. Pestilence soon appeared, the inseparable companion of famine; a large portion of the people was swept away; and the groans of the dying excited only the envy of their surviving friends. At length the barbarians, satiated with carnage and rapine, and afflicted by the contagious evils which they themselves had introduced, fixed their permanent seats in the depopulated country."—Rom. Hist. chap. xxxi.

These events seem to answer to the "burning mountain cast into the sea," causing a third part of it to become blood, and destroying a third part of all which were in it, as described under the *second* trumpet. If *Ætna* or *Vesuvius* had literally been thrown into the ocean, it could hardly have produced a greater effervescence among the waters than these things produced among the nations. The *sea* would also have a special reference to these calamities being brought upon the *maritime* parts of the empire.

After this, the empire received another mighty shock from the *Scythians*, or *Huns*, a heathen nation, more barbarous and cruel than either the Goths or Vandals. *Attila*, their king and commander, was distinguished by his ferocity, affecting to be called "the scourge of God," and declaring that "the grass would never grow upon those places where his horse had trodden!" About 441 he fell upon the eastern empire, where, bearing down all before him, the country was in a manner destroyed by fire and sword. *Gibbon* says, "The whole breadth of Europe as it extends above five hundred miles, from the Euxine to the Adriatic, was at once invaded, and occupied, and desolated by him." The government of Constantinople, after seventy cities had been razed to the ground, was compelled ignominiously to purchase his retreat.

In the year 450 *Attila* again declared war against both the eastern and western empires. He was defeated in Gaul with a loss (says *Echard*) of 170,000 men; yet in the following year he invaded Italy with a larger army than that with which he had entered Gaul. *Aquileia* after a siege of three months was taken, and so effectually destroyed, that the succeeding generation could scarcely discover its ruins. After this *Verona*, *Mantua*, *Padua*, and many other cities, shared the same fate; the men were slain, the women ravished, and the places reduced to ashes. These devastations, however, were confined to those parts of Italy which border on the Alps. *Attila* threatened Rome, but was induced, partly by fear of the Roman army, partly by the remonstrances of his own, and partly by the embassy of *Leo* to the Roman pontiff, to forego the attempt, and, returning into his own country, he shortly after ended his days.

This surely must be the "great star burning as it were a lamp," which followed the sounding of the *third* trumpet, and which, shooting like a fiery meteor from east to west, and falling upon the rivers and fountains of waters, impregnated the streams with a mortal bitterness. If the rivers and fountains denote, as has been supposed, the *mountainous* parts of the empire, whence they have their origin, the facts have a remarkable coincidence with the prediction.

As to the remainder of the history, every thing from this time went to *eclipse* the imperial government. Africa, Spain, Britain, the greatest part of Gaul, Germany, and Illyricum, are said to have been dismembered from the empire; the court was full of intrigues and murders; *Valentinian* the em-

peror ravished the wife of Maximus, one of his senators; Maximus in return got Valentinian murdered, usurped his throne, and compelled Eudoxia the empress to marry him; Eudoxia, in hatred to the usurper, invited *Genseric*, the Vandal, to come over from Africa and revenge the death of Valentinian; Genseric prepared to invade Italy; Maximus, on hearing it, instead of taking measures for repelling him, sunk into despondency; the senators stoned him to death, and threw his body into the Tiber; Genseric entered Rome without opposition, and gave it up to be sacked and plundered by his soldiers for fourteen days. Hence, as Bishop Newton observes, "the western empire struggled hard, and gasped as it were for breath through eight short and turbulent reigns for the space of twenty years, and at length expired in the year 476, under Momyllus, or Augustulus, as he was named in derision, being a diminutive of Augustus."

After this, Odoacer, king of the Ostrogoths, invaded the country and seized the government, which he held, however, not as head of the western empire, but merely as *king of Italy*. There were indeed a senate and council after this, but they had only the shadow of authority.

Thus it was, I conceive, that the eclipse of the sun, moon, and stars, as described under the *fourth* trumpet, was accomplished. It may be thought that these events *had too slight a relation to the church of Christ* to become the subject of prophecy: two things, however, may be alleged in answer. *First*, They were necessary for the accomplishment of other prophecies, particularly Dan. vii. 7, 8; 2 Thess. ii. 7. Hereby a way was made for the beast to have "ten horns," as after the overthrow of the empire it was divided into so many independent kingdoms, which with little variation continue to this day. Hereby also a way was made for the "little horn" of Daniel's fourth beast, or the papal antichrist, to come up amongst them; or, as the apostle expresses it, for the man of sin to be revealed. "The mystery of iniquity hath already begun to work, (saith he,) only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way: and then shall that wicked (one) be revealed." While the imperial authority continued, there was not sufficient scope for ecclesiastical ambition; but when this was removed, the other soon appeared in its true character. The Goths embracing the *religion* of the conquered Romans, the clergy became objects of superstitious veneration amongst a barbarous people, and of this they availed themselves to the establishing of their spiritual authority. Hence the see of Rome made no scruple of setting up for supremacy.

Secondly, In these judgments upon the empire we perceive the Divine displeasure for its having corrupted the Christian religion, and transformed it into an engine of state. The wars of the Assyrians and Babylonians were the scourges of God on those who had corrupted the true religion; and such were those of the Goths, the Vandals, and the Huns, on the Christian governments of the fourth and fifth centuries.

DISCOURSE X.

THE FIRST WOE-TRUMPET, OR THE SMOKE AND LOCUSTS.

Rev. viii. 13; ix. 1-12.

As the first four trumpets were connected in their objects, so are the last three. The last verse of the eighth chapter is introductory to them.

Ver. 13. "This solemn denunciation seems to be introduced for the purpose of drawing our attention to the great importance of the events which were to happen under the last three trumpets. It serves also as a chronological mark to show that these three trumpets are all posterior to the first four, not only in order, but in time; and that they belong to a new series of events."* The most distinguishing plagues which were to befall the church and the world are designated by them. The first two seem to refer to the prevalence of popery and Mahomedism, and the last to those vials of wrath which should effect their overthrow.

Chap. ix. ver. 1-12. The fifth, or first woe-trumpet, is short, but awfully impressive. Looking at this dreadful irruption of darkness and desolation, we perceive the necessity there was for "sealing the servants of God in their foreheads," that they might be preserved amidst these trying times. These are the "winds" which those ministers of vengeance to whom it was given to hurt the earth (chap. vii. 1, 2) at length let loose upon it. The professing Christian world being exceedingly corrupt, it became necessary to try them. The "sealed" servants of God would endure the trial; but "those men who had not the seal of God in their foreheads" would be carried away and perish.

That the locusts refer to the ravaging hordes of Saracens, who, with Mahomed at their head, subdued and destroyed the eastern part of Christendom, seems to be generally admitted; and some have considered the "smoke" as denoting his false doctrine, and the "star" which fell from heaven to the earth as meaning himself. But, on the most mature consideration, I concur with those expositors who, while admitting the locusts to be Mahomed's destructive hordes of Saracens, yet understand the smoke of *popish* darkness, which was preparatory to the other, and the fallen star, of the fallen bishop of Rome.† If the fourth trumpet refer to the subversion of the imperial government under Augustulus, it may be presumed that the fifth would refer to things not very distant from it, and probably rising out of it; but the appearance of Mahomed was 130 years after this event, and seems to have no immediate connexion with it. On the other hand, there is a connexion between the subversion of the imperial government and "the revelation of the man of sin." It was the imperial authority which "let" or hindered him, and which, when "taken out of the way," made room for his appearing, 2 Thess. ii. 2-8. Thus the eclipse under the fourth trumpet prepared the way for the irruption of darkness under the fifth. The mystery of iniquity had long been at work; but now it burst forth as the smoke of a great furnace, impeding the light of the gospel, and darkening the moral atmosphere of the Christian world.

* Cuninghame's Dissertation, p. 84.

† It is true that that part of the prophecy which treats *directly* of the great papal community is yet in reserve; but as in a history of any nation frequent mention requires to be made of other nations, so, in a prophecy of the ravages of Mahomedism, mention may require to be made of popery, as preparing its way.

With this also agrees the application of "the fallen star" to the pope or bishop of Rome. It comports with the symbolical style of the book that a prophetic person should denote not an individual, but a succession of individuals in an official character. The bishop of Rome was once a star in the Christian firmament; but abandoning the doctrine and spirit of a Christian minister, and setting up for worldly domination, he "fell from heaven unto the earth," and thus became a fit agent for "opening the bottomless pit." The bishop of Meaux acknowledges that "hell does not open of itself; it is always some false doctor that opens it."

The *darkness* of popery is not only of infernal origin, but brings with it a state of mind prepared for the grossest delusions. Intercepting the light of truth, it darkened the world with its doctrines. It changed the truth of God into a lie, and, like old heathenism, "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever, Amen!" Wherefore God gave them up to Mahomedan imposture, depredation, and ruin. As the smoke brought forth the locusts, (though both proceeded from the pit,) so popery brought forth Mahomedism.* But for the one, the other could not have prevailed as it did where the light of the gospel had once appeared. The Roman catholics have made great noise about the keys; and truly a key has been given them, "the key of the bottomless pit!"

As to the *locusts*, they are described chiefly by their *depredations*. The wrath of God is less directed against them than against that out of which they came. They were indeed *from beneath*, and so was the conquering system of Assyria and Babylon; but as these powers were the rod of God's anger against a nation which had corrupted the true religion, it is not till they in their turn are punished that much is said of their crimes. And thus the destructive hordes of Saracens that laid waste a great part of the eastern world are described as executing a commission, not against "grass, or green things, or trees," like ordinary locusts, but "against the men who had not the seal of God in their foreheads"—that is, against the corrupters of Christianity, ver. 4. There was a *direction* given to their successes very much like that which has of late years been given to those on the continent of Europe against the papal countries. The Christianity of the Greek church, whose patriarch resided at Constantinople, was in a great degree absorbed by them.

It is observable, however, that the men against whom their commission was directed were not to be *killed*, but tormented for a certain time. They doubtless did kill great numbers, *individually* considered; but with all their ravages they only harassed those countries where corrupted Christianity prevailed. They were not able to destroy either the Greek or the Latin church.

The *time* in which they should harass them is limited to "five months," which probably alludes to the usual season for the ravages of the natural locust. It has been thought to intend so many prophetic days or years. Five months, reckoning thirty days to a month, and each day a year, would be 150 years; and this was the period in which the Saracen arms are said to have prevailed. They began about 612. After the death of Mahomed, they continued, though with some interruptions, to carry on their conquests. In 713 they entered Spain, which in a few years was subjugated to them, and, passing the Pyrenees, they entered France, which was then said to be the only rampart of Christianity. They advanced as to a certain victory, whereupon ensued one of the bloodiest battles that the world had ever seen. Of the Saracens there were 400,000 men, besides women and children, who came with them, designing to settle in France, and no doubt to extirpate

* See Mr. Cuninghame's Dissertation on the Trumpets, chap. VI.

Christianity from Europe. *Three hundred and seventy thousand* of them are said to have been slain, including their general. This battle was fought by *Charles Martel*, the grandfather of Charlemagne, in 734, and put a stop to the progress of the Saracen arms in Europe. About 762, after the "five months" of years which were given them to continue had elapsed, they ceased to extend their conquests by settling peaceably in the countries which they had conquered, and so ceased to ravage as locusts.

The *description* given of these locusts, ver. 7-10, answers to most of the peculiarities of the Saracen armies; as their use of cavalry; their turbans, resembling crowns, in which they gloried; the union of fierceness and effeminacy in their character; the impenetrability of their forces; the rapidity of their conquests; and their carrying with them the sting of a deadly imposture.

Finally, This fearful army is described as having "a king over them, even the angel of the bottomless pit," whence they came, and "whose name in the Hebrew tongue is *Abaddon*, but in the Greek *Apollyon*." This would seem to be Mahomed and his successors, or Satan as working by them. The genius of Mahomedism is to *destroy* the lives as well as the souls of men.

After this we are told, "One woe is past; and behold there come two woes more hereafter." By the term "hereafter" it seems to be intimated that the second would not follow very soon after the first, but that a considerable lapse of time would intervene betwixt them. In this respect the language differs from the introduction of the third woe, in chap. xi. 14, where it is said, "The second woe is past, and behold the third one cometh *quickly*."

DISCOURSE XI.

THE SECOND WOE-TRUMPET, OR THE ARMY OF HORSEMEN.

Rev. ix. 13-21.

WE here enter on the sixth, or second woe-trumpet, which, embracing different contemporary events, may be expected to require several discourses. That part of it which we are now upon contains a description of the revival of the Mahomedan desolations by the *Turks*, in the thirteenth and following centuries. It will be recollected that the second woe was not to come quickly, but "hereafter." Such was the fact. Several centuries elapsed between the ravages of the Saracens and those of the Turks. But as the desolations wrought by the followers of Mahomed, whether Saracens or Turks, would be less injurious to the cause of Christ than the abominations of popery, there is not only much less said of them than of the other, but what is said is finished before the other is particularly begun, that the thread of the principal subject might not be broken. There is no reason to think that the Turkish wars would have occupied a place in Scripture prophecy, but for their being the appointed means of crushing a corrupt part of the Christian church. For these reasons I question the propriety of calling the Mahomedan power *the eastern antichrist*. There is no doubt of its being *opposed* to Christ, and the same may be said of heathenism; but *nothing is called antichrist in the Scriptures which makes no profession of being on the side of Christ*. If there was an eastern antichrist, it was that community

which the Mahomedans destroyed, namely, "the men who had not the seal of God in their foreheads!"

The leading facts corresponding with this part of the prophecy were as follows:—The Turks, a people who in the ninth century had migrated from the neighbourhood of Mount Caucasus, and settled in Armenia Major, by the eleventh century became formidable to their neighbours. They consisted of *four* sultanies, the seats of which were at *Bagdad*, *Damascus*, *Alcppo*, and *Iconium*; all in the neighbourhood of the Euphrates. Their principal struggles were with the eastern Roman empire, or the Christians of the Greek church. For about two centuries their ambition was restrained, partly it may be by the European crusades, or what were called *the holy wars*, for the recovery of Jerusalem; but the disasters which attended these undertakings inducing the European princes at length to relinquish them, they were then at liberty to pursue their objects. In 1281 they obtained a decided victory over the eastern Christians; and in 1299 a new empire was founded by *Othman*, composed of the four Turkish sultanies, which still subsists, and is called after his name the *Ottoman* empire. During the fourteenth century their successes continued. In the middle of the fifteenth (1453) Constantinople was taken, the eastern Roman empire fell, and with it the Greek church, neither of which, except in the religion of the latter being embraced by the Russians, has since lifted up its head.

The "four angels" then denote the four Turkish governments near the Euphrates. These are called angels, as being *messengers* of wrath, commissioned to destroy the corrupt Christians of the east. The "loosing" of them refers to the removal of those obstructions which for a time impeded their progress. The "voice" which ordered them to be loosed proceeding from the "four horns of the golden altar" signifies that these judgments, like those in chap. viii. 3–5, would be in answer to the prayers of the saints; or perhaps, as Bishop Newton says, "intimating that the sins of men must have been very great, when the altar, which was their sanctuary and protection, called aloud for vengeance." Their continuance "for an hour and a day, and a month and a year," reckoning by prophetic time, includes 391 years; which beginning from 1281, the year of their first victory over the eastern Roman empire, extends to 1672, the year of their last victory over the Poles; from which period they have been sinking into such disorder and imbecility as forebode their ruin. Their armies being described as "horsemen" answers to the numerous cavalry of the Turks. The number of them, consisting of "myriads of myriads," shows the vast armies which they brought into the field. "Breastplates of fire, of jacinth, and of brimstone," may denote the glittering harness with which the horses were caparisoned. Their "heads being as the heads of lions" is expressive of their strength and fierceness. "Fire, and smoke, and brimstone, issuing out of their mouths," seems to allude to the use of gunpowder in war, which began about this period. Great guns were used in the taking of Constantinople in 1453. The symbol is expressive of what a body of horsemen, fighting with fire-arms, would appear to a distant spectator, who had never before seen or heard of any thing of the kind.

There is one remarkable difference between the *locusts* and the *horsemen*: the former were not commissioned to *kill*, but merely to *torment*; whereas of the latter it is said, "By these were the third part of men *killed*, even by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone which issued out of their mouths." They both, doubtless, killed men as individuals; but the latter only were permitted to kill those *political bodies* to which the prophecy refers. The eastern Roman empire, and the Greek church as connected with it, fell not by the Saracens of the eighth, but by the Turks of the fif-

teenth century. Finally, their "power was in their *mouth*, and in their *tails*." Now as the fire and smoke and brimstone are said to issue from the former they would seem to denote their artillery; and as in respect of the latter they resemble the locusts, these are the destructive *principles* which they propagate by the sword in common with the Saracens. Mahomedism was that to the Christian church in the east which Assyria and Babylon were to Samaria and Jerusalem. Its first appearance in the seventh and eighth centuries was a judgment upon them for having corrupted the Christian doctrine and worship; but as a body it went only to "torment" them, and to "kill" them. It said, "Repent, or I will remove thy candlestick out of his place!" but they repented not. Its last appearance therefore, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, carried the threatening into execution. The candlestick of the eastern church was removed, and her children were killed with death!

But that which is the most remarkable is the effect, or rather the want of effect, of these terrible judgments on those who survived them. "The *rest of the men* (that is, of the men who had not the seal of God in their foreheads) who were not killed by these plagues, repented not." As those that were killed were the eastern Roman empire and the Greek church as connected with it, so those that were not killed were the western Roman empire and the Latin church. These two churches were as *Aholah* and *Aholibah*. The fall of the one ought to have been a warning to the other; but it was not. They persisted in their image-worship, which was only the old idolatry of the pagans under a new form; nor were they behind them in their murderous persecutions, their foul impostures, their filthy intrigues, and their fraudulent impositions. And though, soon after the overthrow of the Greek church, the Reformation began, yet they reformed not. The council of Trent, which was called on this occasion, sat eighteen years, and at last left things as it found them. Babylon was not to be healed!

DISCOURSE XII.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WESTERN OR PAPAL APOSTACY.

Rev. x.

THE eastern church, as connected with the Roman empire, being slain, the remainder of the prophecy may be expected to concern the *western*, or "the rest of the men who were not killed by these plagues." This it does; so much of it, at least, as brings us to the taking of the beast and of the false prophet, and so to the commencement of the Millennium. The corruptions of the western church have been intimated before; as by the sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads, chap. vii.; by the judgments inflicted on the western empire under the first four trumpets, chap. viii.; and by the cloud of smoke from the bottomless pit: but now the prophecy treats directly and exclusively of them. Nor is it surprising that the apostacy of this church should occupy so large a part of the prophecy,* inasmuch as both for its duration and mischievous effects there is nothing equal to it under the gospel dispensation. The period allotted for its continuance is no less than 1260 years; during which the holy city is trodden under foot, the witnesses prophesy in sackcloth, the true church fleeth into the wilderness, and the saints of the Most High are persecuted to death by a ferocious and

From the beginning of chap. x. to the end of chap. xix.

cruel beast. This apostate church was, no doubt, *the man of sin* foretold by Paul; and, notwithstanding what has been advanced against it by a late respectable writer, I have no doubt of its being the *antichrist* which the Christians in John's time had *heard should come*.*

Before we enter upon this subject it will be proper to give the outlines of the ten chapters in which it is contained. Chap. x. I consider as merely introductory. Chap. xi. gives a general representation of this corrupt and persecuting power, with the state of the church of Christ under it, during the 1260 years. Chap. xii. gives a second, and chap. xiii. and xiv. a third general representation of it during the same period. Chap. xv. and xvi. give a more particular account of that part of the subject which commences at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, and contains a subdivision of that trumpet into seven vials, the pouring out of which brings us down to the Millennium. The xviith, xviiith, and xixth chapters contain what in modern publications we should call *notes of illustration*, giving particular accounts of things which before had only been generally intimated.

We are not to expect the events relating to the western church to follow the conclusion of those of the eastern, *in order of time*. In tracing the issue of the one, we were led almost down to the times of the Reformation; but, in taking up the other, we must expect to go many centuries back again. It is in prophecy as it is in history, when describing contemporary events, the writer, having gone through one series, returns and takes up the other. It is thus in the history of Judah and Israel in the Second Book of Kings; with this difference, that, in carrying on those histories together, the writer went through only a single reign of one of them ere he returned to the other; whereas in this the overthrow of the eastern church is completed before the account of the western is begun. The former brought us down to the fifteenth century; the latter, when tracing the origin of things, may glance at events as early as the fourth.

Ver. 1-11. The "mighty angel" appears by his description to be the Son of God himself, and this may indicate the importance of the vision. His being "clothed with a cloud" may express the concealment of his designs, and the hiding of his power. He could have crushed this great conspiracy at the outset, but he did not. The "rainbow on his head" is the sign of peace, or of covenant mercy, and may here denote that whatever evils might be permitted in order to try the church, yet there should not be such a deluge as to destroy it. His countenance being compared to "the sun," and his feet to "pillars of fire," may intimate that neither is his glory tarnished, nor his majesty diminished, by all the corruptions which are introduced under his name. Finally, his "coming down from heaven" seems to denote a change of scene. The Lamb's company stand upon Mount Sion; but the harlot sitteth upon the waters, and the beast riseth out of the sea. Thus, as the subject respects the same apostate community, the scene is the earth, and the angel descends from heaven to disclose it.

* This appears to be evidently made out by Mr. Scott, in his notes on 2 Thes. ii. 3-12, and 1 John ii. 18. As to its being a character of antichrist that he "denieth the Father and the Son," (ver. 22,) it is of the antichrist *already come* that this is spoken, who had professed Christianity, and whose apostacy consisted not in a disavowal of the name of Christ, but of certain Christian doctrines, which included a *virtual* denial of Jesus being the Christ, as that also was a virtual denial of the Father. Had these "forerunners of antichrist," as Mr. Scott very properly calls them, been avowed infidels, they could not have been *seducers* to the churches of Christ, (ver. 26,) a name given to false teachers. Such were those *deceivers* in 2 John 7, who, by denying the real humanity of Christ, denied his being come in the flesh. But if a *virtual* denial of the Father and the Son rendered those who were *already come* antichrists, there is no reason why it should not do the same of *him that should come*. It is not probable that John would have allowed "the man of sin" to acknowledge either the Father or the Son, while he usurped the place of both.

The "little book" which the angel held open in his hand relates doubtless to the western apostacy. It has been thought to be a kind of *Appendix*, or *Codicil*, to the sealed book, and a part of what follows to be *chapters* of it. But this seems too much; for if so, it would not properly belong to the sealed book, whereas all that pertains to the apostacy, and to the state of the church to the end of the world, belongs to the trumpets, which trumpets are a subdivision of the seventh seal. It is not therefore any thing *added* to the sealed book, but a marked division of it,—a book as it were within a book.—The angel's setting his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, would express his absolute dominion over both. His "crying with a loud voice as when a lion roareth" was awfully preparatory to the seven thunders which immediately uttered their voices. On hearing them, John was about to write, but is told by a voice from heaven to "seal up the things which the thunders uttered, and write them not." The thunders then were not mere sounds, but certain "things," which, though they were not at present to be disclosed, yet in due time should be fulfilled. Their fulfilment too was an object of such importance, and lay so near the angel's heart, that with the utmost indignation he "swore by Him that liveth for ever and ever that *there should be no delay*;" but that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he should begin to sound, they should be accomplished.*

From these considerations it appears plain that the seven thunders relate to the same "things" as those which are afterwards disclosed under the seven vials. They both express the wrath of God against the papal anti-christ; the one describes it only in general, and that in the form of *threatenings*, the other descends to particulars, and describes it as *actually executing*. The thunders being introduced before the prophetic account of the apostacy may denote the displeasure of God against it from its very beginning, and tend to support the faith and patience of the church under it.

The forbidding the apostle to write, and commanding him to eat the book, seems like saying,—The apostacy is not yet ripe. The wrath of God against it will be deferred for the present. Under the sounding of the seventh angel he will pour forth the vials of his indignation upon it. At present, therefore, write it not; but receive a general impression of things by eating the book!—The allusion doubtless is to Ezek. iii. 1-3, and denotes that he must understand and digest its contents. The book, he was told, would be sweet in his mouth, but bitter in his belly. The same desire of understanding the future state of the church which made him weep when no one was found worthy to open the sealed book, must make him rejoice when an open book was put into his hand, with a direction to eat it; but when he came to digest it, and to perceive the corruptions and persecutions that should prevail,

* Whether *οτι χρόνος ουκ εσται επι* be rendered, as in our version, *that there should be time no longer*; or more literally, as by Mr. DAUBUZ and others, *that the time shall not be yet*; or, as Dr. GILL says the words will bear to be rendered, *that there should be delay no longer*; the meaning cannot be that time itself should then be at an end. Nor does it seem to be an object of sufficient importance for an oath that the time for the seven thunders to be executed *should not be yet*. It is not their not being yet, but their being at the appointed time; not the protraction, but the accomplishment, *notwithstanding the protraction*, to which the angel swears. There is a manifest reference in the passage to Dan. xii. 7: "And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever, that it shall be for a time, times, and a half, and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished." It was of the papal anti-christ, of whom Antiochus Epiphanes was a type, that the man clothed in linen spake, and of him speaks the angel to John. As the former predicts his fall, so does the latter; and as Antiochus had been permitted to scatter the power of the holy people for a time, times, and half a time, so should anti-christ be permitted to scatter the church of Christ for the same prophetic period, reckoning a year for a day, that is, for the space of 1260 years. See "Prideaux's Connexion," Part II, Book III. at the close.

and for so long a period retard the progress of the gospel, it would be grievous to him.

To teach him that what he had now seen and done was designed only as a general impression, preparatory to what should follow, he is given to understand that he must go over the ground "again," writing prophecies which respect many "peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings."

DISCOURSE XIII.

THE FIRST GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPAL APOSTACY, AND OF THE STATE OF THE CHURCH UNDER IT.

Rev. xi., &c.

I CONCEIVE with Mr. LOWMAN that the following chapters contain three general descriptions of the papal antichrist, and of the state of the church under it; only he confines them to the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth chapters, whereas it appears to me that the thirteenth and fourteenth should not be divided, but considered as containing between them the third general description. The reasons for considering these four chapters not as one continued prophecy, but as general representations of the events of the same period, are the following:—

First, The events foretold by the slaughter and resurrection of the witnesses in chap. xi.; by the flight of the woman into the wilderness, and the victory over the dragon, in chap. xii.; with the ravages of the beasts and the triumph of the Lamb's company in chapters xiii. and xiv., are the same.—*Secondly*, These representations are not confined to one or two trumpets, but comprehend the times of the greater part of them. Some of the things represented, particularly those at the beginning of chap. xii., in which the origin of the apostacy is traced, appear to go back to the times of the first four trumpets, namely, to the fourth and fifth centuries; others, particularly those at the close of chapters xi. and xiv., which describe the overthrow of the apostate church, go forward to the times of the last trumpet, and even of the last vials, into which that trumpet is subdivided. This will be evident by comparing chap. xi. 19, with chap. xvi. 18. In both mention is made of "lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail;" both, therefore, manifestly refer to the same events.—*Thirdly*, In each of these descriptions there is a reference to the 1260 years, the period which in prophecy marks the duration of the antichristian power. So long were the witnesses to prophesy in sackcloth, so long the woman to be in the wilderness, and so long the beast to make war with the saints. It is therefore to the events of this period that these chapters relate; containing an account of the rise, the reign, and the overthrow of the papal antichrist.

It could scarcely be expected that so long a period, embracing such multifarious characters and events, events too which so deeply interest the church of God, should be passed over without particular notice. The sacred writer is as it were made to pause, and to give us several distinct views of the subject, according to the different lights in which he beheld it. I only add, if these chapters do really comprehend the events of the 1260 years, we might almost presume, in going over them, to meet with something under each description relating to so distinguished an event as the *Reformation*, and must certainly have thrice to cross the meridian of our own times.

The first of these general descriptions, which we now enter upon, does not appear to trace the origin of the apostacy, but to take it up from the time in which things were so matured, that, in taking the measurement of God's temple, the papal community was ordered to be left out, as not belonging to it.

Ver. 1, 2. The language no doubt is Jewish, but the doctrine, worship, and worshippers of the *Christian* church are intended. Christianity, having become the religion of the state, abounded with converts; but such would be their character, and such the kind of religion they would introduce, that the extent of the church would require to be contradicted. The outer court, containing the body of the worshippers, must be left out. That which had been known by the name of the catholic church must be given up as idolatrous; and thus the profanation of the temple by Antiochus would be acted over again.*

Ver. 3-6. The import of these verses is, that, during the long period of papal corruption and persecution, God would have his faithful witnesses, who should bear testimony against it, though it were in sackcloth. As, in the language of the prophecy, a king denotes not an individual monarch, but a succession of kings, or a kingdom; so by "two witnesses" we are doubtless to understand not two individual witnesses, but a competent succession of them. This is manifest from their continuing through the long period of 1260 years, which can only be true of a succession of men. Some have supposed them to be the Old and New Testaments, others the Old and New Testament churches; but I see no reason why they should not be understood of the faithful servants of Christ, who, *during this period*, would bear witness for the truth. It is of the *true church* as opposed to the *false* that the other general descriptions speak; namely, of the woman and her seed who fled into the wilderness, and of the Lamb's company as opposed to that of the beast; I conclude, therefore, that such are the two witnesses in this.

Moreover, the correspondence of 1260 days, in which they should prophesy, with the "time, times, and the dividing of time," in Daniel, (chap. vii. 25,) not only determines the general application of the prophecy, but the parties concerned in both to be the same. In the latter end of the fourth, or Roman, government, according to Daniel, a little horn should grow up among the ten horns, that should "wear out *the saints of the Most High*, until a time, times, and the dividing of time." According to John, the witnesses, during the same period, should prophesy in sackcloth, and be persecuted and slain. The *witnesses* of John, therefore, and the *saints* of Daniel, are the same.

These two witnesses are said to be "the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the God of the earth." The olive trees and the candlestick of Zechariah, to which there is a manifest reference, were not the same. The former supplied the latter, or the two sides of the bowl of it, with oil. The candlestick seems to have signified the church, and the

* "Our Reformers (says Mr. FABER) never thought of unchurching the church of Rome, though they freely declared it to have *erred*. Hence, while they rejected its abominations, they did not scruple to derive from it their line of episcopal and sacerdotal ordination." Vol. II. p. 3, note.

The English Reformers might allow the church of Rome to be a true church of Christ; but do the Scriptures support them in their concession? The church of Rome was once a part of God's temple; but hence it is left out of the measurement. Instead of being "the holy city," it is a body of idolaters who tread it under foot. It is not Zion, but Babylon. Some of God's people might be found in her, but they are commanded to come out of her. She is not the bride, the Lamb's wife, but the mother of harlots. Finally, if the church of Rome continued to be a church of Christ, what must that church be who fled from her persecutions into the wilderness?

olive trees the prophets of God who were with the builders helping them, Ezra v. 2. Corresponding with this, the olive trees of John are faithful ministers, and the candlesticks Christian churches. The same prophesying which bears witness against the corruptions of antichrist supplies the friends of Christ as with fresh oil, and enables them to shine as lights in the world. Both the olive trees and the candlesticks in different ways are witnesses to the truth.

The "fire that proceedeth out of their mouth" denotes the Divine threatenings to which those who reject their testimony are exposed. In this way all who have perseveringly set themselves against the truth of God have been slain by it, not only as incurring the wrath to come, but spiritual judgments even in this life; such are blindness of mind and hardness of heart, the most awful and sure presages of eternal death.

Their having "power to shut heaven that it rain not in the days of their prophecy, to turn waters into blood, and to smite the earth with plagues as often as they will," denotes the influence of prayer when presented in faith and in conformity to the will of God. There is a reference no doubt to the prayer of Elijah against apostate Israel, which prayer was answered with a dearth; but, without any thing properly miraculous, the prayers of God's suffering servants may draw down both temporal and spiritual judgments on persecuting nations. The terrible things which God is now in righteousness inflicting on the nations may be in answer to the prayers of his servants of former ages, who century after century have been crying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Such cries enter the ears of the Lord of hosts, and must be answered.

APPENDIX TO DISCOURSE XIII.

THE history of the witnesses prior to the eleventh and twelfth centuries is difficult to be traced, owing to the want of materials; and during those centuries almost all the accounts that we have of them are from the pens of their persecutors, who have not failed to transmit their memory to posterity in the most odious colours. That some who in church history are deemed heretics were really such need not to be questioned; but let any serious Christian read the church history of MOSHEIM; and, unless he can find a portion of true religion under the article of "heresies and heretics that disturbed the peace of the church during this century," it is difficult to say where he is to look for it. After the utmost search through other parts, he may ask, "Where is wisdom, and where is the place of understanding?"

There is little doubt but that all through these dark ages there were many thousands who stood aloof from the corruptions of the times, and bore practical testimony against them; and who, notwithstanding some errors, were much nearer the truth and true religion than those who have reproached them as heretics.

There is reason to believe that amongst the *Novatians*, the *Paulicians*, the *Cathari*, the *Paterines*, and others who separated from the catholic church, and were cruelly persecuted by it, there were a great number of faithful witnesses for the truth in those days.

We should not, like Bishop Newton, confine the witnesses to councils, princes, and eminent men, who in their day bore testimony against error and superstition. They will be found, I doubt not, in great numbers amongst

those who were unknown, and consequently unnoticed by historians. God hath chosen the *things that are not* to bring to naught the things that are. Let a church history of our own times be written on the principles of that of MOSHEIM, and the great body of the most faithful witnesses would have no place in it.

The history of the witnesses will be principally found in that of the *Waldenses* and *Albigenses*, who for a succession of centuries spread themselves over almost every nation in Europe, and in innumerable instances bore testimony, at the expense of their lives, against the corruptions of the anti-christian party.

John Paul Perrin, a French protestant of the city of Lyons, who early in the seventeenth century wrote the history of these churches, traces their origin to *Peter Waldo*, who was also a citizen of Lyons. Waldo, as we shall see presently, was not the father of the Waldenses; but he was an excellent man. About the year 1160 he began to bear testimony against the papal corruptions. The archbishop of Lyons, being informed of his proceedings, sought to apprehend him; but Waldo, having many friends in the city, was concealed there for about three years. After this, he was driven from Lyons, and it is said that he retired into Dauphine in the south of France, and afterwards into Picardy in the north; and that his followers spread themselves, not only in Piedmont, Provence, Languedoc, &c., but in almost all the nations of Europe.

Waldo translated, or procured to be translated, the Scriptures into the French language; by means of which his followers disseminated the truth over a great part of Europe.

In *Piedmont*, whither some of his followers were driven, churches were planted, which though opposed to innumerable oppressions and persecutions from their princes, who were stirred up by the priests, yet continued to bear witness to the truth, not only till the Reformation, but for a considerable time after it. In *Picardy*, whither Waldo himself retired, the houses of three hundred gentlemen who adhered to him were razed to the ground, and several walled towns were destroyed. Being driven thence, he and his followers retired into *Flanders*, where great numbers of them were burnt to death. Thence many fled into *Germany*, particularly into *Alsace*, and the country along the Rhine, where the bishop of *Mayence* caused to be burnt thirty-five burgesses in one fire, and eighteen in another, who with great constancy suffered death. At *Strasburg* eighty were burnt at the instance of the bishop of the place. They were scattered through the whole kingdom of *France*. From the year 1206, when the Inquisition was established, to 1228, such multitudes were seized, particularly in France, that even the bishops declared to the monks inquisitors, that "the expense of supporting them would be more than could be defrayed, and that there would not be found lime and stone sufficient to build prisons which should contain them!" A hundred and fourteen were burnt alive at one time in Paris. In 1223 they had goodly churches in *Bulgaria*, *Croatia*, *Dalmatia*, and *Hungary*; and notwithstanding the persecution, in Germany, one of their martyrs assured his persecutors, in the year 1315, that there were then 80,000 of the same mind in the country. In *Bohemia*, a colony of Waldenses settled and planted churches 240 years before the time of Huss. Another colony went from Dauphine about 1370, and settled in *Calabria*, where they were defended by their landlords against the priests till 1560, when they were exterminated by the papal soldiery. In *England*, during the reign of Henry II., namely, from 1174 to 1189, they were persecuted under the name of *Publicans*. About 1315, *LOLLARD*, who was seven years afterwards burnt to death at Cologne, came over to England and taught many, who thence were

called *Lollards*, and were persecuted without mercy. Soon after the death of Lollard, the same doctrines were taught by *Wickliff*, whose followers also for a century and a half, down to the Reformation, were burnt in great numbers.

Perrin, as has been observed, traces the origin of the Waldenses and Albigenses to PETER WALDO; yet there are several things even in his history which prove their existence LONG BEFORE THE TIME OF WALDO. He quotes *Reynerius* the inquisitor, who wrote within sixty years after Waldo, as saying of the Waldenses that "they had resisted the church of Rome for a long time." He quotes a Waldensian poem, called *The Noble Lesson*, which poem appears by its contents to have been written about the year 1100, that is, forty or fifty years at least before the appearance of Waldo. He quotes *Claudius Rubis*, who, in his *History of Lyons*, says of the Waldenses, in a way of reproach, that "being retired unto the Alps, at their departure from Lyons, they became like the rest of the people of that country, besom-riders," or sorcerers. There must then have been a people among the Alps who were reproached as sorcerers, before the disciples of Waldo went and joined them. Finally, in *Perrin's* History of the Albigenses, he says, "They received the belief of the Waldenses soon after the departure of Waldo from Lyons, that is, soon after 1160, and yet that the instruments who were employed in this work were *Peter of Bruis*, *Henry*, *Joseph*, *Esperon*, and *Arnold Holt*. But *Peter of Bruis* began to preach against the corruptions of popery in 1110, and was burnt in 1130, and *Henry* was soon after imprisoned at Rome; all before the times of Waldo. There must therefore have been a body of these faithful witnesses from an early period, probably from the times in which the Christian church began to be overspread with corruptions.

In the spring of 1655 a most horrible massacre of the Waldenses was perpetrated in the dominions of the duke of Savoy.* On this occasion Sir Samuel Morland, going over as envoy from the protector Cromwell to the court of Savoy, was charged, as he says, by Archbishop Usher, before he left England, to make the most diligent inquiry into the antiquity of the Waldenses. Having finished his business at Turin, and retired to Geneva, he was requested by Secretary Thurloe to write his *History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piedmont*. In his history, Sir Samuel, besides relating many things of the Waldenses since the days of *Perrin*, and narrating the particulars of the late massacre, makes it appear that these churches remained united with all other Christian churches so long as they retained the true religion; but when the church of Rome departed from it,

* It was on occasion of this horrible massacre that MILTON wrote the following sonnet:—

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them that kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groans,
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that rolled
Mother and infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all th' Italian fields, where still doth sway
A triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learned thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe!

Not only did the English government interfere with the court of Turin in behalf of the remnant of these persecuted people, but a collection was made for them through the nation, which amounted to nearly £40,000, (a prodigious sum in those times,) which was sent to them by Sir Samuel Morland.

they began to depart from her; and that the followers of *Peter Waldo*, who about 1165 fled from the south of France into the valleys of Piedmont, were not the first Waldenses, but rather that they joined themselves to those their faithful brethren who had been there long before them.

The learned Dr. ALLIX, a French protestant who took refuge in England, on the revocation of the edict of Nantes, largely establishes the same thing in his *Remarks on the Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont and of the Country of the Albigenses*. He has proved that these people, from their situation in the *valleys*, and not from Waldo, were denominated *Wallenses*, or the *Vaudois*—that though not free from a portion of the general corruption, yet they continued to maintain the leading principles of what is now called the protestant religion—that before the year 1026 a body of men in Italy, connected with *Gundulfus*, believed contrary to the opinions of the church of Rome, condemned its errors, and sent their brethren into divers places to oppose themselves to the superstitions that reigned throughout the west—that in the same century another body of the Christians of Italy, denominated *Paterines*, and whose principles were much the same with those who were afterwards called Waldenses, separated from the church of Rome—that soon after the year 1100 it was said, “If a man loves those that desire to love God and Jesus Christ, if he will neither curse, nor swear, nor lie, nor whore, nor kill, nor deceive his neighbour, nor avenge himself of his enemies, they presently say, He is a *Vaudès*, he deserves to be punished; and by lies and forging are found to take away from him what he has got by his lawful industry”—that about 1160 many of the followers of Peter Waldo retired into the valleys of Piedmont, and there joined the *Vaudois*—that, Waldo himself being condemned as a heretic, it was common for the papists to call all religious people Waldenses, hoping thereby to fix a stigma upon them, and to represent them as a sect but newly risen up—and that from this time to the Reformation, a period of between three and four hundred years, the Waldenses were persecuted with but little intermission; partly by armies sent to destroy them, and partly by the horrid process of the inquisition; which persecutions they bore with unparalleled constancy.

Similar remarks are made by Dr. Allix on the churches of the *Albigenses*, so called from *Albi*, a city in the south of France. He has proved that these churches continued for many centuries independent of the pope—that about the middle of the eleventh century *Berengarius* of Tours opposed the doctrines of the Romish church, and was charged by its adherents with having corrupted almost all the French, Italians, and English—that early in the twelfth, namely, about the year 1110, *Peter of Bruis*, and after him *Henry*, taught the same doctrines, for which the former was burnt, and the latter died in prison—that in the fourth canon of the Council of Tours, held in the year 1163, it is said, “In the country about Thoulouse there sprang up *long ago* a damnable heresy, which by little and little, like a canker, spreading itself to the neighbouring places in Gascoin, hath already infected many other provinces”—that between 1137 and 1180 Languedoc was so full of the disciples of *Peter of Bruis* and *Henry*, that the archbishop of Narbonne, writing to Louis VII. king of France, complains as follows:—“My lord the king, We are extremely pressed with many calamities, among which there is one that most of all affects us, which is, that the catholic faith is extremely shaken in this our diocese, and St. Peter’s boat is so violently tossed by the waves that it is in great danger of sinking!”

From the whole it appears that in the early ages of the papal apostacy, before the introduction of image-worship, transubstantiation, and other gross departures from the faith, the opposition of the faithful would be less decided

than in later times. Other Christian churches, while they preserved their independency, might not go the same lengths as that of Rome; but neither might they at once separate from it, nor probably be clear of a participation in its corruptions. The opposition to it might be expected also to be chiefly from individuals rather than from churches; and this appears to have been the fact.

The famous CLAUDE, bishop of Turin, in the ninth century, though he preached the doctrine of Christ in great purity, and boldly opposed almost all the errors of popery, yet does not appear to have so separated from the church of Rome as to form independent churches. The principles however which he taught led to this issue, and were acted upon after his death. His preaching and writings contributed greatly to the spread of true religion in the valleys of Piedmont.

From the fourth to the tenth century but little is said of the Waldenses in history: yet as *Reynerius*, who wrote about the year 1230, speaks of the Vaudois as "a sect of the *longest standing*," and as the Council of Tours, about seventy years before this, speaks of the same heresy as having "sprung up *long ago*," we may conclude, even from the acknowledgments of the adversaries, that God was not without his witnesses in those dark ages. MILTON also, in the sonnet before quoted, represents the Vaudois, or people of the valleys, as having "kept God's truth so pure of old, when all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones." He must therefore have considered them as having preserved the purity of Christianity *while our Saxon ancestors were yet heathens*. After the tenth century, when iniquity was at the full, the opposition was more decided. For 500 years, during the most murderous wars and persecutions, the *Paterines*, the *Petrobrussians*, the *Waldenses*, the *Albigenses*, the *Lollards*, the *Wickliffites*, &c., maintained their ground. Nor were they contented to bear witness to the truth in their own countries, but employed missionaries to almost all the nations of Europe; and this notwithstanding each missionary could expect nothing less than martyrdom for his reward!

Nor were their labours unproductive. The numbers who espoused their principles in the south of France only were such that a crusade of 500,000 men was sent against them. It was by this army of bloody-minded fanatics that the city of *Beziers* was taken, and the inhabitants, without distinction, men, women, and children, to the number of 60,000, were put to the sword!

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE FIRST GENERAL DESCRIPTION CONTINUED; OR THE SLAUGHTER AND RESURRECTION OF THE WITNESSES, WITH THE FALLING OF A TENTH PART OF THE CITY.

Rev. xi. 7-13.

VER. 7-12. If the testimony of the witnesses be the same as their prophesying in sackcloth, it must continue through the whole of the 1260 years. But it does not appear that the beast at the termination of that period will be able to "overcome and kill them," seeing he himself will then be slain, and his body given to the burning flame. Several commentators therefore have rendered it, *while they shall perform, or be about to finish*, their testimony, &c. And with this agrees the account which repre-

sents the beast and his party at the time of the slaying of the witnesses as being in the plenitude of their power.

The *slaughter* of the witnesses would not, according to the usual style of the prophecy, denote their being put to death as individuals, but silenced and crushed as witnessing bodies. It was thus, as we have seen, that the eastern empire, and the Greek church as connected with it, were *killed* by the Turkish horsemen, chap. ix. 18.

Of the *beast* that shall kill them no mention is made before; but we shall hear much of him hereafter. Suffice it at present to say, it is the same as Daniel's fourth beast, chap. vii., and as that which is described by John, in chap. xiii. 1-8 of this book, as having "seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns:" it is *the Roman empire under its last form, as divided into ten independent kingdoms*. There he is described as rising out of the sea; here out of the abyss, or bottomless pit: the one, as Mr. Faber remarks, may denote his political, and the other his spiritual origin.

The witnesses were to be killed in *the great city*, which "spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." We shall have occasion more than once to notice an antichristian *city* as opposed to the church of Christ, just as the great harlot is opposed to the bride the Lamb's wife. It will be proper therefore to fix the meaning at the outset. If the prophecy had related to Old Testament times, when God chose a literal city in which to build his temple, a literal city might have been properly opposed to it. When Zion was his dwelling-place, Babylon was its adversary. But as the true church under the gospel is not confined to place, neither is the false church. The New Testament Zion does not consist of material buildings, but is a community scattered among the nations; and such is the New Testament Babylon. The "great city" therefore means Rome, not in respect of its buildings, nor the inhabitants within its walls, nor as a political empire, the symbol of which is *the beast*; but as the head of the antichristian community. This city, or community of nations under one ecclesiastical head, was a Sodom for its filthiness, an Egypt for its idolatry and persecution, and a Jerusalem for its malignant hatred of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The dead bodies of the witnesses were to lie in the street of the great city *unburied*; that is, being silenced and crushed throughout Christendom, they would for a time be treated with the utmost indignity and reproach, as those are who are denied the ordinary decencies of burial. Nor would these indignities be inflicted by the highest orders only; but "peoples, and kindreds, and tongues, and nations," that is, the body of the inhabitants of Christendom, would take a part in them. While insulting the witnesses, they would make merry on their own account, as being no longer tormented with their testimony.

Such is the description given of the witnesses, and of the treatment which they would receive, both from the ruling powers and the common people. The question is, What are the facts which correspond with it? It is thought by some that both the slaughter and the resurrection of the witnesses are yet to be fulfilled. If so, it is vain to look for corresponding facts in *past* events. This was the opinion of Bishop NEWTON, of Doctor GILL, and of other expositors of note. I cannot but consider this as a mistake. In the bishop it appears to have been founded on the supposition of *the time of the dead that they should be judged*, spoken of in ver. 18, referring to the last judgment, or "the consummation of all things;" but which manifestly refers to the avenging of the martyrs by the judgments to be inflicted on the papal power, under the seven vials, antecedent to the Millennium. Comp. chap. xi. 18, 19; chap. xvi. 12-21. Dr. GILL speaks of the war by which the witnesses are slain as being "the last war of the beast" (on chap. xi. 8); but the last

war of the beast is that in which he and the false prophet will be taken; and in which the followers of Christ, instead of being killed, shall be victorious over their enemies, chap. xix. 20.* It is remarkable, too, that both the slaughter and resurrection of the witnesses, together with the falling of a tenth part of the city, are introduced before the termination of the sixth, or second woe-trumpet. I question therefore whether these prophecies can refer to events of so late a date as this hypothesis requires.

The time in which the witnesses are slain, and their bodies lie unburied, appears to be a time in which the beast is in the height of his power, or, as PRESIDENT EDWARDS says, "in which the true church of Christ is lowest of all, most of all prevailed against by antichrist, and nearest to an utter extinction; a time in which there is left the least visibility of the church of Christ, yet subsisting in the world, and the least remains of any thing appertaining to true religion whence a revival of it could be expected," p. 92. It is true we know not what is before us; but if such a state of things as this should return after what has occurred in Europe within the last three hundred years, it will, as Mr. Edwards I think has proved, be contrary to all God's usual methods of proceeding. I cannot therefore but think with him that the persecution and slaughter of the witnesses *preceded the Reformation*.

After the suppression of the Bohemians, for nearly a hundred years, true religion was in a manner crushed. The enemy continued without resistance to "wear out the saints of the Most High." Not a *society* or *body* of Christians was to be found which dared to oppose the general corruption. The popish party considered the heretics as suppressed, and congratulated each other on so happy an event. The security that they felt was manifest by the barefaced manner in which they sold their pardons and indulgences at the time when Luther's indignation was first kindled against them.

Whether the "three days and a half," during which the witnesses should lie unburied, denote three years and a half, and refer to a particular period of that duration, or only to a short space of oppression, in allusion to the "three times and a half," as being a kind of 1260 years in miniature, I am not able to determine; nor have I seen any thing on the subject relating to a particular period which afforded me satisfaction. However this may be, if the slaying of the witnesses refer to the times immediately preceding the Reformation, their resurrection and ascension to heaven must denote the Reformation itself, and the placing, by Divine Providence, of the parties concerned in it out of the reach of their enemies. The resurrection, as it were, of the Waldenses, the Wickliffites, and other reputed heretics, in the persons of Luther and his contemporaries, with the rapid progress made by them in various nations nearly at the same time, would cause great fear to fall upon their adversaries; and the security in which they were placed by the secession of those nations from the see of Rome was equal to their being taken up to heaven in a cloud, where those who thirsted for their blood could only look after them with malignity and envy.

Ver. 13. After the resurrection of the witnesses, and before the sounding of the seventh, or third woe-trumpet, follows an *earthquake*, and a tenth part of the city falls. In the earthquake are slain of men (or names of men) seven thousand, and the remnant are affrighted, and give glory to the God of heaven. If the meaning of this passage can be clearly ascertained, it will determine the time of the sounding of the seventh angel, and serve as a medium by which to judge of several other things.

The "earthquake" must, I conceive, denote a *revolution*, as this is the ap-

* See President Edwards on Agreement in Extraordinary Prayer.

propriate and well-known symbol of such an event. The "city" is doubtless the same as that which in the 8th verse is "spiritually called Sodom and Egypt;" that is, the Romish church, or the Apocalyptic Babylon. By "a tenth part" of it must be understood a considerable portion of it, and very probably a part belonging to one of the ten horns, or kingdoms, into which the empire under its papal form was to be divided. By "the names of men," Dr. GOODWIN and others have understood *titles* or *orders* of men, and supposed that the revolution signified by the earthquake would destroy them. Or if the phrase denote, as some have understood it, *men of name*, it would signify the destruction made among the higher orders, and which would of course be accompanied with great slaughter among the common people. "The remnant that were affrighted and gave glory to God" would denote those of the same community who escaped, and whose fears would forebode other examples of the Divine justice.

What event is there during the 1260 years of antichristian usurpation which answers to these characters? It has been understood of the fall of the Greek church in 1453, when Constantinople was taken by the Turks: but that event has been described in the vision of the horsemen (chap. ix.); and it is the western or Latin church that occupies the whole of these chapters. It were much better to understand it of the falling off of the northern nations from the see of Rome, which was an immediate consequence of the Reformation. Its being "in the same hour" with the resurrection of the witnesses would favour this interpretation, but in several other particulars it does not agree. No reason can be given why the seceding northern nations should be called "a tenth part of the city;" nor do any events which attended the Reformation appear to correspond with the slaughter of "seven thousand names of men." If the tenth part of the city fell as early as the Reformation, the seventh angel must have sounded his trumpet "quickly" after it; and this some writers who believed the former have very consistently maintained, conceiving also that the Millennium commenced, or would commence, towards the middle of the eighteenth century. But surely we must allow that events have contradicted this explication. The character of the seventh trumpet is, that under it the kingdoms of this world were to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; but the nations which have fallen off from the papal see have not answered to this description, but have rather sunk into formality and irreligion. And as to the Millennium, one of its characters is, that the beast and the false prophet shall first have gone into perdition, and Satan be bound; but neither of these has taken place. It is also in the Millennium, if ever, that we are to look for the cessation of war, and the universal prevalence of true religion, both among Jews and Gentiles, neither of which has yet come to pass.

All things considered, I know of no event that seems to correspond so well with the prophecy as *the late revolution in France*. Thus it has been understood by some of the ablest expositors, and that for ages prior to the event. A writer in the *Eclectic Review* has collected no fewer than ten of them who have referred to this event, and that long before it occurred, and several of them in commenting on the passage. Among these are the names of Dr. THOMAS GOODWIN, and VITRINGA. Dr. GOODWIN, who wrote in 1639, says, "By the tenth part of the city, I understand, as Mr. Brightman before me, some one tenth part of Europe." "I think it probable that France may be this country; and that in this *revolution* men will be deprived of their *names* and *titles*, which are to be rooted out for ever, and condemned to perpetual forgetfulness." "France may have the honour to have the last great stroke in the ruining of Rome. And this figurative earthquake, though happening only in one country, may extend its effects to

others, so that a great shaking of states, as well political as ecclesiastical, may be intended."

VITRINGA, who wrote in 1719, asks, "What can be more suitable than to understand here by the *tenth part of the city* some illustrious kingdom, which, being under the dominion of Rome with respect to religion, was of distinguished rank among the ten kingdoms, and had hitherto defended the Romish superstitions? It is here said, in a figurative sense, that it would *fall*, since by means of those mighty commotions by which it was to be shaken it would be torn from the body of the antichristian empire." "*France* may be the forum of the great city." "The *earthquake* in this tenth part of the city is an event which history must illustrate. It is not perfectly clear from the prophecy of what kind these commotions are; whether warlike, such as are wont to shake the world, and subvert the existing government, or whether they are such as arise on a sudden from the insurrection of a nation that has been long oppressed: the words of the prophecy appear to favour the latter sense. In the predicted catastrophe some thousands will undoubtedly perish *distinguished* by their elevated dignities or nobility of birth."—*Eclectic Review for February, 1814.*

Dr. GILL, in 1748, speaking of the *earthquake*, says, "Something yet to come is here intended;" and "I rather think the kingdom of *France* is meant, the last of the *ten* kingdoms which rose up out of the ruins of the Roman empire." And in his note on chap. xiii. 18, he speaks of the destruction of antichrist as "quickly following the downfall of the kingdom of *France*, as the *tenth* part of the city, which should fall a little before the third woe came on."

The revolution in France has been truly a moral earthquake, which has shaken the papal world to its centre. One of the *ten* kingdoms which composed it, and that the principal one, has so fallen as at present to be rather a scourge than a support to it. If by *names of men* be meant *titles*, they were abolished; or if *men of name*, the slaughter predicted of them certainly corresponds with the calamities which befell the princes, the nobles, and the priests, during that awful period; and as the fall of a few thousands of great men would involve that of an immense number of the common people, such has been the effect in this instance. Whether the remaining adherents to the papal cause have given "glory to God" in the manner they ought, or not, they have felt his hand, and by their fear and dismay have been compelled to yield a sort of involuntary acknowledgment of his justice.

The only objection that I feel to this application of the prophecy is, that it is said to be "in the same hour" as that in which the witnesses ascended into heaven, which, if understood of that legal security which from the Reformation was afforded to the protestants against popish persecution, may seem to be at too great a distance for such a mode of expression. It is however not only under the same trumpet, but *during the period in which the witnesses continue to enjoy that security to which they were then introduced*, that this event has occurred. Instead of the great Babylonish city recovering itself so as to renew its persecutions against the witnesses, it is itself smitten of God as by an earthquake and in a measure overthrown. If the opinions of GOODWIN, VITRINGA, and GILL be correct, and if the events which have of late years occurred be the accomplishment of them, the last of these writers must have been mistaken in supposing the slaying of the witnesses to be something future; for the fall of the city is placed *after* the slaying and rising again of the witnesses. If therefore the one be now past, so is the other.

DISCOURSE XV.

THE FIRST GENERAL DESCRIPTION CONCLUDED; OR THE SOUNDING OF THE SEVENTH ANGEL.

Rev. vi. 14-19.

AFTER the great earthquake, we hear as it were the cry of the watchman, telling us the hour of the night—"The second woe is past, and behold the third woe cometh quickly!" When the first woe was past, the second and third woes were to come *hereafter*; but between the last two there would be but a short space. As things should approach to a crisis, events would occur in a more rapid succession.

This *second* woe, as it introduced the Turkish horsemen, (chap. ix. 13-19,) must have commenced about 1281, and (if the falling of a tenth part of the city has been rightly interpreted) ended about 1791. Its having commenced with the introduction of the Turks does not prove that it comprehended them only, nor that it must needs end with the passing away of their empire. On the contrary, the accomplishment of their overthrow seems to be reserved for the sixth vial of the third woe-trumpet, which will be poured upon the Euphrates, near the times of the Millennium.

But, it may be asked, how is it that the sounding of the trumpets should be introduced in this place? If this and the three following chapters contain *general descriptions* of the papal apostacy, *including the times of various trumpets, but not divided by them*, how is it that in the midst of one of these descriptions mention should be made of the second woe ending, and of the third woe coming quickly? I answer, Though these general descriptions are not divided by trumpets, yet, as they comprehend the times of the trumpets, each of them might have been so, and, for our information, one of them actually is so. And as the termination of the sixth and the sounding of the seventh trumpet forms an era in the church of Christ, it is here marked with peculiar emphasis. It is from this era, as we shall find, that, after these three general descriptions are given, the series of the prophecy is resumed, and the vials are introduced.

But if the sounding of the seventh angel forms an era in the Christian church, it requires that we pause, and pay particular attention to it.

The events of this trumpet were anticipated by the angel at the distance probably of more than a thousand years, when he forbade the seven thunders to be written—"The days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he should begin to sound," are marked as the period when the great designs of Heaven, foretold in prophecy, should be accomplished, chap. x.

The contents of this trumpet are of deeper interest than any that have preceded it, both to the enemies of the church and to the church itself. It wears a twofold aspect. Towards the enemies of the church it is a *woe*-trumpet, and a signal of mighty vengeance; towards the church itself it is a harbinger of joy, a kind of *jubilee*-trumpet, announcing the year of enlargement; for when the "seventh angel sounded, there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever!" Under the *former* of these aspects it includes the seven last plagues, which are but so many subdivisions of it, and which are, I conceive, the execution of the seven thunders in chap. x. These thunders, it is observable, are not only

referred to "the days of the voice of the seventh angel," but to those in which he should "*begin* to sound," that is, to the early part of them. Under the *latter* aspect it comprehends all the success of the gospel previous to and during the Millennium, with all the glorious results of it as described in the remainder of the prophecy. We are not to consider it, however, under either of these aspects as being *more than a signal of things which are to follow*. As the vengeance will not all be poured forth at once, so neither will the kingdoms of this world at once become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; but from the sounding of this trumpet both shall have a commencement, and both be singularly progressive under it.

With respect to the *time*, if the application of the "earthquake, and the falling of a tenth part of the city" to events which have occurred within the last twenty years be just, there can be little if any doubt of the seventh angel's having sounded his trumpet within that period, and of the whole of these verses containing a general view of the state of things from our times to the commencement of the Millennium.

On this occasion the heavenly chorus strikes up. The four-and-twenty elders, who sit before God on their seats, fall upon their faces and worship God. This heavenly chorus is not introduced on ordinary occasions. Things must therefore be pending of deep interest to the church of God. By the matter of the song we may learn something of what they are. Corresponding with the twofold aspect of the seventh trumpet, those who have destroyed the earth are to be destroyed, and those who have suffered for Christ are to be rewarded.

The character under which the Most High is praised—"the Lord God Almighty, who is, and was, and is to come"—seems to imply that he could have suppressed the power of his enemies at any time; that though, for wise reasons, he had not for ages past exerted his strength, yet now he was about to "take unto him his great power, and to reign;" and that all this is the result of his immutable counsels.

The "anger" of the nations had been great both against God and his servants, opposing him, and persecuting them with unremitting cruelty: but now *his* wrath is come; now the blood of the martyrs of past ages shall be avenged (chap. xviii. 20); now their labours and sufferings shall produce their effects; from the seed which has been sown during a succession of centuries in tears and blood a harvest of joy will spring up; finally, those who by persecutions, corruptions, and unjust wars have destroyed the earth, shall now be themselves destroyed.

Under the image of opening the heavenly temple seems to be set forth the glorious state of the church when these judgments shall be executed upon her enemies. As the temple was polluted and shut up under certain idolatrous reigns, and opened in times of reformation, so the gospel temple has been treated under the reign of antichrist, and so it shall be restored at or towards the end of the 1260 years. "The ark of the testament being seen" implies the removal of the veil; and as it was not to be seen in the second temple, but only in the first, its being seen here would seem to denote the *restoration* of pure primitive Christianity, as it was taught, believed, and practised when the gospel temple was first erected. "The lightnings, voices, thunderings, earthquake, and hail," are the same things which are described under the seventh vial, chap. xvi. 18-21. Both refer to the same events; only this is general, and that more particular; and as there the language seems to refer to the efficacy of the gospel, and of the spiritual judgments on those who reject it—purifying the moral atmosphere of the world—such appears to be its meaning here.

DISCOURSE XVI.

THE SECOND GENERAL DESCRIPTION; OR THE GREAT RED DRAGON, AND THE WOMAN FLYING INTO THE WILDERNESS.

Rev. xii. 1-6.

THE first general description, it has been observed, took up the apostacy at the time when things were so matured that the catholic church was ordered to be left out of God's temple, as not belonging to it; but this appears to trace it to its origin. Here we go back to an early period of history; possibly as far as to the fourth century, and to the times of some of the first trumpets. At a time when the church was in danger of being lost in superstition and worldly conformity, it was natural for the faithful to feel anxious for the cause of Christ. For their encouragement, the church is described in vision as bearing a *seed* which should be preserved by the special care of Heaven, through all these evil times, and become in the end victorious over the whole earth. Such appears to be the scope of this second general description.

Prior to the introduction of antichristian corruptions, the church is described as "a woman clothed with the sun, and having the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars;" denoting the plenitude of gospel light which compassed her as a garment; her superiority to the Jewish dispensation; and, in consequence of her adherence to the doctrine and examples of the apostles, her triumph over ten successive persecutions.

The woman is said to be "with child, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered;" denoting, it may be, the earnest desires of the true church after the increase of believers. Such has always been its character. Worldly men who have taken upon them the Christian name have invariably been employed in compassing selfish objects. But true Christians have at all times been distinguished by a desire to extend the kingdom of Christ.

The following description, by EUSEBIUS, of the labours of the immediate successors of the apostles, is doubtless applicable to the church so long as it adhered to their doctrine and example. "They built up those churches the foundations of which were laid by the apostles, promoting greatly the doctrine of the gospel, and scattering the salutary seed of the kingdom of heaven at large over the whole world.—Travelling abroad, they performed the work of evangelists to those who as yet had not heard the word of faith, being very ambitious to preach Christ, and to deliver the books of the Divine Gospels. And these persons having only laid the foundation of faith in remote and barbarous places, and constituted other pastors, committed to them the culture of those they had perfectly introduced to the faith, departing again to other regions and nations, accompanied with the grace and co-operation of God."—Lib. III. c. 37

While the woman is thus in labour, "behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads, whose tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth, stands before her, ready to devour her child as soon as it was born." The dragon is in ver. 9 expressly called "the devil and Satan who deceiveth the whole world," and all that is said of him in the remainder of the prophecy agrees with this in its literal application; but, by his having the heads and

horns of the Roman beast, is intimated that it was under this form, or by means of this government, that he did what he did in the present instance.

As the woman is not an individual, but the society of the faithful, so neither is the man-child an individual, but the woman's *seed*, which, in ver. 17, is explained of them who "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." It was this seed that the dragon aimed by persecution and corruption to destroy. This child was *born to rule*: not however at present; for if so, there had been no need of his being caught up to the throne of God, nor for his mother's flying into the wilderness for 1260 years. It is at the termination of that period that the man-child, or the seed of the church, shall rule; and this accords with Dan. vii. 27, "The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High." Nor need it be objected that the sceptre of this government is a rod of iron; for such the kingdom of Christ must ever be to the ungodly.

There are two marks by which the times referred to in this vision may, if I mistake not, be ascertained. One is the 1260 days, or years, which, being the appropriate number of the reign of the papal antichrist, proves it to have no reference to the times of paganism. The other is, that the ten horns are not upon the beast, but upon the dragon, and the crowns are not as yet upon them, but upon the seven heads. When the horns are spoken of in reference to the times following the overthrow of the empire by the northern nations, and of its becoming ten independent kingdoms, they are described as being upon the beast, and as having crowns upon them, chap. xiii. 1. This indicates that the introduction of the vision contained in the first five verses of this chapter, though it does not go so far back as to the days of paganism, yet neither does it go so far forward as to the times of popery; but to *those which were intermediate and preparatory*, namely, the fourth and fifth centuries, in which Christianity became exceedingly corrupt, and a connexion was introduced between the secular and ecclesiastical powers which issued in what is exhibited in chap. xvii., a woman riding upon a scarlet-coloured beast! I do not suppose that the 1260 years of the reign of antichrist are to be reckoned from the time when these corruptions began. Antichrist did not commence his reign from his birth; but thence his way was preparing. It is of what was done *prior* to the woman's flight into the wilderness for 1260 years that these verses speak. By the accession of Constantine, the beast was "as it were wounded to death;" and this may be the reason why no mention is made of him. Under the Christian emperors the beast for some time would lie apparently dead: the dragon, however, "that old serpent the devil and Satan, who deceiveth the whole world," knew how even *at that time* to make use of the pomp and power of the empire to serve his purposes.

It is in the corruptions of the fourth and fifth centuries that we are to look for the origin of popery. It was by the influx of worldly power and glory into the church that Satan first seduced a great part of those who had shone like stars in the Christian firmament, and (alluding perhaps to his having originally drawn into apostacy a great part of the angels of heaven) cast them to the earth. But perceiving, notwithstanding what had been done as to a number of the *leaders* of the church, that a large body of the faithful were still intent on not only preserving, but extending the Redeemer's kingdom, the dragon aims to destroy the fruits of their labours. When he saw that the bait of worldly pomp and power had so far succeeded as to draw the principal men into his net, it was doubtless his object to make a full end of the church of Christ. But he was disappointed. The woman "brought forth a man-child, who, in the end, would rule all nations as with a rod of iron."

By the woman's flying into the wilderness seems to be meant her retiring into obscurity, where she would exist without legal protection, in some such manner as David did when he fled from the persecutions of Saul, and without any other defence than that which was afforded by the shielding providence of God. In this way the true church existed in all the nations of Europe from the time that popery first obtained the ascendancy, and during the long period of its domination. Wherever this religion prevailed, all those Christians who refused to yield to its corruptions were driven into obscurity. It was thus not only in those countries bordering upon Italy, but in others at the greatest distance. It is thought by some to have been thus with the *British churches* in Wales, with the *Culdees* in Scotland and Ireland, and probably with every other body of Christians where this influence extended. Many of them were so pursued by persecution, that, if they had any communion with each other, it was in a secret way. If they met to worship God, it must be in the night, in woods, or mountains, or caves of the earth. So little visibility belonged to the church in this state, that it requires some attention to ascertain where it was to be found. To the question, however, "Where was your church before Luther?" we may answer, **IN THE WILDERNESS**, where prophecy has placed her, and whither those who ask the question had driven her. If one place was more distinguished than another as affording a shelter to the faithful, *it was among the mountains and valleys of the Alps*.

It may be difficult to decide upon the time when the woman fled into the wilderness. This, however, we know, that very soon after the revolution by the accession of Constantine corruptions in doctrine, divisions, intrigues, persecutions, and a flood of superstition, overspread the catholic church.*

In such a state of things true Christians must not only be offended, but must become offensive to others, and so be persecuted, and compelled to retire as into the wilderness.

The ancient *Vaudois* are said to "date their origin from the beginning of the fourth century; when one Leo, at the great revolution in religion under Constantine the Great, opposed the innovations of Sylvester, bishop of Rome. This agrees with what was said by *Rainerius*, a monk inquisitor of the thirteenth century, that they were the most pernicious of all sects, for three reasons. 1. "Because it is the *most ancient*. Some aver their existence (says he) from the days of Sylvester, others from the very times of the apostles. 2. Because it is so *universal*; for there is hardly a country into which this sect has not crept. 3. Because all others render themselves de-

* We may see into what a gulf of superstitious imposture the catholic church was sunk within fifty years after the death of Constantine, by the following story, taken from Dr. ALLIX. Sulpicius Severus, who lived early in the fifth century, wrote *The Life of a St. Martin of Tours*, who had lived in the latter part of the fourth. In writing this life, Sulpicius speaks of a certain altar, which the popular superstition had rendered famous, because some martyr was pretended to have been buried in the place. "St. Martin not being able to make any certain discovery of the name of the martyr, and the circumstances of his sufferings, and being loth absolutely to doubt the truth of it, thought fit himself to go to this famous sepulchre in company with some of his brethren. Being come to the place, he earnestly begged of God to reveal to him the name and merit of the martyr. After this, turning himself towards the left, he saw standing a hideous ghost. They command him to declare himself. The ghost obeys, tells his name, confesses that he had been executed for robbery, that it was only the error of the people that caused him to be canonized, that he was in nothing like the martyrs, they were in glory, whereas he was in pain. The good St. Martin, being troubled to hear this account, caused the altar to be carried to another place, and so, says his biographer, delivered the people from a superstitious error."

The same *Sulpicius Severus*, though a monk himself, yet speaking of the monks of his time, says, "They do almost all things in such a manner that you would not so much think they had repented for their former crimes, as that afterwards they had repented of their repentance!"

testable by their blasphemies; but this has a great *appearance of godliness*, living a righteous life before men, believing right concerning God, confessing all the articles of the creed, only hating and reviling the church of Rome."

DISCOURSE XVII.

THE SECOND GENERAL DESCRIPTION CONTINUED; OR THE WAR BETWEEN MICHAEL AND THE DRAGON.

Rev. xii. 7-17.

VER. 7-12. The dragon, having driven the true church into the wilderness, is supposed to have carried things in his own way amongst the rest. At a certain period, however, during her 1260 years' residence in the wilderness, Michael her prince espoused her cause, and makes war upon the dragon.

There is no doubt a reference in this part of the prophecy to what was predicted in Dan. x. 13-21; xii. 1. Michael is there described not only as standing up for the people of God under Persian oppression, but as fighting the battles of the church in later ages, even during the "time, times, and half a time," or during the dominion of antichrist.

The account given of Michael agrees not only with the character of a created angel, but with that of Messiah the Prince, who defends his church against the dragon, "that old serpent the devil." Each has his angels, who perhaps are the visible agents in the war. But, before we determine the application of this part of the vision, it will be proper to notice a few of its general characters.

First, The scene is laid in "heaven." Yet in this heaven there is supposed till now to have been a place found for the dragon. It could not therefore be in the church above, where there has been no place for him since he "left his first estate." But in the church below there has. The latter therefore must have been the scene of the present contest.

Secondly, The war is made by Michael on the dragon, and not by the dragon on Michael. This intimates that it must have been at a time when the dragon possessed such a plenitude of power in what was called the Christian church, that his object was not to extend so much as to retain it.

Thirdly, Whatever of worldly power and policy might accompany the war, the war itself was *spiritual*. It was a war between truth and error, righteousness and unrighteousness; for the victors "overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony."

Fourthly, It is supposed that in this great struggle many of Michael's adherents would lose their lives, but that nevertheless they would overcome. The cause of truth and righteousness would prevail, and those who suffered for Christ's sake would bear such a testimony for truth, and obtain such a victory over the world, as to be more than conquerors.

Such are the characters of the war: to what event during the 1260 years of antichristian usurpation does it apply? I can conceive of none but *the Reformation in the sixteenth century*. Satan, as ruling by means of Rome, was then attacked, and cast out of those nations where the Reformation prevailed; which nations, being the seat of Christ's visible kingdom, are accounted as "heaven," while those which still cleave to the apostacy are "the earth."

A song of the heavenly host is introduced on this occasion; for the "loud voice" (ver. 10) does not appear to be that of an individual, but of a multitude, who join as with one voice in a shout of joy and praise. It fits the lips of the holy army of martyrs before the throne, who, feeling for their brethren upon earth, rejoice in their having obtained a portion of relief. As Satan accused Job, and obtained permission of God to persecute him, so, by the agency of the bishop of Rome, he had from century to century accused and persecuted the saints of the Most High. But now were come "salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren," say they, "is cast down, that accused them to our God day and night." The Reformation was at once a pledge of antichrist's consumption, and of the increase of the Redeemer's kingdom.

The weapons by which the victory was obtained are celebrated by the heavenly host, and are worthy of our special attention. Some of the followers of Christ among the Albigenses, the Bohemians, and the Reformers thought it necessary to take arms, and fight for their religion; but it has proved, I believe, in almost every instance, that where a body of Christians have taken the sword to defend themselves against *persecution*, they as a body have perished by the sword. Whatever of this spirit there might be amongst the Reformers, it was not by this, but by "the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony," that they overcame.

The "heavens," from which the dragon is cast out, are called upon to rejoice, while a woe is pronounced upon the inhabitants of "the earth and of the sea," or those *continental* and *maritime* nations where he still dwelleth, and to which his influence is in one sense confined. The power of Satan in this way, being reduced to narrower limits, would be the more mischievous within those limits. He would consider the Reformation as only a first step towards the overthrow of a system by which, under the Christian name, he had deceived mankind with equal facility as by the delusions of heathenism. Knowing therefore that his time was short, he would be the more assiduous in improving it. The denunciation wears a terrible aspect towards those nations which, notwithstanding all the light of the Reformation, still cleave to the apostacy. It may be equal to saying, Woe unto you, Austria, France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy; for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time!—From this language it might be expected that, in those countries which rejected the Reformation, popery would operate so as either, by producing its proper effect, to lead its votaries into downright infidelity, or, by riveting the delusion, to render them more and more the dupes of imposture. And thus it has actually operated: the nations which still cleave to it are nearly divided into two classes, the deceivers and the deceived; the former of which appear to be the destined instruments of Heaven in destroying the latter, and so of executing the vials of God's displeasure upon them.

Ver. 13–17. The wrath of the dragon, for having been cast out of heaven, is directed against not only the spiritual welfare of his own subjects, but the lives of those Christians who were situated within his territories. The friends of Christ in popish countries have since the Reformation been persecuted with increased violence. In the ordinary measures of legal process, persecution has indeed diminished; it has in a manner been shamed out of countenance by the prevalence of tolerant principles; but the more it has been restrained in this way, the more violent have been its ebullitions in a way of occasional outrage. Of this the massacre of Paris in 1572, the cruelties in the valleys of Piedmont in 1655, and the revocation of the edict of Nantes in 1685, are horrible examples.

From the times of the Reformation the church of Christ had in a manner come out of the wilderness. Having obtained a degree of legal protection in several nations, its members were not obliged as heretofore to retire into woods, and mountains, and caves, nor to have recourse to midnight assemblies for the purpose of hearing the gospel; but after these renewed persecutions the woman is obliged to fly *a second time* into the wilderness, as to her wonted place of refuge. Such has been the state of the protestants in all popish countries; such has been their state in France from the revocation of the edict of Nantes, in 1685, to the revolution, in 1789, though of late they were treated with less severity than formerly, being allowed to meet in the daytime, only under military inspection. Nor was it in *popish* countries only that the wrath of the dragon vented itself. A portion of the poison of a persecuting spirit was found among protestants, even in our own country, from the Reformation to the revolution of 1688. If one place was more distinguished than another, as affording a shelter for the woman at the time of this her *second flight*, I suspect it was *North America*, where the church of Christ has been nourished, and may continue to be nourished during the remainder of the 1260 years. And as to those parts of the church which still exist in a state of insecurity, the serpent has not been suffered to make a full end of them; they are nourished by the word of God, and shall doubtless survive the reign of antichristian corruption and persecution.

The flood of waters cast after the woman by the dragon, and the war made on the remnant of her seed, referring, as it appears, to the latter end of the 1260 years, may be something *yet to come*. It is not impossible that persecution may yet be revived. The antichristian cause can hardly be supposed to expire without some deadly struggles. Indeed it is in the very act of "making war on him that sitteth upon the horse, and his army," that the "beast and the false prophet will be taken;" and this seems to be the same war which is here made with the "remnant of the woman's seed."

Should a flood of persecution yet be in reserve for the church of Christ, it may be the last effort of an expiring foe; and from that the *earth* will preserve her by swallowing it up; it may be in some such way as the invasion of the Philistines preserved David, or as political struggles have often been favourable to Christians, by furnishing those who wished to persecute them with other employment. The dragon, provoked by his want of success against the woman, may vent his malice on the remnant of her seed that are within his reach; but his time is short. His agents, "the beast and the false prophet," will soon be taken; and the Angel, with a great chain in his hand, shall next lay hold of *him*, and cast him into the bottomless pit.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

THE THIRD GENERAL DESCRIPTION; OR THE BEAST WITH SEVEN HEADS AND TEN HORNS.

Rev. xiii. 1-10.

THE apostle, in vision, standing as upon the sea-shore, sees "a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy." A beast rising out of the sea is an empire opposed to God and his Christ rising out of the perturbed state of things in the world.

The description given of this beast leaves no doubt of its being the same as the fourth beast in the seventh chapter of Daniel, namely, *the Roman empire*; with only a few circumstantial differences. Daniel viewed it in its *whole duration*, whereas John describes it with special reference to its *last* or *papal form*; Daniel says nothing of its heads, which John does; and, lastly, Daniel speaks merely of the ten hours pertaining to the beast, but John describes them as having "crowns," which shows that the times referred to are those in which the western empire would be overthrown, and ten independent kingdoms arise out of it.

This seven-headed and ten-horned beast does not appear to be the pope, or popedom, nor the church of Rome; but *that secular power which has supported the church of Rome through the whole of her corrupt and bloody progress*. The beast is not the harlot, but that on which the harlot rides. That which has been denominated *The Holy Roman Empire*, of which sometimes a French and sometimes a German monarch has been the head, seems to be the government principally intended, as being the great supporter of that church. It is not this government, however, *exclusively* of that of the other European nations, but merely as a *principal* amongst them. The ten horns were not distinct from the beast, but constituent parts of it. Europe, prior to the Reformation, was a family of nations, united in respect of religion by one ecclesiastical head. As nations they were independent, and often engaged in war with one another; but *in supporting the church* they were united. The beast is indeed distinguished from its horns, as any other beast may be, while yet the horns are constituent parts of it. The ten horns are said to "agree and to give their kingdom to the beast" (chap. xvii. 17); that is, they united with the emperor in supporting the church. Things were so managed indeed by the church, that the rulers of every nation in Christendom were in a manner compelled to unite in her support. "All the civil powers were obliged by the council of Lateran to take an oath, on pain of ecclesiastical censures, that they would endeavour to exterminate all who were declared heretics by the church out of their dominions; and if any prince or ruler refused to do so, after admonition, it was to be certified to the pope, who should declare all his subjects absolved from their allegiance, and any catholic was free to seize his dominion." Such was this monstrous beast, and such the means used by his rider to guide and govern him.

Of the heads and horns of the beast we shall have occasion to speak hereafter more particularly. At present we may observe he is described as possessing the properties of the first three of Daniel's four beasts, a leopard, a bear, and a lion, each ferocious and destructive; and whereas the dragon is said to have given him his authority, the government, though professedly Christian, was under the influence of the wicked one. After the empire became Christian, the dragon for a while seemed to take the work of seducing and persecuting men into his own hand (chap. xii. 1-6); but he is now contented to transfer it to the beast as a kind of deputy under him, ver. 2.

"I saw one of his heads," continues the apostle, "as it were wounded to death, and his deadly wound was healed, and all the world wondered after the beast." To understand this, we must know what is meant by the heads of the beast, and this we must learn from chap. xvii. 7-11. They are there said to be "seven mountains on which the woman sitteth, and seven kings, five of which are fallen, one is, and the other is not yet come." It was not one of the seven mountains that was "as it were wounded to death," but one of the seven kings, or governments, or forms of government, under which Rome existed. These, according to *Tacitus* the Roman historian, were *kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, military tribunes, and emperors*;

five of which forms of government had passed away at the time of the prophecy; the sixth, namely, that of *emperors*, then was, and the other was not yet come. The wound which the beast is said to have received in one of his heads was so serious that he was for a time considered as dead; yet was he not dead in reality, but merely "*as it were* wounded to death;" for after this he revived and lived and reigned, to the wonder of the world. Hence the language in chap. xvii. 8, "And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder —when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and *yet is!*"

There are two interpretations of this part of the prophecy on which good commentators have been divided. One is, that the sword by which the beast was wounded was that of the northern nations in the fifth century, by which Rome, under its sixth or imperial head, was overthrown; but by means of popery the wound was healed, and she who had been given up for lost became in a new form the mistress of the western world. The other is, that the deadly wound was caused by the sword of CONSTANTINE, who, having in different engagements defeated his pagan colleagues, subverted the ancient religion of the empire, so that for a few years the beast was as it were dead; but that when, under the influence of corruption, it again became idolatrous and persecuting, the beast revived, and the world wondered after him.

Till of late I have preferred the former of these interpretations; but upon a closer examination of the prophecy I am inclined to think the latter to be the meaning. It does not seem likely that so extraordinary a change in the empire, and one that so deeply interested the church of God, should be overlooked, while one which is much more ordinary, and of but small account to religion, should be held up to view. It seems also, notwithstanding the corruptions introduced under the first Christian emperors, it were too much to suppose that the empire continued to be the *same* beast as it was in the times of paganism, or that the difference was so small as not to require any kind of notice in the page of prophecy.

That the species of Christianity introduced in the times of Constantine was injurious to the church is allowed, even by those who approve of national religious establishments; yet the prophecy may be very applicable to the event. Supposing this to be its true meaning, there is no countenance given by it to that partial and corrupt system which at that time was introduced. On the contrary, there is a strong intimation conveyed in those saving terms "*as it were*" that the beast, though stunned, was not slain. He was not wounded to death, but merely *as it were* wounded to death. As soon as circumstances favoured his recovery, the wound was healed, and the beast resumed his wonted vigour, ver. 3.

"They worshipped the dragon and the beast." The homage of the world is generally paid to success, though it be in the worst of causes. Those powers which raised and supported the antichristian harlot, being successful, receive the homage of the nations called Christian, though in paying it they sink into the old idolatry under a new name, and in reality worship the wicked one, ver. 4.

The "*great things*" spoken by this secular beast may refer to that spirit which gives not God the glory of success, but, like Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, arrogates every thing to self. Its "*blasphemies*" relate to words and assumptions more immediately directed *against God* and his cause. The charge of blasphemy was preferred against all the *heads* of the beast, (ver. 1,) though most of them were pagan, and of course unacquainted with the true God. The blasphemies referred to therefore must be not merely his speeches directly uttered against the Great Supreme, but his *arrogating and assuming that which exclusively belongs to him*. This charge is repeated and enlarged upon in ver. 6, where also it is followed with "*making war*

upon the saints." If God had been within the reach of the beast, he would have made war with him; but as he was not, his hatred against him was discovered in making war upon his people. A species of practical blasphemy seems to constitute the principle from which all persecution proceeds; for it is no other than usurping the throne of God in the mind of man. This principle has been common through all those pagan and papal governments which have come in contact with the church of God. Nay, is it not exceedingly prevalent in almost all the governments now in being? It is rare, very rare, for those who occupy the supreme place in civil affairs to respect the claims of conscience and of God. Had these claims been properly respected, it had never entered the minds of the rulers of any nation that all the people within certain geographical boundaries should be compelled to worship God in a given way!

The blasphemies of this beast are directed not only against the "name," but against "the tabernacle of God, and them that dwell in heaven," or his celestial attendants. The very saints and angels before the throne are by him represented as rebels against God, by receiving that homage which is due to him, and participating in their abominations. The church of God on earth, relatively considered, or as being his "tabernacle," possesses a sacred character. If any man destroy or defile it, as Antiochus did that of the Jews, him will God destroy. What then must be the guilt contracted by those persecuting powers who, under the pretence of extirpating heresy, have reproached the living God, and done every thing in their power to drive the religion of the Bible out of the world!

The time allotted for the continuance of this beast is "forty and two months." A day being here put for a year, it is the same period as the "thousand two hundred and threescore days" in which the witnesses were to prophesy in sackcloth, and the woman was to continue in the wilderness.

The war which it was "given him to make with the saints" is the same as that which he is said to have made against the witnesses, chap. xi. 7. It is that continued series of persecutions which, during that part of the 1260 years which has already elapsed, he has been carrying on against the followers of Christ.

As the beast had assumed the place of God, so the multitude consented to treat him as the sovereign lord of conscience, and to be of that religion which he required. In describing this unworthy compliance, however, the Holy Spirit takes care to except "those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life;" thus branding the idolaters with the black mark of reprobation. Such language wears a terrible aspect towards those who enter into the abominations of antichrist and persevere therein; but a pleasing one towards the chosen of God, who in the worst of times maintain their allegiance to Christ, ver. 8.

The account of this secular beast (which from its character of supporting the popish hierarchy may be denominated papal) here closes with a few words by way of solemn warning—"If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and faith of the saints." The persecutor shall soon be persecuted, and the destroyer destroyed; and this not only in the world to come, but even in this world. Meanwhile, let the saints know that this is the season for the trial of their patience, and of their faith; the one to bear up under the persecutions of their enemies, and the other to keep in view the crown of life before them, ver. 9, 10.

DISCOURSE XIX.

THE THIRD GENERAL DESCRIPTION CONTINUED; OR THE BEAST WITH TWO HORNS LIKE A LAMB.

Rev. xiii. 11-18.

VER. 11-15. The former of these beasts we have considered as designed to symbolize the Roman empire under its last head, or that secular government which, in connexion with the ten horns or kingdoms of Europe, supported popery through all its foul and bloody deeds; but here arises another beast, diverse from the former, yet acting in concert with him. Daniel, when describing the fourth or Roman beast, speaks of a *little horn* which should grow up as it were insensibly among the ten horns, and displace three of them. John says nothing of this little horn of Daniel, and Daniel is equally silent about this second beast of John; but from the character given to them both they appear to be one and the same, namely, *that ecclesiastical power which was to coexist with the secular, and both assist it and be assisted by it.*

This beast is described as “rising out of the earth,” in which particular it is distinguished from the other, which “rose out of the sea.” For a beast to rise out of the sea is for an empire to rise out of the perturbed state of things in the world, and such was the empire before described; but for one to rise from the *earth* is for a power to grow up insensibly, like a weed in a garden, out of the established order of things.—Such was popery.

“And he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.” This perfectly answers to that affectation of Christian meekness, accompanied in reality by the spirit and doctrine of the wicked one. On one occasion it can be *the servant of servants*; on another the deposer of kings and disposer of empires.

“He exerciseth all the power of the first beast before or in the sight of him.” “He is (says Bishop NEWTON) the prime minister, adviser, and mover of the first or secular beast. He holdeth *imperium in imperio*, an empire within an empire; claimeth a temporal authority as well as a spiritual; hath not only the principal direction of the temporal powers, but often engageth them in his service, and enforceth his canons and decrees with the sword of the civil magistrate.”

“He causeth men to worship the first beast.” As the secular authority invested the ecclesiastical with power, and riches, and honours, so, in return, the ecclesiastical, by consenting that Christianity should become an engine of state policy, and conscience itself be subjected to its interests, transferred that homage to man which was due only to the eternal God. It is this ecclesiastical influence that has constituted the European nations a continuation of the old Roman empire. It is the only bond which for ages has held them together, so as to render them one great antichristian beast, ver. 12.

He is next described by his pretended miracles. He doeth great wonders, so that he maketh (or seemeth to make) “fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast.” This part of his character answers to what was foretold by the apostle of the man of sin—that he should come with “signs and lying wonders.” All these impositions of “the false prophet,” as he is elsewhere called, (chap.

xvi. 13, 14,) being wrought *in the sight of the first beast*, and in that of the people, were to ingratiate himself with them, and to persuade them that he was, as is said of the sorcerer, "the great power of God." While therefore he was professing to honour magistracy, he was labouring to subject it to himself.

To show his devotion to the secular beast, he directs the people to make an image to him; which being done, he, after his manner, endues it with life, and speech, and great authority: but all is "deceit;" for the object is not to exalt the secular beast, but himself.

This making of an *image* to the beast seems to allude to the heathen practice of making images to their deities. The gods themselves were supposed to be invisible. The same deity had images made to him in divers places. The design of making an image to a god would be to acknowledge him as *their* deity, and to give a visibility and an establishment to his worship. To "make an image to the beast whose deadly wound was healed," would therefore be to give visibility and authority to his worship; or to require implicit obedience to his commands in whose reign *paganism was revived under the name of catholic Christianity!* It is as guarantee of this system that the first beast is designated by the *healing of his deadly wound*, and that the second beast exerts all his influence in his favour.

It has been observed, that while the secular beast is said to make war upon the saints, the ecclesiastical is only said to "*cause* them to be killed." The council of Lateran decreed not to put heretics to death, but to deliver them over to the secular power to be killed! "The inquisitors (says BURNET) on this occasion, with a disgusting affectation of lamb-like meekness, are wont to beseech the civil magistrates to show mercy to those whom they themselves have given up to be consigned to the flames!" ver. 15.

Ver. 16-18. Such was to be the growing influence of this last beast, that he could "*cause*" all ranks and degrees of men to enlist under the banners of the first, to receive like soldiers his mark and number, and so to be aiding and assisting in the execution of his measures. Such has actually been the conduct of the Roman hierarchy; so that the common rights of men have been suspended on condition of their receiving the papal badge. Such, in fine, is the nature of the alliance established by this system between the ecclesiastical and the secular powers; each plays into the other's hands; the church consents that religion shall be an engine of state policy, and in return the state supports the church in all her corrupt proceedings.

Respecting the "*mark*" and the "*name*" of the beast, it is opposed, I conceive, to the seal of God on the foreheads of his servants, chap. vii. And as the *seal* and *name* of God on the forehead appear to be the same, (compare chap. vii. 3, with chap. xiv. 1,) so may the *mark* and the *name* of the beast. Both are thought to allude to the ancient practice of marking servants and soldiers with their owner's name in their forehead or in their hand.

I cannot pretend to be certain what is meant by the "*name* of the beast." It may be observed, however, that as the beast here evidently means the *secular*, and not the ecclesiastical power, there is a name given to him in the prophecy. He is called "the beast that was, and is not, and yet is" (chap. xvii. 8, 11); the meaning of which I conceive to be,—the government that existed in all its beastly properties as pagan, that appeared to have lost them as Christian, but that in supporting a corrupted Christianity resumed them. In other words, it is *paganism revived under the form of catholic Christianity*. Now as names are signs of character, to have this name or mark of the beast would be the same thing as being openly of this character or religion.

As to the "number of his name," I have nothing to offer which is fully satisfactory to my own mind. It is something which requires "wisdom and understanding to count it;" and yet, by its being the "number of a man," it would seem not to surpass human comprehension. It may be a name whose numerals amount to 666, as the Greek word *κατενωος*, or other words in which this number has been found; but as this appears to be merely conjecture, I leave it undecided.

DISCOURSE XX.

THE THIRD GENERAL DESCRIPTION CONTINUED; OR THE LAMB'S COMPANY.

Rev. xiv. 1-5.

UNLESS we consider the whole of the fourteenth chapter as a continuation of the thirteenth, we cannot be said to have a third general view of the rise, reign, and overthrow of popery; for the whole of the *thirteenth* chapter is taken up with a description of its rise and reign, and nothing is said in it of its downfall. Nor is any thing said of the state of the church of Christ during these "forty and two months," save that the beasts "made war" with its members, and "caused them to be killed." But if the *fourteenth* chapter be considered as a continuation of the subject, we have then a complete view of it, and a most animating description of the state of the church of Christ during the "forty and two months," or 1260 years, in beautiful opposition to the beasts and their followers.

Ver. 1. The first of the beasts was a monster, having seven heads and ten horns; a compound of the leopard, the bear, and the lion. And as to the last, though in respect of its horns it was *like a lamb*, yet it had nothing of a lamb in its nature. What a charming contrast is here; not only between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdoms of this world, but between a compound of hypocrisy and malignity, and the religion of Jesus Christ! There was something *like a lamb*; but, lo, here *is a Lamb*!

One of the beasts is described as rising out of the *sea*, and the other out of the *earth*; but the Lamb as standing upon a *mountain*. "Standing" is a reigning posture, Dan. xi. 3. He had been slain, but now "stands up, and rules with great dominion." It also denotes that the party is not only unvanquished, but triumphant. It might have been supposed that from the rising up of these beasts the Lamb should have found no place to exercise his government among men; but he stands his ground, and has his followers, as the beasts have theirs. His kingdom was never overturned even in the most corrupt ages.

The place on which he stood was "Mount Sion." This is his proper ground, as much as Babylon was of the other. In his church even upon earth, and amidst the sharpest persecutions, the Lamb standeth upon the Mount Sion.

The company said to be with him are the same that were sealed in chap. vii. This sealing was prior to the papal apostacy, and contained an assurance that God would preserve himself a people under it; and lo, after all the ravages of the beasts, here we find them; not in Babylon, but with the Lamb in Sion. The followers of the beast were designated by his mark and the number of his name; and the followers of the Lamb "have his Father's name written in their foreheads." These are the same with the

two witnesses, and the woman that fled into the wilderness; they denote the Israel of God, and were that to an apostate church which the twelve tribes who served God day and night were to an apostate world.

In reviewing the dark ages of popery, we are apt to think there could have been but few who clave to the truth in those times; but, if the Christian world were again put to such a test of their sincerity, it were well if the number of the faithful proved greater than in those days. MEDE (says Bishop NEWTON) hath observed, from good authorities, that in the war with the Waldenses and Albigenses there perished in France alone *a million*: from the first institution of the Jesuits to the year 1480, that is, in little more than thirty years, *nine hundred thousand*. In the Netherlands alone, the duke of Alva boasted that within a few years he had despatched to the amount of *thirty-six thousand*, and those all by the hand of the common executioner. In the space of scarcely thirty years the inquisition destroyed by various kinds of tortures *one hundred and fifty thousand*. Saunders, himself a popish writer, confesses that *an innumerable multitude* of Lollards and Sacramentarians were burnt throughout all Europe; who yet, he says, were not put to death by the pope and bishops, but by the civil magistrates." That is, the secular beast did the work, and the ecclesiastical only caused it! These, and many more whose names will appear another day, composed the company who stood with the Lamb.

Ver. 2, 3. But hark! A sound is heard—It is from a great distance—It is like the roaring of the sea, or the rolling of thunder—It is the sound of a multitude—There is music—It seems like a new song—It is the moving of God's host!—What can be the meaning? If I mistake not, this is a description of the same event which is signified in the first general view by the resurrection of the witnesses, and in the second by the victory of Michael and his angels over the dragon and his angels; that is to say, *The Reformation of the sixteenth century*. The song intimates that something has occurred which furnishes matter of rejoicing. A *new* song commonly supposes a new or recent deliverance: and to what event during the 1260 years can this be applied unless it be to the Reformation? It was then that the army of the Lamb felt its ground, and gloriously triumphed. That which at a distance was only "as it were" a new song, on drawing nearer proved to be one in reality, and one that none but the redeemed could unite in. The joy attending the Reformation would be confined to the faithful. As to worldly men who engaged in it, they would rejoice only as their temporal interests were promoted by it; and as to the devotees of the beasts, they would deplore the dangers of the church: but they who had been reclaimed from the apostacy of their species, and preserved from that of professing Christians, would enter into the spirit of it. In them it was the triumph of faith. The blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony would be the burden of their song.

The Lamb's company are here particularly characterized. *First*, By the things from which they had been preserved; namely, *spiritual fornication and adultery*, into which the generality of professing Christians had fallen. *Secondly*, By the course they had pursued. They followed the Lamb whithersoever he went; in his doctrine, worship, afflictions, spirit, and conduct he was their example. *Thirdly*, By the distinguished blessings conferred upon them. They were "redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb." They were the travail of his soul, in which he was satisfied. In them appeared the efficacy of his death; while others, though calling themselves Christians, still continued under the worst of bondage. And as, in the law of the first-fruits, a part was accepted for the whole, so, when that which called itself the church apostatized, those

who continued faithful were accepted as the Christian church, or reckoned as the Lord's portion. *Fourthly*, By their sincerity and purity. "In their mouth was found no guile; for they were without fault before the throne of God." While the followers of the beasts were trimming and worshipping, as their worldly interests required, these were upright before God in all their conversation.

Such is the contrast between the beast and the blasphemies of his worshippers on the one hand, and the Lamb and the praises of his followers on the other.

DISCOURSE XXI.

THE THIRD GENERAL DESCRIPTION CONCLUDED; OR THE MESSAGES OF THE THREE ANGELS, THE HARVEST, AND THE VINTAGE.

Rev. xiv. 6-20.

If the foregoing application of the new song of the Lamb's company to the *Reformation* in the sixteenth century be just, it may be expected that what follows will relate to events subsequent to that distinguished era.

Ver. 6, 7. I am aware that this commission of the flying angel has been generally understood as addressed to papal idolaters, and the passage of course applied to the evangelical labours of the reformers. The fall of Babylon, and the warnings against worshipping the beast and his image which follow, may have led to this application. There are other things, however, which have led me to consider "the angel flying in the midst of heaven" as sent to pagan rather than to papal idolaters.

It is true we are in danger of magnifying the events of our own times, and of expecting to find things occupying a conspicuous place in prophecy which upon the great chart of the Divine proceedings may have no place, or at most be only as a speck. I have not sought however for any thing which might be applied to the events of present times, nor interpreted the passage in any other than what appears to be its most natural meaning.

There are four characters pertaining to the prophecy, some of which appear to be inapplicable to the evangelical labours of the reformers, but which are all applicable to the attempts to evangelize the heathen. 1. The parties to whom the message is sent are not merely the nations of Europe, but EVERY NATION, AND KINDRED, AND TONGUE, AND PEOPLE. 2. The message itself seems to intimate that they had hitherto read only the book of nature, and that without learning from it so much as WHO MADE THE HEAVENS, AND THE EARTH, AND THE SEA, AND THE FOUNTAINS OF WATERS. 3. It is supposed that when the spread of the gospel should be attempted in good earnest, and in a humble dependence upon God, *difficulties* which before seemed insuperable would subside. The church has long felt too much like the unbelieving Israelites in respect of going up to possess the Promised Land. Giants have seemed in the way, and walls reaching up to heaven; but when the work is attempted in the name of Christ, it is like *an angel flying in the midst of heaven*, whose course none are able to arrest. 4. The *tone* in which the nations are addressed is solemn and imperious. "The hour of his judgment is come!" There was something resembling this when the gospel was first announced. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."—"The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now com-

mandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness," &c. The kingdom of the Messiah was then at hand, but now it draws near in its most extended form; and those nations and governments that will not bow to him shall be dashed in pieces as a potter's vessel! It is now coming to this, that "all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him; and none can keep alive his own soul;"—which, as our poet expresses it, is equal to saying—

And all the kindreds of the earth
Shall worship, or shall die!

The desire which has been kindled of late years to carry the gospel among the heathen does not appear to be an object unworthy of a place in prophecy. It has engaged the attention of a larger portion of the Christian church, and excited more earnest prayer and disinterested exertion, than perhaps any thing which has occurred since the Reformation. Nor ought we to consider what has hitherto been done as any thing more than the commencement of the angel's flight. It has indeed for its *object* the evangelizing of "*every* nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people;" but at present this is far from being accomplished. We have seen enough, however, to convince us with what ease the great God, by touching the hearts of a few individuals, can accomplish it.

Ver. 8. This is the first time that mention is made of *Babylon*. The allusion doubtless is to old Babylon, by which the church was formerly oppressed; and to the predictions of her fall as given by the prophets (Isa. xxi. 9; Jer. li. 8): but the Babylon here referred to doubtless is Rome, considered as the head of that great antichristian community which has corrupted the religion of Christ, and persecuted his followers.

There may be no such immediate connexion between the preaching of the everlasting gospel to the heathen world and the fall of antichristian Babylon as that the latter should be the effect of the former; but it may comport with the wisdom of God to render it a concomitant. When the servants of Christ lay themselves out for his name in one way, it is not unusual with him to promote the same general object in another. If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, temporal blessings are added unto us; and thus if we lay ourselves out in extending his cause among the heathen, he may at the same time, by his providence, be working in another quarter the overthrow of that which is opposed to it.

The cry of the angel does not denote that Babylon would be *immediately* and *entirely* destroyed at this time; for if so, the warnings of the third angel, which follow, would be unnecessary. Besides, it is by the *harvest* and the *vintage*, towards the close of the chapter, that the overthrow will be effected. But the church is here called upon to *expect* it, and to observe the course of events, as preparing the way for it.

Ver. 9–13. This is the language of solemn warning. It is addressed to all whom it concerns, good and bad, especially to those who live at the time here referred to, the time immediately preceding the fall of the antichristian power, and so looks with a severe aspect on those who persevere in their attachment to it, notwithstanding the light which will have been diffused in the world. They who at *any period* surrender their consciences to human authority, and fully imbibe the antichristian system, will incur the wrath of God; but they who do this in the face of that light which by this time will be spread through the world, will incur greater degrees of the Divine displeasure than those who have been carried away with it in darker ages. The twelfth and thirteenth verses would seem to portend a time of *persecution* prior to the final overthrow of the antichristian power; a time which

may be as the last struggles of the beast. This is the flood cast out of the mouth of the dragon after the woman (chap. xii. 15); the gathering together of the "kings of the earth and of the whole world to the battle of the great day of God Almighty" (chap. xvi. 14); and the *war* made by the beast and the kings against him who sat upon the horse, and against his army, chap. xix. 19.

Ver. 14-20. The angels have delivered their messages, and now the Lord himself appears. He comes as it were to judgment, and to the antichristian party a terrible judgment it will be. Under the symbols of a *harvest* and a *vintage* is predicted its utter overthrow. Whatever distinction there may be between the one and the other, both I doubt not refer to that series of calamities which is reserved to destroy the beast and his adherents. They refer to the same things which have been noticed from chap. xi. 18, when the wrath of God was come, and the time of the dead that they should be avenged, and those destroyed who had long destroyed the earth. This being a general description of events which will be more particularly set forth under the pouring out of the vials, we shall find them again under "the battle of Armageddon, or the great day of God Almighty" (chap. xvi.); also in the "supper of the great God," to which the fowls are invited, and in which "the beast and the false prophet are taken," chap. xix.

One thing is remarkable in both the harvest and the vintage, they indicate that the papal abominations shall be *ripe, fully ripe*. There is a tendency to maturity in both good and evil, in individuals and communities, and even in the world itself. Popery matured is infidelity. To this it tends, and here it will probably land the great body of its adherents. I see no solid ground for Mr. Faber's hypothesis of an *infidel king*, any more than of an *infidel antichrist*, the historical exposition of the eleventh chapter of Daniel by Prideaux (*Connexion, Part II. Book II., III.*) appearing to me to be the true one; but I have no doubt that infidelity is, and will be, the distinguishing feature of the last times. What is said of the "scoffers of the last times" is indeed descriptive of what we daily witness; but it is only of individuals that these things are spoken. Infidelity does not appear to be symbolized in the Scriptures either by a *beast*, a *horn*, or a *king*; it is merely the papal beast grown old, or popery as having produced its proper fruits, which fruits may be the appointed means of its destruction.

DISCOURSE XXII.

INTRODUCTION TO THE VIALS.

Rev. xv.

THREE general descriptions having been given of the antichristian power, each of which carried us to the end of the 1260 years, the series of the prophecy *from the time of the sounding of the seventh trumpet* is now resumed. This trumpet, it has been observed before, wears a twofold aspect. It is partly a woe-trumpet, and partly the harbinger of joy. The seven vials are a part of it, and answer to the former view. The other part comprehends the success of the gospel preparatory to the Millennium, the Millennium itself, and all that follows to the end of the prophecy, and answers to the latter view. At present we are to consider it as a woe-trumpet, or as comprehending the seven vials; which, containing a *more particular* account of

the judgments already hinted at towards the end of the general descriptions, will, like them, bring us to the close of the 1260 years.

The angels with the vials are called "a sign in heaven, great and marvellous," because the judgments which follow are signal and fearful, and the times very eventful, so as deeply to interest the church of God.

The seven vials are denominated "the seven *last plagues, in which will be filled up the wrath of God.*" This supposes that in various instances God had already poured forth his wrath upon these antichristian powers, but that this should be the FINISHING BLOW. Hence it follows that we are not to consider these vials as including *all* those plagues which at different periods have been poured upon the antichristian party, but merely *those which shall bring it to its end.* As the vials are a subdivision of the third and last woe-trumpet, they could not begin to be poured out till that trumpet was sounded; and as they are emphatically called the seven *last* plagues, they must refer to the latter end of the 1260 years. In short, they are the particulars of what was signified under the general representations by God's wrath being come, and the time of the dead that they should be avenged—and by the harvest and the vintage, chap. xi., xiv.

All those expositions of the vials, therefore, which suppose them to have been pouring out at different periods from the beginning of the 1260 years, appear to me to be founded in mistake. The furthest point to which we can look back for the commencement of these calamities may be found to be within the last five-and-twenty years, ver. 1.

The "sea of glass mingled with fire" is the same which is said in chap. iv. 6 to have been before the throne. It is opposed, I conceive, to that perturbed element from which the beast arose; and describes the pure, calm, and triumphant state of those who have overcome. The striking up of the heavenly choir on this occasion was to express the great good that should arise from these evils. The song they sing is that of "Moses and the Lamb." As the song of Moses at the Red Sea magnified the victory of the Lord over the Egyptians, so this song will celebrate the triumph of the Lamb and of his followers over enemies of a similar character. If the works of God in redeeming his people from the long and hard bondage of Egypt were "great and marvellous," much more so would they be in delivering his saints from the long and hard bondage of "that great city which is spiritually called Egypt;" and if his "ways were just and true" in the former instance, they would be still more manifestly so in the latter, ver. 2, 3.

It is not in malignity towards any creature, but in love to God, whose honour had for so long a time been trampled under foot, that these heavenly minds rejoice; not for the evil considered as evil, but for the good that should arise from it. Hence, anticipating the righteousness which the world shall learn when these judgments are abroad in the earth, they triumphantly ask, "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest." By this language we are given to expect that *the judgments on the antichristian powers, in connexion with the preaching of the gospel, will contribute to the universal spread of true religion over the face of the earth,* ver. 4.

As the throne of the God of Israel was in the holy of holies, so his throne in heaven is described as in his temple; and as, when the high priest entered into the former once a year, he saw the ark of the testimony, so, the heavenly temple being opened, the apostle looked and saw the seven angels come out from before the throne, as having received their commissions. They are described as "clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles." Nothing could better express the state

of their *minds* in executing the Divine displeasure. God had sometimes employed evil angels to execute his will, even towards his own people, as in the case of Job, and in such instances they have been certain to discover their malignity. But when good angels execute the Divine will, though it be upon his worst enemies, they have no malignant bitterness, but are influenced purely by the love of God and righteousness, ver. 5, 6.

Next to the description of the messengers follows the delivering to them their respective messages; and this was from the hand of one of the four living creatures who represented redeemed men. God does not usually employ his people in this world to overthrow either corrupt churches or antichristian governments. This is a kind of work not suited to them. They must, however, have some concern in it. Their prayers for deliverance are answered by terrible things in righteousness upon their persecutors; and to all the judgments of God they must add their cordial *Amen*, ver. 7.

The effect of the delivery of these messages is described as "filling the temple with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power, so that no man could enter it." "This cloud (says Dr. GUYSE) appeared like a thick smoke, awfully glorious, which was a symbol of the Divine vengeance, (Psal. xviii. 8,) as going forth from the presence of the Lord, and to be executed by the glory of his power, in the destruction of antichrist; even as the cloud on the tabernacle was of his dreadful judgment upon Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and the murmuring Israelites; (Numb. xvi. 19, 42;) and as Moses could not enter into the tabernacle, nor the priests stand to minister in the temple, while the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord; (Exod. xl. 35; 1 Kings viii. 11;) so no one could enter into this heavenly temple to intercede for the preventing of these grievous calamities upon the beast: none were suffered to do this, that judgment might have its free course, till all the seven punishments to be inflicted by the ministry of the seven angels were fully executed in their order."

DISCOURSE XXIII.

ON THE VIALS.

Rev. xvi. 1-9.

I ENTER upon this part of the subject with diffidence, because I consider the events predicted as mostly future; and the exposition of unfulfilled prophecy, especially when couched under symbolical language, is rarely accurate. When in looking at a symbol we compare it with facts, we can judge of the one as being designed to predict the other; but, in looking at the symbols without the facts, we can seldom make much out in explaining them. Nor does it appear to have been the design of prophecy to enable us to foresee things with any considerable degree of precision; but to keep up a general hope before the accomplishment, and to strengthen our faith after it.

Ver. 1. Before entering on particulars I shall offer two or three general remarks:—

First, Some of these "plagues," and it may be the greater part of them, will consist in *Wars* between the nations of Christendom. Such is doubtless the meaning of those in which mention is made of "blood," and of the "battle of Armageddon, the great day of God Almighty." It is thus that

the nations which have shed the blood of his saints will have blood given them to drink!

Secondly, As the grand design of these wars is the destruction of the anti-christian hierarchy, they may be expected to have a *providential direction* given to them, causing them to bear more especially upon that object. If this remark be just, it furnishes a presumption that the vials have been pouring out for the last twenty years. As a fire kindled in a city has a direction given to its ravages, by the wind, or by some other means; so Providence has caused the desolations of the continent to bear principally, though not entirely, upon the papal cause.

Thirdly, The resemblances between the vials and the trumpets may throw more light upon the subject than any other medium of which we are in possession. It is a fact very remarkable, that each of the seven trumpets has a point of resemblance to one of the seven vials—For example, The first trumpet affected *the earth*; and so does the first vial.* The second trumpet turned *the sea into blood*; and the second vial was poured out upon *the sea*, which became *as the blood of a dead man*.† The third trumpet affected the *ivers and fountains of waters*; and so does the third vial.‡ The fourth trumpet respected *the sun*; and the fourth vial does the same.§ The fifth trumpet was followed by *darkness and pain*; and such were the effects of the fifth vial.|| The sixth trumpet was complex, relating partly to the depredations of the Euphratean horsemen in the east, and partly to the idolatries and persecutions of the beast and his associates in the west; and so is the sixth vial, relating partly to the Euphratean waters being dried up, and partly to the battle of Armageddon, by which the cause of the beasts will be ruined.¶ Finally, the seventh trumpet presents a *closing scene*; and so does the seventh vial.** These resemblances cannot be accidental. Though they refer to events, therefore, more than a thousand years distant from each other, yet there must be some important points of likeness between them; and as the trumpets are all, except the last, fulfilled, we may by means of them form some judgment of the vials which yet may be unfulfilled.

It is on this principle that Dr. GILL seems to have proceeded in expounding the vials. “The first vial,” says he, “will be poured out upon *the earth*, and designs those popish countries which are upon the *continent*, as France and Germany, especially the latter; and as the first trumpet brought the Goths into Germany, so the first vial will bring great distress upon the popish party in the empire.—The second vial will be poured upon *the sea*, and may intend the *maritime* powers belonging to the church of Rome, particularly Spain and Portugal; and as the second trumpet brought the Vandals into these places, so this vial will effect the same, and bring wars and desolations into them.—The third vial will be poured out upon *the rivers and fountains of waters*, which may point to those places adjacent to Rome, as Italy and Savoy; and as the third trumpet brought the Huns into those parts, so this vial will bring in large armies hither, which will cause much bloodshed, and a great revolution in church and state.”††

This comment on the vials, founded upon their analogy with the trumpets, bids fair, in my judgment, to be the true one; especially that on the first three which has just been quoted.

The Doctor adds—“As yet I take it none of them are poured out, though some great and learned men have thought otherwise. As yet there have been no such devastations on the continent, as in France and Germany, as to produce the above effects; nor in the countries of Spain, Portugal,” &c.

* Comp. chap. viii. 7; xvi. 2.

† Chap. viii. 8; xvi. 3.

‡ Chap. viii. 10, 11; xvi. 4.

§ Ch. viii. 12; xvi. 8, 9.

|| Ch. ix. 1-3; xvi. 10.

¶ Ch. ix. 14; xi. 14; xvi. 12-16.

** Ch. xi. 15; xvi. 17.

†† Sermon on the Glory of the Church in the Latter Day, pp. 12-15.

This was doubtless the case in 1752, the year in which the sermon from which the above extract is made was printed, but this is more than can be said in 1810!

Ver. 2. If by the "earth" be meant "the *continent*, as France and Germany, especially the latter," (and I know of no interpretation more natural,) we have certainly seen a succession of evils falling upon the men who "had the mark of the beast," first in France, and after that in Germany, grievous as the most "noisome sores," and like them indicative of a state of corruption and approaching dissolution.

Ver. 3. If this vial respect the papal *maritime* nations, particularly Spain and Portugal, (and here also I know of no interpretation more natural,) we have seen a commencement of things in those countries, but have not yet seen the issue. What it will be God knoweth. Whether this or that political party prevail, it will be a plague, and a plague that will tend to accomplish the ruin of the antichristian cause.

There is a circumstance of additional horror in this vial, which was not in its corresponding trumpet: the blood into which this "sea" would be turned is described as stagnant, "as the blood of a dead man;" as though such a quantity should be shed as not only to tinge, but to congeal the ocean, turning it as it were into a putrid mass!

Ver. 4-7. If the *rivers and fountains of waters* denote "Italy and Savoy," these countries may be expected to be the scene of the next great convulsions which shall agitate Europe. And if it be so, it may be a just retribution for the blood of the Waldenses, which was there shed in shocking profusion for many successive centuries.

The responsive language of the angels on this occasion accords with such an interpretation, and is exceedingly impressive. It shows in what light the persecution of the faithful is viewed in heaven. This sin implies such a hatred of God and his image as would, if he were within reach, dethrone and kill him! Unjust war is a great sin; it is murder on an extended scale; yet it is not to be named in comparison of persecution for Christ's sake. The one is destroying God's natural image; but the other is aimed at his moral image. In the former "the potsherd striveth with the potsherds of the earth;" but in the latter man striveth with his Maker! This was the sin which crowned the wicked life of Herod the tetrarch, who to all his other crimes "added this, *above all*, that he shut up John in prison!" Blood shed in persecution of God's servants hath a cry which must sooner or later be heard. The persecutions of former ages may be forgotten by men; but he "who is, and was, and shall be" will not forget them. The judgments of our own times are examples of this; all Europe, previously to the Reformation, was stained with the blood of the martyrs; and since that memorable era, France, and Germany, and Spain, and Portugal, and Italy have been deeply engaged in that impious practice. Is it surprising then that all Europe in measure, and those nations in particular which have persisted in it, should be made to drink the bloody draught? While we feel, and ought to feel, for suffering humanity, it is not for us to join with the merchants of the earth in their wailings; but rather with the angels in heaven, saying, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, because thou hast judged thus!"

Ver. 8, 9. In discoursing upon the trumpets, it was observed that the Roman empire, then become the seat of Christianity, was considered as a world of itself; having not only its *earth*, its *sea*, and its *rivers*, but its *sun*, and *moon*, and *stars*; symbols of its supreme and subordinate governments, chap. viii. 6-12. When the sun was eclipsed, on the sounding of the fourth trumpet, it signified the fall of the imperial authority; but the fourth vial, though poured upon the sun, yet, unlike its corresponding trumpet, does not

terminate upon it, but upon the people on whom it shines. The sun here, instead of being eclipsed, or having its power diminished, has it increased. Its heat is rendered more intense, so as to become a plague to those who are under its influence.

By the "sun" is undoubtedly to be understood the supreme secular government of what is called *the Holy Roman Empire*, which is denominated *the beast*, and distinguished by its carrying or supporting the harlot. Its scorching heat cannot be understood of the persecution of the faithful; for they would not "blaspheme" under it. It would seem, therefore, to be the galling tyranny by which the adherents of the beast will be oppressed; while yet they repent not of their deeds.

DISCOURSE XXIV.

THE VIALS CONTINUED.

Rev. xvi. 10-21.

VER. 10, 11. By the "beast" we have all along understood that secular government which at the head of the other European governments has *supported the papal antichrist*. This certainly has not been the imperial government of France, but of Germany, to which therefore the character of *the beast* belongs. The station from which his influence and authority proceeds will be his "seat," or throne, or we may say his *den*; and that which the swellings of Jordan were to the lions which made their dens amongst the thickets growing upon its margin, (Jer. xlix. 19,) that will this plague be to him, causing him, if not to quit his den with howlings, yet to be very miserable in it. This is intimidated by his "kingdom being full of darkness," and by their "gnawing their tongues for pain." The supporters of the papal cause will be confounded. Darkness and anguish will come upon them. Yet being given up, like Pharaoh, to hardness of heart, they will continue to blaspheme the God of heaven, and will not repent of their deeds. These blasphemies and this perseverance in impenitence are sure signs of its being the determination of heaven to destroy them. Individuals may repent and escape; but as a community they are appointed to utter destruction.

Ver. 12-16. This vial, so far as respects the *temporal* dominion of Christ's enemies, possesses a final character; and seems partly to respect the overthrow of the Turkish power, signified by the "drying up of the waters of the Euphrates," and partly that of the papal, signified by the battle of "Armageddon," or of that "great day of God Almighty."

With regard to the first, as the sixth trumpet respected the rise of the Turkish power to punish the eastern church, so the sixth vial seems to denote its overthrow, along with that of the western church. The drying up of waters fitly expresses that diminution of strength and defence in a nation which issues in destruction. Thus, when God would destroy Babylon, he saith, "A drought is upon her waters, and they shall be dried up—I will dry up her sea, and will make her springs dry. And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for dragons, an astonishment and a hissing, without an inhabitant." "The kings of the east" may denote those who shall be employed in overthrowing this power, as the armies of Cyrus and Darius, on the waters of the Euphrates being diverted, were employed in overthrowing Babylon.

I have expressed a doubt whether either the doctrines or the wars of Mahomed would have had a place in this prophecy but for their relation to the Christian church (on chap. ix. 13-21); and I think it questionable whether the downfall of the Turks would have been noticed but on the same account. This was the reason of so much being said of old Babylon. She might have risen and fallen unnoticed by the prophets, if she had had nothing to do with Jerusalem. But though she was an instrument in God's hand in purging that corrupted city, yet seeing she "meant not so," but set herself against God himself, it required that she should in the end be overthrown, and that her overthrow should be marked in prophecy. In like manner, though Mahomed and his followers were instruments in punishing a corrupt part of the Christian church, yet seeing they meant not so, but set themselves against Christ himself, they also shall be overthrown, and their overthrow is marked in prophecy.

With regard to the second part of this vial, or that which respects the *papal* powers, this is the most tremendous. This is the last struggle of the beast and his adherents, and it will issue in their utter overthrow. This is "the great day of God Almighty;" the same as the *harvest* and the *vintage* in chap. xiv., and the "taking of the beast and the false prophet," in chap. xix.

Preparatory to this great day we have *the mustering of the forces*.—"Three unclean spirits like frogs" are described as going forth amongst the nations to gather them together; one from the mouth of the dragon, another from that of the beast, and another from that of the false prophet. These *spirits* may denote the corrupt *principles* which shall be disseminated in the *earth*, tending to deceive and to destroy mankind. As the *dragon* is described as the grand mover of all these mischiefs, as he is not said to be taken with the beast and the false prophet in chap. xix., and is denominated "that old serpent the devil and Satan," I consider him as a being of a different order from either of them; and as the unclean spirit which proceeded from the dragon may be supposed to correspond with his character, it may be a spirit of *diabolical malignity against God and true religion*.—The *beast* being understood of the last head of the Roman empire, the great supporter of popery, the unclean spirit proceeding out of his mouth may be *that which assumes the place of God in the consciences of men, and converts Christianity into an engine of state policy*.—The *false prophet*, though designated by a new name, appears to be the same power that was represented in chap. xiii. by the two-horned beast, and in 2 Thess. ii. 3, by "the man of sin." This is evident from the character of each being the same. The coming of the man of sin was to be with "signs and lying wonders." The two-horned beast "deceived them that dwell on the earth by means of his miracles;" and amongst the operations of the three evil spirits mention is made of "miracles," which seem to pertain to the false prophet. The man of sin, the two-horned beast, and the false prophet, therefore, are the same; namely, the papal hierarchy, or the community of which the pope is the head. The evil spirit proceeding out of his mouth may be that of *blind zeal, and religious imposture*.

These three evil spirits, discordant as they may be in some respects, will be united in their opposition to true religion. Hence in the great battle wherein the beast and the false prophet are taken, (chap. xix.) and which, as has been observed, is the same as this at Armageddon, the whole triumvirate is engaged "against him that sat on the horse, and against his army." It will be a character, it seems, of these times, that the friends and enemies of Christ will be nearer together than they have been wont to be: irreligion and false religion will unite their standards and fight with neither small nor

great, but with Christ and his adherents. Where men agree in the grand outlines of false doctrine, and conceive themselves to meet in their political interests, they can easily overlook other differences.

It seems as if a spirit of infatuation, like that in Pharaoh and his host at the Red Sea, would possess the enemies of Christ prior to this their last overthrow. The kings of the earth are gathered together, partly by hatred of God and religion, (the spirit of the dragon,) partly by the desire of subjugating both to political purposes, (the spirit of the beast,) and partly by blind zeal and religious imposture, (the spirit of the false prophet,) and being assembled will direct all their force against God and his cause. In what particular mode their hostility will be manifested, and by what means Christ will prevail against them, it is too much for us to determine. The former may be by direct persecution, or, if by war, it will be one whose object shall be to exterminate the true religion; and the latter may be by turning their hearts one against another. Though they have been gathered together, and have unitedly engaged in this notable enterprise, yet, finding it unsuccessful, they may fall out with one another. The spirit of the dragon may prevail over that of the beast and that of the false prophet, and he may think to govern the world without them. The antichristian kings also, perceiving how things are going, may be for joining the strongest side. But if so, they will find themselves deceived. The next vial will purify the world of their baleful influences, and the angel with a great chain in his hand stands ready to lay hold on the dragon himself, and to cast him into the bottomless pit.

The warning language addressed to the faithful (ver. 15) seems to intimate that these important events will come upon men unexpectedly, and that many will be stripped by them of their professions and prospects. Blessed are they whose religion will stand the test of such times of trial.

Ver. 17-21. As the sixth vial has issued in the overthrow of the temporal power of antichrist, the seventh seems to respect its *spiritual* dominion, or the hold which it has on the minds of men.*

The moral atmosphere of the world has long been polluted by false religion, from which it seems to be the object of this vial to cleanse it as by a thunder-storm, which thunder-storm produces a great earthquake, and this the falling to pieces of the great antichristian city, and other cities with it. The face of the world hence becomes changed, and the wrath of God pursues, as by a terrible hail-storm, the men who repent not of their deeds.

Nor will this purification of the moral atmosphere be confined to Christendom, but will extend to the whole earth. Paganism, Mahomedism, apostate Judaism, and every thing which stands opposed to the truth, shall now be driven out of the world. An "earthquake" is the well-known symbol of a revolution; and so great and mighty a revolution of religious principle may well justify the description given of it. And now, a voice out of the temple of heaven, even from the throne of God, is heard, saying, "IT IS DONE!" The threatening of the angel in chap. x. 7 is accomplished—the 1260 years are ended—THE MYSTERY OF GOD IS FINISHED!

As this vial seems to be wholly of a *spiritual* nature, the "thunders, and lightnings, and earthquake, and hail" do not seem to refer to wars, or to any other temporal calamities, but it may be to the effects of truth, and to those *spiritual judgments* which will fall on them who continue to reject it. The *body* of antichrist, as I may say, will be destroyed by the temporal sword, as described under the preceding vial; but the "spirit of Christ's mouth" shall destroy his *spirit*. Such from the beginning was the doom passed upon

* That these are very distinct we need go no further than Ireland for proof. Popery has there long existed, not only without the aid of temporal power, but in a manner against it; yet there are few if any countries where it has faster hold on the minds of men.

that wicked one; and such is the punishment of those who escape in the great battle wherein the beast and false prophet shall be taken, but who repent not of their deeds: they shall be "slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceedeth out of his mouth," chap. xix. 21.

The city being "divided into three parts," as by an earthquake, denotes I think the breaking up of the papal system; and what "the cities of the nations" which fall with it can be understood to mean but those worldly establishments of religion which have symbolized with popery, not only in worship and ceremonies, but in an *alliance with the kingdoms of this world*, I cannot conceive. To understand "the great city" of the Roman *empire*, and "the cities of the nations" of *particular states*, neither comports with the meaning of the terms in other parts of the prophecy, nor with the *spiritual* judgments denoted by this vial. "The great city" is mentioned in several other places in the prophecy—as in chap. xi. 8, "Their dead bodies shall lie in the streets of *the great city*, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified."—And in chap. xiv. 8, "Babylon is fallen, *that great city*."—And in chap. xviii. 10, 21, "Alas, *that great city*, Babylon."—"Thus with violence shall *that great city* Babylon be thrown down." In none of these passages does it appear to mean the *empire*, but the *church* of Rome. The empire is symbolized by a *beast*, from which *the great city* is distinguished, chap. xi. 7, 8. But if "the great city" mean the church of Rome, even "great Babylon who now comes in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath," "the cities of the nations" must mean those ecclesiastical communities which have symbolized with her.

DISCOURSE XXV.

THE GREAT HARLOT, AND THE BEAST THAT CARRIETH HER.

Rev. xvii.

HAVING gone through the vials, we have arrived at the commencement of the Millennium. Indeed we descended to this period in each of the three general descriptions, and in the pouring out of the vials have only retraced the latter part of the ground more particularly. All that remains between this and the twentieth chapter would in modern publications be called *notes of illustration*. No new subject is introduced, but mere enlargement on what has already been announced. We have heard much of the beast in the thirteenth chapter; but in the seventeenth we have a still more particular account of him, and of the woman that sitteth upon him, without which we should not have been able to understand the other. We had a hint given us of the fall of Babylon in the fourteenth chapter; but in the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth we have a triumphant ode, sent as it were from heaven, to be sung on the occasion. Finally, we have been given to expect, in the fourteenth chapter, that prior to the overthrow of the antichristian cause the gospel would be making progress; but in the nineteenth we see the word of God going forth, riding upon a white horse, and the antichristian powers destroyed in the very act of opposing him.

The first of these *illustrative notes*, as we shall call them, is contained in the seventeenth chapter, and respects the leading characters of the antichristian party.

Ver. 1-6. The object of this vision was not to gratify curiosity, but to show the justice of those plagues which were, or were about to be, inflicted.

The opprobrious name given to the woman determines its reference to a corrupt and false church, as opposed to "the bride the Lamb's wife." Her "sitting upon many waters," and which are said to be "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues," (ver. 15,) prove that this corrupt and false church would not be confined to a single city or nation, but would extend over a number of nations. The "kings of the earth that have committed fornication with her," are all those governments which are or have been within the pale of her communion, and which till the Reformation included the whole of western Europe, "the great Gothic family," as they have been denominated. It is this their idolatrous communion with her that is called fornication. Those who have been made "drunk with the wine of her fornication," are those who have drunk into her doctrines, worship, spirit, and practices, and have become as it were intoxicated by them.

To have a view of this harlot, the apostle is carried in vision "into the wilderness." She was represented before as sitting upon many waters; but as she is now to be described as riding upon a beast, it is proper that it should be upon the earth. Though the imagery however is changed, yet the meaning may be much the same; for a wilderness, no less than many waters, signifies peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. Hence the nations into which Judah was carried captive are called "the wilderness of the people," Ezek. xx. 35. For the apostle to be carried into the wilderness may be equal to his being placed in the midst of the nations of Europe—say in London, Paris, Madrid, or Vienna—at a time when papal Rome was in all her glory.

Being in the wilderness, he sees a woman sitting upon a beast, which beast was caparisoned with scarlet trappings, full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. This beast is manifestly the same as that which is described in the thirteenth chapter as "rising out of the sea," and is no other than *the Roman empire under its last head or form of government, or that which has been known in history as the western or holy Roman empire, in connexion with the kingdoms of Europe, which are its ten horns*. It is this government which has given the title of *emperor*, sometimes to a king of one nation, and sometimes of another; but whoever has possessed it, he has been considered as the grand supporter of the papal hierarchy.

It is said that the ancient pagan emperors were wont to be dressed in "scarlet" in times of war,—a fit attire then for a bloody period, and now for a bloody persecuting government. Its "names of blasphemy" express its impious and antichristian character, assuming the throne of God in the minds and consciences of men.

The "purple, and scarlet, and gold, and precious stones, and pearls," with which the woman was arrayed, allude no doubt to the attire of a harlot of no ordinary rank. The design is to describe her as being of the world, and seeking the things of the world, or as contriving by her meretricious ornaments to dazzle the eyes of her beholders. It is by that ceremonious pomp, splendour, and will-worship, which have often been defended under the name of *deccency*, and deemed necessary, both to gratify the taste of the polite and to excite the admiration of the vulgar, that false religion makes its way. The "golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication," are her corrupt principles and idolatrous practices, recommended by her seducing emoluments. The "name on her forehead" is thought to allude to the ancient practice of harlots, who not only used to put their names on their doors, but some of them upon their foreheads. It

is expressive not only of the general character of the antichristian church, but of her impudence; practising day by day the foulest and filthiest impostures, and yet calling herself the holy catholic church, and denying salvation to all without her pale! The name of "mystery" was given to this apostacy by Paul as well as John, and with this very proper exposition, "The mystery of iniquity." The system is full of "the depths of Satan," which it is an honour not to know.—She is further denominated "Babylon the great." Here we see that the Apocalyptic Babylon and the harlot are the same; it is Rome, as an antichristian community extending over many nations. What Babylon was to the Old Testament church she is to the New; and such will be her end.—Finally, she is denominated "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." There are other corrupt churches as well as that of Rome; but she is the principal, and the parent of them, the harlot of harlots. Not only by "forbidding to marry" does she open the flood-gates to illicit commerce between the sexes, and even to unnatural crimes, but sells indulgences and pardons in the name of Jesus Christ!

To complete the character of this mother of harlots, she is described as making others intoxicated, and as being herself "drunken with the blood of the saints!" Persecution is the crowning sin of the greatest sinners.

The apostle, having beheld her, "wondered with great admiration," as well he might. So much wickedness, be it committed by whom it might, was wonderful; but who could have thought that this was a picture of what would be called *the holy catholic church, in whose pale only was salvation!!!* The Christian church was an object dear to him: what then must be his feelings to be told that it should come to this.

Ver. 7. The answer of the angel is designed to allay the admiration of the apostle; and this it does by accounting for what had been seen. When Hazael wondered at his own predicted cruelties, and scarcely thought them possible, he was told in answer, "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." This was answer sufficient; and that of the angel resembles it. The character of the woman is accounted for by her alliance with the beast. Let the Christian church consider this, and tremble at such alliances.

Ver. 8-11. Having given an account of the woman, the angel proceeds to describe "the beast that carrieth her." This no doubt is the Roman empire, described as the "beast that was, and is not, and yet is." Prior to the overthrow of paganism by Constantine, it *was*—it was that idolatrous, blasphemous, persecuting power which Daniel had foretold. From that period, professing to become a Christian government, the properties of the beast were as it were laid aside, and it *was not*. Such was its character from the days of Constantine to the revelation of the man of sin. It might have been denominated *the beast that was, and is not; or the late pagan, but now Christian empire*. But, notwithstanding this his profession of Christianity, his origin is "the bottomless pit," and his end "perdition." He may deceive the blinded multitude with his pretences of being *not* that which he once was; but, as the angel informs the apostle, he *yet is*. He had indeed a "wound by a sword," which was thought at the time to be mortal, but it did not prove so. The corruptions of Christianity healed it, and all the properties of the beast revived in their wonted vigour.

The angel proceeds to inform the apostle more particularly concerning the "seven heads" of the beast, and intimates that in understanding this subject there will be employment for "wisdom." They are said first to be "seven mountains on which the woman sitteth." This determines the seat of the hierarchy to be Rome, well known as standing, when in its full extent, upon seven hills. They are also said to be "seven kings," or forms of

government, under which the empire had subsisted, did subsist, or would hereafter subsist. The forms which had subsisted (as has been observed on chap. xiii.) were *kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, and military tribunes*; the form which subsisted at the time of the commencement of the prophecy was that of *emperors*; and that which was yet to come, and to "continue a short space," seems to be that non-descript government which succeeded the overthrow of the emperors, and continued in divers forms for about three hundred years, till the establishment of that government which from the days of Charlemagne to the Reformation (a space of above seven hundred years) combined all the nations of Europe in support of the antichristian hierarchy.

This short-lived intermediate power might on some accounts be considered as the "seventh" head of the beast, and as such be distinguished from its last head, which in this view would be the "eighth;" but upon the whole it was rather to be considered as belonging to that in which it merged, and which in this view would be the seventh, or "of the seven."

There is an apparent difficulty in this *last head* of the Roman government being described as *the beast that was and is not*, as though the changes here alluded to were peculiar to that last head, when in fact they respect the beast under different heads. The answer I conceive to be this:—The beast, it is true, *was* under his first five heads, and *was not* under his sixth; but till the last stages of his existence this description could not be applied to him, or become as it were *his proper name*. From this time he would be known as *the beast which was and is not*, or as the no longer pagan, but Christian empire.

Ver. 12–18. In every description of the Roman beast, whether by Daniel or John, the ten horns are a distinguished part of it. "Ten kings," in the language of prophecy, are ten kingdoms or governments. They were not kingdoms at the time of the vision; hence the kings are said to have "received no kingdom as yet;" but on the overturning of the empire by the Goths in the fifth century, those nations which had before been dependent provinces, together with others that were without its jurisdiction, became independent kingdoms; and having embraced the religion of Rome, in process of time united in supporting it.

The reign of these kings is said to be "one (or *the same*) hour with the beast;" that is, with the last head of the Roman empire. They had overturned the empire in its preceding head or form; but by agreeing together in religion they established it under a new form: and being of the same mind with the beast in this his new form *as to supporting the church*, they unanimously "gave their power and strength and kingdoms to him," for this end. They did not subject their kingdoms to him as a secular power, for then had they not been independent; their only connexion with him would be ecclesiastical, or in his supporting the harlot. That this was the only bond of union between them is manifest from the result of things: when their love should be turned into hatred, they are not said to hate the beast, but the whore; it was the whore therefore, and not the beast, that was the object of their attachment. While he, caparisoned in scarlet, should carry her through all her filthy and bloody courses, they would be with him, holding up his trappings, or lending their authority to enforce his measures.

Such was actually the conduct of all the governments of Christendom prior to the Reformation, and such has been the conduct of many of them since. It is thus that they are said to have made "war with the Lamb." Their proceedings with respect to religion have been antichristian. All that has been done for more than a thousand years in invading the rights of conscience has been assuming his throne; and all the cruel edicts against what

they call heresy and heretics, with all the bloody executions of them, have been in direct hostility against his kingdom. "But the Lamb shall overcome them." Whosoever shall gather together against him will fall for his sake. They may ask, Who is like unto the beast, and who is able to make war with him? But the Lamb is "Lord of lords, and King of kings," and must prevail. His army, too, is a select band, "called, and chosen, and faithful," who following their Leader are certain to be victorious. The overthrow of the governments of Christendom does not respect them as *monarchical* in distinction from republican, (for one of Daniel's "kingdoms" was a republic,) but as *antichristian*. Those governments that "make war with the Lamb," whatever be their form, the "Lamb will overcome them."

In the progress of this war it is intimated that the kings who have supported the harlot shall have their hearts turned to "hate" her, and shall be instruments in her destruction. The hierarchy will become as odious in the eyes of the nations as a wrinkled prostitute is in the eyes of her paramours. This is the way in which the antichristian church is doomed to fall. It will not be from the increase of religious people who withdraw from her communion, as she has always apprehended; but from those who have been her companions in sin, and who, when nothing more is to be expected from her, shall turn against her and destroy her. It is not by protestantism, nor by Methodism, (as serious Christianity is now called amongst us,) but by infidelity, that false religion will be overthrown.

It may seem strange that the powers which supported the antichristian harlot should be the instruments employed in destroying her; but so it is appointed of Heaven. God, who saw the end from the beginning, intended for wise ends to permit the apostacy, and so to order it that the governments of Europe should for a time unite in supporting it. But it is only for a time: when the purposes and prophecies of God are fulfilled, he will cause a spirit of discord to separate these workers of iniquity, so that they shall destroy one another.

Finally, That no doubt might be left as to what was signified by the woman, she is called "that great city which reigned" at the time of the vision "over the kings," or kingdoms, "of the earth." This was equal to saying, It is **ROME**, considered as the seat of an antichristian hierarchy, which in the latter part of her empire shall prevail, but which, like all her other forms, shall go into perdition.

DISCOURSE XXVI.

THE FALL OF BABYLON, AND THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

Rev. xviii. ; xix. 1-10

CHAP. xviii. This is another note of illustration; a sacred ode, much resembling that on the fall of old Babylon, Isa. xiv. 4-23; xxi. 9. That which old Babylon was to Zion, the Roman hierarchy has been to the Christian church; and the end of the one shall correspond with that of the other.

Her fall being *sudden*, and accomplished by the "strong arm of Him that judgeth her," seems to relate to her *political* overthrow, as predicted by "the harvest and the vintage," chap. xiv.; by the "battle of Armageddon," chap. xvi.; and by "the supper of the great God," chap. xix. And as the city to

be destroyed does not consist of material buildings, but is a community extending over many nations, so the fire by which it is consumed will doubtless be such as is suited to the object. The events of *war* may be that to the antichristian cause which fire is to a city.

I shall barely *notice the contents* of the song, and *remark on a few of its parts*. An angel descends from heaven, and proclaims the important event; and while he pronounces the doom of the criminal, states withal what have been her crimes, ver. 1-3. Another voice is heard from heaven addressed to the people of God who have in different ways and degrees been connected with her, to come out of her as Lot escaped from Sodom, lest, being partakers of her sins, they receive also of her plagues, ver. 4. This second voice also confirms the charges exhibited against her by the first; and reiterates her doom, ver. 5-8. A description is given of her overthrow under the image of a city on fire: Those who have been seduced by her wiles shall be filled with astonishment at beholding her fearful end, ver. 9-13. The criminal herself is tauntingly addressed, as having lost all that her heart had been set upon, ver. 14. Interested men make great lamentations on account of her, ver. 15-19. Apostles, prophets, and martyrs are called upon to rejoice over her, ver. 20. Her fall is compared to the sinking of a great millstone cast into the sea, ver. 21. Her desolations are described by the loss of all her enjoyments, ver. 22-24. Great interest is excited in heaven by her overthrow, chap. xix. 1-6. A general joy pervades the church of God both in heaven and earth, and the Millennium quickly follows, ver. 7-9. The song concludes with an account of the effect of the vision on the apostle towards his informant, ver. 10.

By the language in chap. xviii. 6, 7, it may seem as if the servants of God would be the executioners of his wrath upon this corrupt community; but their being called to "reward her as she rewarded them" may only denote that the judgments inflicted upon her will be according to their testimony, and in answer to their prayers. It was thus that the two witnesses inflicted plagues upon their enemies, chap. xi. 5, 6. The visible agents employed in the work will be the governments of Christendom which will "hate the whore, and eat her flesh, and burn her with fire."

That which will greatly contribute to the fearfulness of her overthrow will be her *previous security*. She saith in her heart, "I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow." If she had been "the bride, the Lamb's wife, she could not have been more secure; so much the greater therefore will be her fall.

The events which to a political eye seem to occur only from the chances of war, are here described as the process of the *Judge* of heaven and earth. The power which will be exerted will be that exercised over a condemned malefactor by a judge, at whose command the officers of justice proceed to execution. Power is the only thing that she has respected; and by the strong arm of power she shall be brought down! ver. 8.

We have heard of the hearts of the kings being turned to hate the whore; yet we find here kings *lamenting her overthrow*. The kings or kingdoms of Europe may then be what they now are—divided into parties. One party, and that the successful, will, from interested considerations, hate and set themselves against her; another party, from similar considerations, will espouse her cause, and these, proving unsuccessful, will lament over her, ver. 10.

The kings are joined in their lamentations by the "merchants," who seem to be those who have made a trade of religion; which, however it may include many amongst the laity, must refer more immediately to the mercenary part of the clergy.

The most notable article in the list of her commodities is "the souls of men." There is doubtless an allusion to Ezek. xxvii. 13, but "the persons of men" can there mean only slaves, whereas "the souls of men" are here distinguished from slaves. Tyre dealt only in men's bodies, but Rome in their souls. I know not what else to make of the sale of indulgences and pardons; of the buying and selling of church livings; of confessions, prayers for the dead, and of every other means of extorting money from the ignorant.

That which will excite the most doleful lamentations among the adherents of the antichristian church will cause the friends of Christ to shout for joy. The marks of desolation are recounted with triumph. The sounds of music, the bustle of craftsmen, the grinding of the mill-stone, the light of a candle, and the joyful salutations of the bridegroom and the bride, are all ceased, and succeeded by the awful stillness of death. And if any ask, Wherefore hath the Lord done this? What meaneth the heat of this great anger? the answer is, "In her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."

The first ten verses of the nineteenth chapter, which are a part of the sacred ode, describe the effect of the fall of Babylon on the friends of God both in heaven and earth.

Chap. xix. 1-8. The heavenly host with one voice raises the shout of "ALLELUIA! Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, ALLELUIA! and her smoke rose up for ever and ever." What a contrast between this and the whining lamentations of the merchants!

The punishment of every community *as such* requires to be in this world; when therefore her smoke is said to "rise up for ever and ever," the allusion may be to a city consumed by fire; and the meaning is, that it shall never be rebuilt, but its overthrow, like that of Sodom, shall be set forth for an everlasting monument of the Divine displeasure.

After this a voice is heard out of the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great." The theme is acceptable to him that sitteth upon the throne, and must be encored. In answer to this call of the angel, the servants of God both in heaven and earth are described as in a state of delightful agitation. With one voice they renew the song, and expatiate on the subject. The sound of their voices is as that of an immense multitude of people, or as the roaring of the sea, or as continued peals of thunder, saying, "ALLELUIA; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" God had always been omnipotent, and had always reigned; but while his enemies were suffered to prevail on earth he did not *appear* to reign in that part of his empire as he now will. Now his right hand and his holy arm will have gotten him the victory!

But the song is not yet finished: it is added, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." The Lamb and his wife are fitly introduced in opposition to the harlot and her paramours; namely, the beast and the kings of the earth. The fall of the one is the signal for the glorious appearance of the other. Such was the taking away of the dominion of the *little horn* to the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, being given to the people of the saints of the Most High, Dan. vii. 26, 27. This marriage of the Lamb I conceive is the Millennium itself. Both this and the fall of Babylon, which precedes it, are here introduced by way of anticipation. They each come into the song of heaven previously to their being actually accomplished on earth. The account of

the one follows in the remainder of this chapter, where the beast and the false prophet are taken; and that of the other in the first six verses of the chapter following.

The accession of believers to Christ at any period is represented by the espousal of a chaste virgin to her husband; and the whole gospel dispensation is described as a marriage supper. What an espousal, then, and what a supper will that be, when Jews and Gentiles, from every nation under heaven, shall be brought to believe in him! The appearance of the Christian church has not been such of late ages as might have been expected of one that had Christ for her Head. She has been not only scattered by persecution, but her beauty greatly tarnished by errors, corruptions, and divisions, so as scarcely to sustain a *visible* character; but when believers all over the world shall have purified their souls by obeying the truth—when they are what they were in the days of pentecost, “of one heart and of one soul”—and when there is nothing but distance of situation in one body—to hinder their being united then will “the bride have made herself ready.”

The church is described as being *active* in putting on her robes of glory, but they are ready *prepared* for her. To her was “*granted* that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white.” Reference may be had to the wedding garments provided, according to the representation in the parable, at the expense of the bridegroom. It is said to be “the righteousness of the saints;” yet as it respects the saints not individually, but collectively, and at the Millennial period, it would seem to denote a *justification* of the church from all things which have stood against her, analogous to that of an individual believer on his first espousal to Christ. As the perdition of the anti-christian community is described in language alluding to that of individual unbelievers, (ver. 3, 20,) so the glory bestowed on the church at this period alludes to that which is conferred on individual believers when they are “washed, and justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” Thus the church in the days of Zerubbabel, when she had been polluted among the heathen, is represented by Joshua the high priest “clothed with filthy garments,” and her justification by the “taking away of his filthy garments and clothing him with change of raiment.” Thus also the glory of the church at another period is expressed in language applicable at all times to individual believers:—“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, and hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth with jewels.” Christ’s salvation will then be to her as a beautiful garment, and his righteousness as an ornamental robe.

Ver. 9. A blessing was pronounced by our Lord on those who saw and heard the things which were then to be seen and heard, and a still greater blessing is in reserve for those who shall see and partake of the good here predicted. The most glorious things spoken of the church of God will then be accomplished. The success of the gospel in different parts of the world during the period of the vials will then meet as a confluence of rivers near the ocean. The tides of mercy and judgment towards Jews and Gentiles will soon find their level in the salvation of both. “In times past we believed not God, but obtained mercy through their unbelief;” now “through our mercy they also shall have obtained mercy,” Rom. xi. 30, 31. In former ages God blessed the eastern parts of the world; of late ages the western; but now the kingdom of Christ, like a returning tide, shall spread over both west and east, Isa. lx. 1–11. “Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand, three hundred, and five-and-thirty days!” Dan. xii. 12.

These predictions respecting the overthrow of Babylon, and the establish-

ment of the church, are attested by the angel as “the true sayings of God.” Such an attestation would tend to strengthen the faith and hope of believers, who might otherwise, during the long reign of the antichristian beasts, be tempted to think that God had forgotten to be gracious, and would be favourable to his church no more.

Here I consider the sacred ode on the fall of Babylon and the marriage of the Lamb as closing, with only a few words of the apostle concerning his informant.

Ver. 10. The angel here spoken of seems to be him whose voice was heard out of the throne, calling for a repetition of the song, ver. 5. John probably supposed him to be the Son of God himself, who had more than once in his visions appeared as an angel, and whom he was in the habit of worshipping. But the angel refuses his adoration on the ground of his being merely a servant, the fellow servant of him and his brethren, who had the testimony of Jesus. *They* testified of things concerning him which were accomplished; as of his birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the way of salvation by him: *he* revealed prophecies which as yet were unaccomplished. Yet their work was much the same: the theme of their testimony contained the spirit or substance of what he had imparted for prophecy. They were therefore fellow labourers in the same cause, and must not worship one another, but God. Christ himself is not an object of worship considered as man, but as God only. That he is God as well as man, and as such an object of Divine worship, this circumstance of the angel’s refusal fully evinces. We see in his conduct what we see in that of Paul and Barnabas at Iconium; and every creature who fears God must follow the example. If Jesus therefore were not God, he ought on all occasions to have refused Divine worship, and certainly would have done so. His never having done this is a sufficient proof of his Divinity. Nor can it be justly alleged that the worship paid to Christ was mere civil respect; for then the same might be said of John’s worshipping the angel, and which he might have done without being repulsed. We learn therefore from this circumstance that Jesus is not only the theme of the gospel ministry, and the spirit or substance of prophecy, but that he is truly and properly Divine.

DISCOURSE XXVII.

THE TAKING OF THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET.

Rev. xix. 11–21.

WHEN the Israelites, full of fearful apprehension from the pursuit of their enemies, cried out for fear, Moses said unto them, “Fear not, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord: for the Egyptians, whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see no more for ever!” In going over these last ten chapters we have seen and heard much of the beast and the false prophet, and of the mischiefs which they have wrought upon the earth; but this is the last account that we shall have of them. By the prophecies in these verses they are buried in oblivion, so that the church in after-times shall know of them only as we know of Pharaoh and his host, namely, as matters of history.

In cases wherein the parties have been assured of victory, it has not been

unusual for a battle to be preceded by a song of triumph. It was thus when Jehoshaphat went forth against his enemies: singers were first appointed to praise the Lord, and then the army was led on to the engagement, 2 Chron. xx. And thus our Lord, when about to engage the powers of darkness, being certain of victory, exclaimed, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out!—Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him!" John xii. 31; xiii. 31. It is thus, I conceive, that the prophecy, having anticipated the victory over Babylon in a song of triumph, proceeds to describe the battle. The scene of the song was in heaven, but the battle in which the event will actually occur is upon earth. It is the same as that before described under the sixth vial, namely, the battle of Armageddon,—“the great day of God Almighty,” —“the supper of the great God!”

Observe the preparations for it.—“Heaven is opened, a white horse is seen, and he that sat upon it is called faithful and true, who in righteousness doth judge and make war.” We can be at no loss in deciding who this great warrior is. He is doubtless the same that is addressed in Psal. xlv. 3, 4:—“Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty: and in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness: and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.”—I may add, he is the same that is described in the first six verses of the sixty-third chapter of Isaiah; and what is here predicted by John not only alludes to that prophecy, but appears to refer to the same event. His coming up from Edom with garments stained with the blood of his enemies appears to be justly paraphrased by Dr. Watts:—

“I lift my banner (saith the Lord)
Where antichrist has stood;
The city of my gospel foes
Shall be a field of blood.

My heart hath studied just revenge,
And now the day appears;
The day of my redeemed is come,
To wipe away their tears.

Slaughter, and my devouring sword,
Shall walk the streets around;
Babel shall reel beneath my stroke,
And stagger to the ground.”

It may be thought that this *bloody* representation is unsuitable to the character of the *Prince of peace*; and that the battle between him and his army on the one side, and that of the beast and kings on the other, is contrary to the genius of the gospel dispensation. To solve this difficulty, let it be observed that the war here described is of *two kinds*, and Christ sustains a twofold character in conducting it. The first is *spiritual*; and this he undertakes as the “Head of the church.” In this character he rides upon a *white* horse, and the armies of heaven follow him upon *white* horses; fitly representing the great efforts that shall be making, at the very period of Babylon’s overthrow, to spread the gospel over the whole earth. The second is *providential*; and this he undertakes as “Head over all things to the church.” In this character he is “clothed with a vesture dipped in *blood*.” In making war in his *spiritual* character, he does not wait to be attacked by his enemies: he goes forth in this respect conquering and to conquer. But in so far as the war is of a *providential* character, the enemies are the aggressors. The beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, “gather together to make war against him and his army,” ver. 19. The idea conveyed by this language is, that while he who sitteth upon the white horse

and his army are going forth, to spread the everlasting gospel in the world, the beast and his allies will gather together to oppose its progress, and will perish in the attempt.

There is no necessity for supposing the armies of Christ will have literally to fight with those of the beast and the kings; but while they are following him in spreading the gospel, *He*, as "King of kings and Lord of lords," may work the utter overthrow of their adversaries, by setting them at variance *with one another*. We have seen this accomplished in part already in the antipathies and wars which have raged between infidelity and popery; and such may be the progress of things, till, like two furious beasts of prey, they shall both be destroyed. The account itself agrees with this supposition; for though the armies of the beast are said to have gathered together against *the armies* of him that sat upon the horse, yet there is no mention of any being engaged in their overthrow but *he himself*. It is *he* that "smites the nations," "treads the wine-press," and has his "vesture dipped in blood." It is remarkable, too, that in the corresponding prophecy of Isa. lxiii. 1-5, he is said to have "trodden the wine-press *ALONE*, and of the people *THERE WAS NONE WITH HIM*."

These remarks may suffice for the general meaning of the prophecy. Let us now attend to a few of the particulars.

It is a joyful sight to see the Son of God riding forth upon the white horse. He will not wait for the fall of the antichristian powers ere he extends his spiritual kingdom. The flight of the evangelical angel was prior to the fall of Babylon; such is still the order of things; and it is in opposing this great and good work that the enemies of the gospel will bring destruction upon themselves.

The character given to this Divine warrior must not be overlooked. He is "faithful and true," as performing all his engagements to God, and fulfilling all his promises to men. "In righteousness he doth judge and make war." The cause in which he is engaged is just, and all his measures are in harmony with it. "His eyes were as a flame of fire," burning with holy indignation against his enemies. "And on his head were many crowns," denoting his great power and numerous conquests. "And he had a name written that no man knew but he himself;" for after all that is known of the glory of his character, it passeth knowledge. The "vesture dipped in blood" refers to what has been said of the destruction of his enemies by means of wars kindled by their own malignity. "His name is called the Word of God," as being that Divine person whose office it is to reveal the mind of God to men, and whose victories are accomplished by means of the gospel. "The armies of heaven on white horses" are the friends of Christ who go forth in their respective stations, and lay themselves out to promote his kingdom. "The sharp sword that goeth out of his mouth" is his truth, which is not only the means of saving believers, but of punishing unbelievers. By his word they shall be judged at the last day, and his threatenings will fall upon them even in the present world. Those who are not destroyed by his judgments on the antichristian party will be despoiled of their power, and ruled as with a rod of iron. "And he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."—The vine of the earth being ripe for destruction, like grapes cast into a press, he will tread them in his anger, and trample them in his fury. "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." In this there is something especially appropriate, as it respects those kings who have opposed his gospel, and lorded it over the consciences of his subjects. He has long sustained this name in right, but henceforward he will sustain it in fact.

And now comes on the decisive battle, "the battle of Armageddon," "the great day of God Almighty," "the supper of the great God!" Terrible things in righteousness have occurred in our times; but by the strong language used to express this event, it seems as if it would surpass every thing which has gone before it. It is unlikely that it should consist of a single battle, but rather of a war, or succession of battles, though doubtless one must be the last. It is proclaimed by an "angel standing in the sun," whose voice would of course be heard from the rising to the going down thereof. The mode in which he announces it is by an invitation to the fowls of heaven to come as to a supper, to feast upon the carcasses of all ranks and degrees of men who shall be found on the antichristian side. The beast and the kings of the earth who make common cause with him, being gathered together with their armies to make war against him that sitteth upon the horse and against his army, will now be utterly overthrown. Those powers which shall be found supporting the papal hierarchy, together with "the false prophet," or the hierarchy itself, after a corrupt and bloody reign of 1260 years, will be "taken and cast alive into a lake of fire, burning with brimstone."

It was remarked, on chap. xvii. 7, that the corruption of the church is ascribed to her allegiance with the secular beast, and it is no less remarkable that the overthrow of the secular beast is ascribed to its allegiance with the church. It was "because of the great words that the *little horn* spake against the Most High that the beast on whose head it grew should be slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame," Dan. vii. 11. Let governments consider this, and tremble at such alliances.

It is true that neither political nor ecclesiastical bodies as such can be literally cast into a place of torment, as individual unbelievers that compose them will be; they may, however, be cast into perdition so as never to rise any more, which may be the whole of what is intended. As the Christian church in her Millennial glory is described in language applicable to individual believers, (ver. 8,) so the antichristian church is represented as a hardened sinner, arrested in a course of wickedness, and sent to his own place.

Finally, It is supposed that after this terrible overthrow there will be a remnant, like the scattered remains of a defeated army, who shall still be on the side of antichrist; but they shall be "slain by the sword of him that sitteth upon the horse, which sword proceedeth out of his mouth." As the battle above described is the same as that of Armageddon under the sixth vial, so "the sword proceeding out of Christ's mouth" corresponds with the spiritual judgments under the seventh vial. They who have escaped the temporal calamities of the former will, except they repent, fall under the spiritual judgments of the latter. The threatenings of Christ's word will overtake them. Their hearts will fail within them, as did the heart of Nabal when told of the words of David. Like him they will be smitten of God and die; and having no successors to stand up in their place, their cause will die with them.

DISCOURSE XXVIII.

ON THE MILLENNIUM.

Rev. xx. 1-6.

VER. 1-3. We have seen the taking of the beast and the false prophet, and in that the fall of Babylon; but the principal mover in the confederacy is *the dragon*, and of him no mention was made in the battle before described. Hence, though he had not been expressly called "that old serpent the devil and Satan," we might have presumed that he was not of an order of beings to be crushed by the hand of man. His being in one place described as "a great *red* dragon, with the *seven heads and ten horns*" of the Roman beast, (chap. xii. 3,) can therefore only respect the form under which he at that time acted out his mischievous designs.

This great red dragon that had formerly been cast out of heaven is supposed to be yet on earth, and after the taking of his agents, the beast and the false prophet, is about to rally his scattered forces, and to engage in new schemes against the Lord and against his Christ. If he be not bound, all the success against the other will signify but little; for he will not be at a loss how to deceive the world, and to engage them anew in some antichristian enterprise.

But who is able to bind him? The hand of man cannot take him. Lo, "an angel comes down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand, and lays hold on him and binds him a thousand years!" The apprehension and imprisonment of this enemy will complete the victory.

There can be no doubt who this angel is; for we know who hath the "keys of hell and of death." To him it appertaineth, after having been manifested to destroy his works, to arrest him in his course, and to set bounds to his operations. The hand of man could not take him; but the hand of Christ can lay fast hold of him.

The dragon being cast into the bottomless pit, and shut up, and a seal set upon him to prevent his deceiving the nations for a thousand years, the kingdom of Christ shall now be established over the whole earth.

Various questions have arisen concerning this Millennial state, both as to its nature and duration. With respect to the latter, the "thousand years" require, I think, in this instance to be taken literally; for if understood of so many years as there are *days* in this period, the duration of the world would greatly exceed what we are elsewhere given to expect. The apostles seem to have considered themselves as having passed the meridian of time, and as drawing on towards the close of it. Such appears to be the import of the following passages:—"God hath in these *last days* spoken to us by his Son.—But now once *in the end of the world* hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.—The *end of all things is at hand*.—The coming of the Lord *draweth nigh*.—Behold, the Judge *standeth before the door*.—He that testifieth these things saith, Surely *I come quickly!*" But if the thousand years were reckoned a day for a year, we are at present but upon the threshold of time: the last judgment must in this case be at a distance of hundreds of thousands of years.

A question of more importance is that which respects the *nature* of this

Millennial reign of Christ, whether it be *spiritual* or *personal*.* Those who favour the former, consider it as a time in which the gospel will be spread over the whole earth, and cordially embraced both by Jews and Gentiles; when those prophecies will be fulfilled which speak of the cessation of wars—of the stone cut out without hands becoming a great mountain and filling the whole earth—of the little leaven leavening *the whole lump*—of the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea—of the first dominion coming to Zion—and of the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom, under the whole heaven, being given to the people of the saints of the Most High.

Those, on the other hand, who plead for a *personal* reign of Christ upon earth, consider the Millennium as a state of *immortality*, a state subsequent to the general conflagration, wherein the righteous, being raised from their graves, shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years; after which, the wicked dead being raised, the general judgment shall follow.

Whatever respect I feel for some who have maintained the latter hypothesis, I find insurmountable objections to the hypothesis itself.

First, The idea of a personal reign appears to me nearly to *exclude that of a spiritual one, by leaving little or no place for it*.—It is clear that the pouring out of the seven vials is principally for the purpose of destroying the antichristian system, and that when this is accomplished the Millennium follows. No sooner are the beast and the false prophet taken under the sixth vial, and the world (like the temple after being polluted by Antiochus) purified from its abominations by the seventh, than the dragon is bound for a thousand years. If then this thousand years' reign be personal, the second coming of Christ must immediately succeed the ruin of antichrist. But if so, how or when are all those prophecies to be fulfilled which describe the prosperity of the church in the latter days? How is war to cease in the earth, and peace succeed to it, when, as soon as the troubles of the earth are destroyed, the world will be at an end? On this principle antichrist will reign till the heavens are no more. The end of the 1260 years will be the end of time, and the church will have no existence upon the present earth but "in the wilderness." Instead of the stone, after breaking in pieces the image, "becoming a great mountain, and filling the whole earth," no sooner is the image broken to pieces than the earth itself shall be burnt up. And on the destruction of the little horn, (Dan. vii. 26, 27,) instead of "the kingdom, and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, being given to the people of the saints of the Most High," no sooner shall that horn be broken than the whole earth will be destroyed with it!

Secondly, The idea of a personal reign represents Christ's second coming at a thousand years' distance from the last judgment; whereas the Scripture speaks of the one as *immediately following the other, and as being the grand object of it*. "The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be *punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; WHEN HE SHALL COME TO BE GLORIFIED IN HIS SAINTS, and to be admired in all them that believe IN THAT DAY.*"—"Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all,"

* I say nothing of a third class, which might be denominated *political*, and which, in the delirium that prevailed a few years since, made the *dragon* to be "monarchy in general," the *Millennial thrones* (chap. xx. 4) seats of magisterial authority to which the *people* were exalted, and the *new heavens and the new earth* the results of the American and French Revolutions! Such are the effects of interpreting prophecy with the view of establishing a political hypothesis.

&c.—“I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead *at his appearing and kingdom.*”

Thirdly, The idea of a personal reign represents believers as raised to a state of immortality a thousand years before the close of Christ's mediatorial kingdom; whereas the Scripture represents the one as immediately succeeding the other. Speaking of the resurrection, the apostle says, “Christ the first-fruits, and afterwards they that are Christ's *at his coming.*” *THEN cometh the end*, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power; for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” Now the resurrection of the saints will itself be the destruction of death. If therefore the end *then* cometh, there is no place for a personal reign of a thousand years between them. Besides, if death be the last enemy, and this enemy be destroyed in the resurrection, how can there be a Gog and Magog army to be destroyed a thousand years after it?

Fourthly, Those who consider the Millennial reign as personal *confine the last resurrection and the final judgment, as described in the latter part of the chapter, to the wicked*: but there is nothing in that account of the resurrection which requires it to be limited to them. The sea is said to give up the dead which were in it; and death and hell (or the grave) to give up the dead which were in them; which language equally applies to the righteous and the wicked: and as to the last judgment, which immediately follows, had it been confined to the wicked, it would not have been said “*whosoever* was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire,” since on this principle they could *none of them* be found written in it.

If the last judgment, as described in chap. xx. 11–15, do not include that of the righteous as well as the wicked, there is no proof from this account of their being judged at all. The Scriptures, however, are very express, that “we must *all* appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, and give account of the deeds done in the body;” and that “God will bring every work into judgment, whether it be good or whether it be evil.”

Fifthly, The account of Satan's being loosed after a thousand years' restraint, and going forth to deceive the nations, and to gather together the armies of Gog and Magog, *does not comport with a state of immortality, or with the condition of men after their resurrection.* Wicked men may rise, indeed, with the same enmity against God and religion as they possessed at death; but as to their being able to collect together, and to encompass the church of God in hope of destroying it, the idea is gross and inadmissible. The sea and the grave will give up their dead, not to become followers of Satan in a new enterprise, but to be judged every man according to his works, ver. 13.

Finally, To represent the Millennium, which precedes the last judgment, as a state of immortality, is to confound it with the New Jerusalem which follows it. The latter is indeed a state of immortality; for “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away” (xxi. 4); but this language itself implies that till after the final judgment it shall not be so.

For these reasons, as well as from the figurative language of almost the whole of the prophecy, I cannot think that the Millennium is to be understood of a personal reign of Christ, in a state of immortality; but of that glorious *rest* which the church will enjoy after the destruction of her anti-christian enemies. Under this view, therefore, I shall now attend to the description given of it.

Ver. 4–6. These thrones correspond with the account in Dan. vii., where, after the power of the little horn is broken, it follows, “And the kingdom

and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, was given to the people of the saints of the Most High." Stations of importance, both in the world and in the church, will be filled by righteous men. Righteousness therefore will flow as a river, and corruption and violence will recede before it. The public mind will favour this course of things. Thus it is that wars and oppressions, and all other disorders, will in a great measure subside. Every thing being done on Christian principles, Christ will reign. "God's way will be known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations. The peoples shall be glad and sing for joy, for the Lord will judge them righteously," Psal. lxvii.

The "judgment given unto them, and to the souls that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus," denotes that God will now vindicate their characters, and avenge their wrongs. This appears to be the meaning in chap. xi. 18, and xviii. 20. The vengeance poured upon the antichristian party is in the former of these passages called *judging the dead*, because it vindicates them and the cause in which they suffered, and avenges them on their adversaries. Thus it will be during the Millennium. The cause in which the martyrs have suffered will then triumph; and while the names of their persecutors will rot in execration, their labours will be in request, and their characters embalmed in the memory of mankind. It is thus, I conceive, that the martyrs will "live and reign with Christ a thousand years."

The antichristian party, on the other hand, called "the rest of the dead," or the "remnant" that escaped from the battle in which "the beast and the false prophet were taken, were slain with the sword of him that sat on the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth." In other words, they will become as dead men during the whole of the Millennial period. They would die *as a body* in that they had no successors to stand up in their place, and *as individuals*, if any remained, would be unable to impede the progress of the gospel. After this their leader being let loose, and permitted to make one more desperate effort, they will then "live again," though it will be but for a short season.

"This (adds the sacred writer) is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Those who consider the reign of Christ personal understand this of the resurrection of the bodies of the righteous, which they suppose will be a thousand years before that of the wicked." A "*first* resurrection" doubtless implies a second, as much as a "second death" implies a first; but as the first and second deaths are different in their nature, so may the first and second resurrections. I question if there be any proof of the corporeal resurrection of the righteous being prior in order of time to that of the wicked. The only passage that I recollect to have seen alleged for it is 1 Thess. iv. 16, "And the dead in Christ shall rise *first*." It is not, however, in respect of the resurrection of the wicked that they are said to rise *first*, but of the change of the living saints; for it follows, "*then* we who are alive, and remain, shall be caught up," &c. The context says nothing of the wicked, or of their resurrection. The resurrection of the righteous being mentioned *alone*, or without that of the wicked, does not prove that the one will be prior to the other. If it prove any thing concerning the wicked, it would seem to be that there will be no resurrection of them; but knowing from other scriptures that there will be a resurrection "both of the just and the unjust," we do not draw this inference; nor have we any ground for drawing the other.

The "first resurrection" appears to me to be no other than *the Millennium itself*, to which all that is said of it will apply. During this glorious period,

the church will have its Pauls, and Peters, and Johns over again. Men will be raised up who will go forth in the spirit and power of those worthies, as much as John the Baptist did in the spirit and power of Elias. Thus the apostles and martyrs will, as it were, be raised from their graves and live again upon the earth.

The *blessedness* pronounced upon him that hath a part in it is expressive of the happiness of those times. The idea is the same as that in chap. xix. 9, "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb;"—and that in Dan. xii. 12, "Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five-and-thirty days!" Each of these passages refers to the same period. If a blessing was pronounced on those who saw the early part of gospel times, much more on those who shall enjoy the latter. It were not enough however to *exist* in those times; to be blessed we must have "a part" in all that is going on; and in order to this we must be "holy." Otherwise, God might work a work in our days which we should not believe, but despise it, and wonder, and perish!

The *first* resurrection supposes a second, and which seems to be that of the just and the unjust. In this the wicked shall be raised to die a second death; but over the followers of Christ the second death shall have no power. As a pledge of their victory, they are already made priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign in spiritual prosperity from generation to generation, for the space of a thousand years.

DISCOURSE XXIX.

THE FALLING AWAY.—THE END OF THE WORLD.—THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.—AND THE LAST JUDGMENT.

Rev. xx. 7-15.

VER. 7, 8. It seems almost incredible, after so long and glorious a season of grace, that Satan should so recover his influence in the world, as that the number of his adherents should become "as the sand of the sea!" Yet thus it is. What is ordinarily called the religion of a people becomes a sort of national habit, to which they are attached from generation to generation. But it is not thus with true religion. There is nothing in it suited to the temper of mind with which men are born into the world. If therefore the Holy Spirit be aggrieved, and withdraw his influence but from one generation, it will be like that which succeeded the times of Joshua, that "knew not the Lord." If in such a state of things Satan be permitted to ply with his temptations, he is certain to be successful.

"The four quarters of the earth" prior to this must have been evangelized by the gospel; but the dragon being let loose deceives them; not by any new superstition, like that of popery; for as to the beast and the false prophet, they will long since have gone to perdition. It may be by a persecuting infidelity, the spirit inspired by the dragon himself, that this last effort will be made. Having seen so much Christianity in the world, the hearts of the wicked will rise against it, and be so far "deceived" by the wicked one as to imagine themselves capable of extirpating it from the earth.

The name given to the enemies of Christ is borrowed from the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth chapters of Ezekiel, where mention is made of Gog and Magog. It does not appear however that the prophecy of Ezekiel and

John refer to the same period; but that the language is merely allusive. Ezekiel's Gog and Magog seem to refer to a combination among the nations against the house of Israel, *soon after their restoration to their own land and their conversion to Christ*, and which will be prior to or at the commencement of the Millennium; but the Gog and Magog army of John is "after the thousand years are expired." The meaning may be, that, like as the nations will combine against restored and converted Israel, so will the whole world of the ungodly combine to exterminate Christianity from the earth; and as the one would issue in the utter overthrow of the assailants, so would the other.

Ver. 9, 10. As there is nothing in the account which intervenes between this and the resurrection of the dead, the "fire that cometh down from God out of heaven" may be no other than the general conflagration itself, spoken of by the apostles Peter and Paul—"The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.—The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Pet. iii. 10; 2 Thess. i. 8.

And now the grand mover of all the mischief which has taken place in the world is not merely bound for a season, as before, but cast into perdition, where his agents, the beast and the false prophets, are. There is no mention of *their* being "tormented," because they as political bodies were incapable of it; but of *him* it is said he "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." Perdition to them will be oblivion; but to him a state of everlasting punishment.

Ver. 11-15. A more impressive description of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment, is scarcely in the power of language. The words are simple, but the sentiments exceedingly sublime. "The language is so plain (says Mr. BLACKWELL) as not to need, and so majestic and grand as to exceed, commentary or paraphrase." But it is not for us to stand admiring the language till we overlook the event itself.

Lo, the dead, both "small and great, stand before God!" Young and old, rich and poor, all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. None are so insignificant as to be overlooked, none so mighty as to escape; the governors and the governed, the parent and the child, the master and the servant, the oppressor and the oppressed, the preacher and the hearer, all must give an account of themselves to God!

Men, owing to the imperfection of their knowledge, and of their memories, make use of "books;" but God's infinite knowledge requires no such assistance. It is merely in allusion to human proceedings that this is spoken. His memory is itself the book from which he will judge the world.

Believing sinners are justified by grace; but both believers and unbelievers will be judged "according to their works." Those who have sinned without the light of revelation will be judged by the light of nature. Those who have sinned against revelation will be judged by it, according to the light they had, or might have had. Believers themselves, though not dealt with according to their deserts, (for they will "obtain *mercy* of the Lord in that day!") yet their works will be censured or approved according to what they were. Their sinful works will be burnt up, though they themselves are saved; and as to their good works, though there be nothing in them deserving eternal life, or furnishing the least ground for boasting, yet will they be admitted as evidences in their favour, Matt. xxv. 31-40.

There have been many days of judgment, as it were, in miniature, but this

will be universal. Whether men have died at sea, or on land; and whatever became of their bodies, whether slain in battle, devoured by beasts of prey, or decently interred in their graves; all will rise and be judged, ver. 13.

"Death and hell (or the grave) were cast into the lake of fire." Death and the grave are things which belong to time, and which, as rivers are lost in the ocean, will now be swallowed up in eternity. Prior to the day of judgment the ungodly were confined under their power as in a prison; but having received their doom, they shall not be remanded thither, but shall go away into everlasting punishment. "This is the second death." Into this dreadful abyss all will be cast, as the just punishment of their sins, excepting those whose names are "written in the book of life." An interest in the salvation of Christ is the only security against eternal death.

DISCOURSE XXX.

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH, WITH THE NEW JERUSALEM

Rev. xxi.; xxii. 1-5.

CHAP. XXI. We have seen, in the foregoing chapter, the end of the world and the last judgment, even that fearful issue of things described by the apostle Peter: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up."—But as the same apostle adds, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for *new heavens* and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;" so in this chapter, and the first five verses of the next, we find an ample description of them.

What then are we to understand by this "new heaven and new earth," this "new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven," and this "pure river of the water of life," which is supposed to flow in the midst of it? Some have considered it as only a more particular account of the Millennium. But to this it is objected—*First*, The Millennium precedes the last judgment, whereas the new heavens and the new earth follow it. *Secondly*, The Millennium was for a limited time; but this is "for ever and ever," chap. xxii. 5. *Thirdly*, Under the Millennium the dragon is only bound for a season, and afterwards loosed; but here there is no dragon nor enemy of any kind. The devil will have been cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, to be tormented day and night for ever and ever (chap. xx. 10); "and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away," ver. 4.

For these reasons others have considered it as no other than *the heavenly state*.* Yet it seems singular that the heavenly state should be introduced as a subject of *prophecy*. It is doubtless an object of *promise*, but prophecy seems rather to respect events in the world in which we dwell than in the world to come. Whatever is meant by the glorious state here described, the *earth*, as purified by the conflagration, is the scene of it. The whole of what is said, instead of describing the heaven of heavens, represents the glory of that state as "coming down upon the earth," ver. 1-4. The truth appears to me to be this: it is a representation of heavenly glory *in so far as that*

* LOWMAN—HOPKINS on the Millennium, p. 48.

glory relates to the state of the earth on which we dwell; which, instead of being the stew of the mother of harlots, shall become the seat of "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The earth will not be annihilated by fire any more than it was by water. It will be purified from sin, and all its effects. The generations of a corrupt race of creatures having terminated, it will become the perfect and perpetual abode of righteousness. The creation has long been subjected to the "vanity" of supplying its Creator's enemies with the means of carrying on their rebellion against him. Under this "bondage of corruption" it has "groaned and travailed," as it were in pain, longing to be delivered. And now the period is arrived. The liberation of the sons of God from the power of the grave shall be the signal of deliverance to the whole creation, Rom. viii. 19-23.

It is not the object of the Holy Spirit to tell us what the heavenly glory is, but rather *what this world shall become, in opposition to what it now is*. This opposition is preserved throughout the description. We have read of Babylon; not that in Chaldea, but a *new* Babylon: here we read of Jerusalem; not that in Palestine, but a *new* Jerusalem—of a city by whose delicacies the merchants of the earth were made rich; now of another city in the light of which "the nations of them that are saved shall walk, and to which kings shall bring their glory and honour"—of a troubled "sea," whence arose those monsters which were the plagues of the earth; now of there being "no more sea"—of the "great whore that sat upon many waters;" now of "the bride the Lamb's wife"—of "great tribulations out of which the saints of God have had to come;" now of "all tears being wiped from their eyes, and of death, and sorrow, and crying, and pain having passed away"—finally, of "a golden cup full of abominations and filthiness;" but now of the "pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," together with the "fruits of the tree of life, which bears twelve kinds of fruit, and yields its fruit every month."

As the new Jerusalem is denominated "the bride, the Lamb's wife," all that is said of her as a *city*, from ver. 10-27, though couched in highly figurative language, is descriptive of the church triumphant. In this, as in many other places, there is a reference to the prophecies of Ezekiel, (chap. xlviii. 31-34,) though the events predicted are not always the same. The city in Ezekiel seems to be the church in a day of great spiritual prosperity; this in a state of immortality. Her high wall denotes her complete security; her twelve gates, on which were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, denote that none but Israelites indeed, who have the seal of God in their foreheads, will enter into it; her twelve foundations may refer to the doctrine of the apostles on which she stands; the pearls and precious stones with which she is adorned are her spiritual riches and glory; there being "no temple, nor sun, nor moon," denotes that there will be no need of those means of grace which we now attend upon; what we now receive mediately, we shall then receive immediately; finally, the nations of the saved walking in the light of it may allude to the interest which surrounding nations take in a metropolitan city, and denotes that the saved, who have been gathered from all nations, will rejoice in the honour that God will have bestowed upon his church.

To complete the description of the city, and to finish the prophecy, we must consider the first five verses of the twenty-second chapter in connexion with the foregoing.

Chap. xxii. 1-5. There is doubtless an allusion in these verses to the waters of the sanctuary, and the trees of life, described in Ezek. xlvii. 1-12. Both Ezekiel and John make mention of a city—of a river—of trees grow

ing upon the banks of it—and of the fruit thereof being for meat, and the leaf for medicine. Ezekiel's waters flowed from the temple, near the altar; those of John out of "the throne of God and of the Lamb." The city is doubtless the same in both; but I conceive at different periods. Ezekiel's city had a temple, but that of John, as we have seen, had no temple; for "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." The former therefore describes the church in her latter-day glory; the latter, in a state of perfection—and which answers to the promise in chap. ii. 7, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

DISCOURSE XXXI.

ATTESTATIONS TO THE TRUTH OF THE PROPHECY, ETC.

Rev. xxii. 6-21.

WE have gone through the prophecy: all that remains consists of attestations, directions, invitations, and warnings concerning it.

Ver. 6. Such is the solemn attestation of the *angel* to the truth of all that he had made known to the apostle. He had received it from the Son of God, even the Lord God of the holy prophets, who had sent by him to signify it unto his servant John, chap. i. 1.

Ver. 7. After the attestation of the angel follows that of *him that sent him*. The "coming of Christ" refers to his second appearing. His declaring that this would be "quickly," is declaring that the things which had been foretold should soon be accomplished. Meanwhile they would be a guide to the faithful, and a blessing should attend those who adhered to them.

Ver. 8. This is the attestation of the *writer*. He not only saw and heard these things, but such was their effect on his mind, that on one occasion he conceived the angel who revealed them to him to have been the Son of God himself, and therefore fell down to worship him. Some have expressed surprise that the apostle, after the angel had once refused his adoration, should offer it a second time; but it appears to me that what is here related is merely a repetition of what was said and done before, chap. xix. 10. He first tells of his having "seen" the things that were to be seen, and "heard" the things that were to be heard; and now of his having been so overcome by them as to suppose the angel from whom they proceeded to be the Son of God, and of course to have fallen down to worship him. The design of the repetition is merely to add weight to the attestation.

Ver. 10-16. He who speaketh in these verses is not the angel, but the Son of God himself, whose speech is resumed from verse 7. The eighth and ninth verses are a parenthesis, in which the writer expresses his own feelings. He who in verse 7 said, "Behold, I come quickly," here adds, "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand." As if he should say, Do not conceal, but declare them, for they are things of immediate concern.—To this is added a solemn declaration of the near approach of that period when the characters of men should be unalterably fixed. Let the persecutors and corrupters of the gospel know that there is no change but on earth, no Saviour nor Sanctifier beyond the grave. Let

the righteous know also, who have faithfully adhered to him through all the temptations and persecutions of the world, that the time draws nigh when their conflicts shall be ended, and they shall be immutably confirmed in righteousness and true holiness. And now the solemn warning of his near approach is repeated, accompanied with a declaration that "his reward is with him, and that he will give every man according as his work shall be." The character assumed by the Judge, that of "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last," while it ascertains his proper Divinity, conveys an impressive idea of the proceedings of that day. It is equal to saying, He that shall judge the world will be possessed of a Divine as well as of a human nature; and, where God is judge himself, the heavens will declare his righteousness.—Blessed shall they be in that day who have "done his commandments," or who, amidst the temptations and persecutions of the world, have kept his sayings. All the blessedness contained in partaking of "the tree of life," and of the glory of "the new Jerusalem," shall be theirs.—On the other hand, "dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie," are "without." Nor does this description appear to refer to ordinary sinners, of which the world is full, but rather to *the enemies of the gospel, and the corrupters of pure religion*. Thus "dogs" denote false teachers; "sorcerers" those who have been employed in drawing away mankind by the lures of the mother of harlots; "whoremongers" those who have committed spiritual fornication with her, or her daughters; "murderers" those who have entered into her persecuting spirit; "idolaters" those who have gone into the worship of saints and images; and "he that loveth and maketh a lie" is one whose heart favouring false doctrine, has employed himself in framing and propagating it.—See chap. xxi. 8.

The Lord Jesus, having from the 10th to the 16th verse addressed himself to the apostle, here turns to the churches, assuring them that all which was revealed in the foregoing prophecy was for their use: "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches." Nor was it to those only which were then in being, but to all the churches of succeeding ages. The things contained in this prophecy therefore are a message from Christ in his glorified state to us. And as in reference to his second coming he assumed the character of "the first and the last," here he is "the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star," which names are descriptive of Him who is God in our nature, and whose coming will introduce an everlasting day of light, and joy, and gladness.

Ver. 17–21. Christ does not only assume a name suited to the revelations which had been made, but draws from them the most affecting invitations and solemn warnings; and with these the book concludes.

Reader, as if he should say, You have read of "The water of life:" you are invited to "come," and drink "freely" of it. You have read or heard of "the Spirit" that spake to the churches: he speaks also to you individually, and the sum of what he saith is, "Come." You have heard of the "bride," and of the glories prepared for her: she does not covet to enjoy these things by herself, but joins with the Spirit of inspiration in inviting you to "come." Nay, every one that "heareth" and believeth these things is warranted to invite his neighbour. And let every one who has any regard for his own soul avoid the cup of the mother of harlots, and come to these living waters. There need be no hesitation on the score of qualifications, for it is free to all who are willing to receive it.

Know also that the words of this prophecy are sacred. If any man add to them, God will add to him its plagues; and if any man take away from them, God will take away from him whatever he may have expected to

receive of its blessings. He who testifieth these things saith, the third time, "SURELY I COME QUICKLY."

To this solemn testimony of Christ the apostle adds his cordial "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" And as he had introduced the prophecy with an address to the seven churches, so he concludes it with the apostolic benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

CONCLUSION.

THE reader may ask, What are the signs of the present times?—What judgments may yet be expected to befall the nations?—and, What cheering prospects await the church?

If the outlines of the foregoing commentary be just, we are now under *the period of the vials*, or that space of time which commences with the sounding of the seventh angel, and terminates in the Millennium. This is a period which appears to be marked in the prophecy; particularly in chap. x. 7, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." That is, in the times in which the seven vials shall be poured out, the great designs of Heaven concerning the overthrow of the papal antichrist, and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, as foretold by the prophets, shall be accomplished.

This is the period in which, according to Daniel, "The thrones are pitched down, and the Ancient of days doth sit—in which they shall take away the dominion of the little horn, to consume and to destroy it unto the end." We see not yet the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; but we see that which is both preparatory and introductory to it.

Moreover, If the exposition of the vials by the trumpets, adopted from Dr. GILL, be just, we are as yet but under the second vial, which for several years has been pouring out upon the *sea*, or the maritime papal nations of Spain and Portugal; and notwithstanding what has taken place, it may be suspected that much of it is yet to come.

Much has been written on the commencement and consequent termination of the 1260 years assigned in prophecy for the continuance of the antichristian power. If the former could be ascertained, the latter would follow of course. Some think that they have already terminated, and others that they are on the point of doing so. But of this I think we may be certain, that unless the vials are all poured out, to which few if any will pretend, the reign of the papal antichrist cannot have terminated, seeing they are the appointed means of its destruction. The *finishing* of "the mystery of God" (chap. x. 7) is the same as the termination of the 1260 years, as is evident from the corresponding passage in Dan. xii. 7, where the angel swears that it shall be for "a time, times, and a half." The pouring out of the last vial is the termination of the 1260 years: accordingly, a great voice is then heard out of the temple of heaven, saying, "IT IS DONE," chap. xvi. 17.

It may be questioned, however, whether the precise time of the commencement and termination of this period be not purposely concealed from us. It does not appear to be the design of prophecy so to fix the time of future events as that we should know them beforehand, to a day, or a month, or a year. It deserves, moreover, to be particularly noticed, *that those prophecies*

in which an exact number of years is specified are generally, if not always, covered with obscurity in respect of the time of their accomplishment, and in some cases have appeared to have had different accomplishments. Seventy years, for instance, were determined for the Babylonish captivity; but as the captives were carried away and restored at different times, it was hard to say when it began, and consequently when it ended. From the first captivity in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, when Daniel and others were carried to Babylon, to the first restoration by the decree of Cyrus, was seventy years; that is, from A. M. 4108 to 4178, 2 Cron. xxxvi. 5-7, 22, 23. From the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, in the reign of Zedekiah, to the decree of Darius to restore it, was seventy years; that is, from A. M. 4126 to 4196, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14-21; Ezra vi. And from the captivity by Nebuzaradan, which finished the desolations, to the dedication of the second temple, which completed the restoration, was seventy years; that is, from A. M. 4130 to 4200, Jer. lii. 30; Ezra vi. 16-22. See the Tables in Prideaux.

Again, seventy weeks of years were determined for the coming of Messiah; but things were so ordered, that though the weeks were well understood to mean 490 years, yet the exact time of their commencement was not understood. A general expectation of him certainly did prevail about the time that he appeared, but that was all that was gathered from the prophecy, and might be all that it was intended should be gathered. Those who entertained carnal views of his kingdom were so blind as not to know it when it did appear. The Pharisees demanded of him when the kingdom of God should come. "The kingdom of God cometh (answered he) not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is among you!" As if he should say, The kingdom of God will not, like the kingdoms of this world, rise out of turbulence, intrigue, and bloodshed, nor be accompanied with ostentation and parade. Imperceptible and gradual in its operations, it comes when you little expect it. You shall not be able to point to the place and say, Lo it is here, or lo it is there! Nay, little as you may think of it, it is already in the midst of you!

In some such manner as this we may look for the expiration of the years of antichrist, and the coming of the kingdom of Christ in these latter days. While curiosity is gaping after wonders, and demanding, When shall these things be? behold, it will be amongst us! The antichristian cause rose gradually, and will probably fall gradually. "They shall take away his dominion to *consume* and to destroy it unto the end." Its temporal power has already been shaken and diminished; but it is reserved for the battle of Armageddon, that "great day of God Almighty," under the sixth vial, to accomplish its overthrow. And when this is done, the seventh will purify the moral atmosphere of the world from its abominable principles, and so make way for the Millennium.

When two of Christ's disciples were inquiring after the *honours* of his kingdom, they were asked, "Are ye able to drink of the *cup* that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the *baptism* that I am baptized with." He would himself have to suffer before he reigned, and they must expect to suffer with him. It is true his sufferings would be but for a short time, and so might theirs; but they required to be the immediate object of their attention. Something similar to this may be expected in what is before us. Some commentators have supposed *the slaughter of the witnesses* in chap. xi. to intimate as much as this. I have already given my reasons for understanding that part of the prophecy of past events; but there are other passages which seem to give us to expect that the adversary will not expire without a deadly struggle. Thus towards the close of the 1260 years, in which the church is described as being in the wilderness, the dragon is

represented as casting out of his mouth a "flood" after her, and as making war with her seed, chap. xii. 15-17. Previously to "the harvest and the vintage"—which, synchronizing with the sixth vial, describe the utter overthrow of the antichristian powers—the *patience* of the saints is celebrated, and a blessing pronounced on the dead that *die in the Lord*, chap. xiv. 13. Previously to the battle of Armageddon, the kingdoms are gathered together *to fight against God*, chap. xvi. 14. The beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, are gathered together *to make war* with him that sat on the horse, and against his army, and perish in an attempt to crush them, chap. xix. 11-21.

If these events signify *war* between the nations, as possibly they may, yet it will be a war directed against Christ and true religion, and in which the church of Christ may expect a sharp persecution; and this not merely from one, but all parties, who, like Herod and Pilate, will be made friends, and unite in such a work as this. We may think that, from the repeated blows which popery has received on the continent, it will never be able to persecute to any considerable degree again; that from the antipathy between its adherents and the patrons of infidelity, they can never again coalesce; and that, from the dishonour which public opinion attaches to intolerance, persecution can never more lift up its head: but we may be mistaken in all these particulars. If the temporal power of popery has diminished on the continent, its spiritual power has increased in Britain.* If papists and the avowed enemies of religion have fallen out, it has been chiefly on political subjects, a union in which would bring them together again. We have lived to see both whigs and tories unite in opposing a free toleration of Christian missionaries; and an English writer of note, who professes to be "the enthusiastic friend of freedom," though he wishes the "catholics the utmost degree of religious liberty," yet proposes in respect of *the evangelical party*, "by well-concerted and well-applied regulations to *restrain* them!"† The spirit of the beast and the false prophet certainly can and will unite with that of the dragon in the war with God Almighty.

It is a consolation that this persecution, or this war against religion, will be the last, and of short duration: this very effort of the enemy will prove his final overthrow: our immediate inquiry, however, seems to be, Are we able, previously to our entrance on the Millennial reign of Christ, to drink of his cup, and to be baptized with his baptism?

But though our Lord checked the aspiring minds of his disciples concerning his kingdom by presenting to them a time of trial, yet he did not fail to cheer them with the promise of glorious things beyond it. "A woman (saith he) when she is in travail hath sorrow because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." The glory of the Millenium will more than balance all the trials during the 1260 years of antichristian usurpation.—Nor shall we have to wait for the Millennium, nor even for the ruin of the antichristian cause, ere we see glorious times. Two hundred years have been thought to be the utmost point to which the pouring out of the vials can extend: they may terminate in less time: but if not, there is great encouragement for the friends of Christ in the promised progress of his cause *during this period*. We shall not have to wait for the Millennium, I say, ere we see glorious days in respect of the success of the gospel. The seventh trumpet, though

* Recent events have also revived its temporal power. N.B. Written in 1814.

† Characters of the late Charles James Fox. By Philopatris Varvicensis. *Eclectic Review* for December 1809, p. 1128.

it includes the vials, and in this view is a woe-trumpet, yet is introductory of good tidings to the church. At the same time that her enemies are bleeding under the strokes of heaven, the "kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." The pouring out of the vials will be to the Millennium that which the wars of David were to the pacific reign of Solomon. The servants of Christ may have to encounter great opposition; but as "the Lord prospered David whithersoever he went," so he will prosper them. Paganism, Mahomedism, popery, and infidelity shall fall before them. Nor shall the obstinacy of Judaism maintain its ground. The wall shall be built, though it be in troublous times. What short of this can be intimated by the "angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people"—and *this before the fall of the antichristian Babylon?* chap. xiv. 6-8.

What else can be meant by the song preceding the pouring out of the vials—"All nations shall come and worship before thee, for thy judgments are made manifest?" chap. xv. 3, 4. The judgments referred to are those of the vials, or "seven last plagues" (chap. xv. 1); the effect of which on the nations will be to induce them to "come and worship" before God. They shall so "manifestly" appear to be the judgments of God against the antichristian powers, that the nations will be deeply impressed by the conviction; and, by the concurring influence of the Holy Spirit and the "everlasting gospel," will be subdued to the obedience of faith.

To the same purpose is that remarkable passage in Isa. xxvi. 9, "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." "The church under the gospel dispensation," says an able writer, "is in this and the preceding chapter the *principal* subject of prophecy. Zion is introduced singing. A song is always in the prophecies a symbol of the enlargement of the church. In verses 17, 18, she complains of feeble and ineffectual efforts in extending the interests and kingdom of her Redeemer: 'We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.' She receives in answer the consoling promise of a period when she shall make vigorous and successful exertions, and no longer complain of abortive labours; when converts numerous as the morning dew shall join her standard: 'Thy dead shall live.'—'Awake and sing—thy dew is as the dew of herbs.' No season or time is particularly ascertained when this promise will be accomplished; but another event is foretold, and immediately connected with this. A judgment, a singular judgment, inflicted as the punishment of a peculiar and enormous crime, is mentioned. The event is represented as inevitable; the Lord's people may not pray for its removal, but are directed to fly to their chambers, and hide themselves until the indignation be overpast. 'For behold the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain!' The terms here used, compared with parallel expressions in the Revelation, put it beyond a doubt that the blood of the martyrs is intended, and the punishment predicated is the avenging of that blood. This is introduced as a coetaneous event with the enlargement of the church. Whenever that precious blood begins to be avenged, then Zion will sing of mercy as well as judgment; then a new and prosperous ministry will arise in the church, and her borders be widely extended."*

If the "punishment" referred to at the close of the twenty-sixth chapter of Isaiah be that which is appointed for the antichristian Babylon for her

* DR. LIVINGSTONE'S Sermon on Rev. xiv. 6, before the New York Miss. Soc., April 3, 1804.

having shed the blood of the martyrs, in which not only this writer, but almost all our ablest commentators, are agreed, the ninth verse doubtless refers to the same events. The pouring out of the vials are the "judgments" which while they are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Many judgments have been in the earth without producing this effect; but the Lord will in this instance accompany them with his word and Spirit, and so render them effectual to salvation.

The same things in substance are taught us in Rev. xix. 11-19, where, prior to the last struggle with the beast and the false prophet, Christ is described as "going forth upon a white horse, and as being followed by the armies of heaven on white horses." And when their enemies, provoked by their success, shall gather together in order to oppose their progress, they themselves shall fall to rise no more.

The period of the vials being a season of WARFARE, it is in this, rather than in the Millennium itself, that we are to look for the most distinguished VICTORIES over error, superstition, and irreligion. The Millennium is a *reign*; but a reign presupposes possession of the throne, and that, in cases where it has been previously occupied by an enemy, a *victory*. It is in this period therefore that we are to look for the overthrow of paganism, Mahomedism, popery, and infidelity; and towards the close of it may expect the malignant opposition of the Jews to give place to the gospel. The glorious Millennial rest will not commence while such an enemy remains unsubdued. The marriage supper of the Lamb must include the children of Abraham in its train. The return of this long-lost prodigal will heighten the joy of the feast, and be as life from the dead.

Supposing the period of the vials to have commenced within the last five-and-twenty years, let it be considered *whether the aspect of the times do not correspond with what we are given to expect*. It must of necessity be a period of *unprecedented wars*; and if those wars are designed of God to avenge the blood of the martyrs, it may be expected they should have a kind of special direction given them towards the countries where that blood has been principally shed. How far this is applicable to late events it is easy to judge. It must also be a period of *extraordinary prayer* and *unprecedented exertion for the spread of the gospel*. It is during this period that "the kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." But the accomplishment of such mighty moral changes is not to be expected by any other than the means above mentioned. When the Lord buildeth up Zion, he regards the prayer of the destitute; and when his servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour her dust, then the time to favour her, even the set time, is come, Psal. cii. 14-17. Had we been more importunate in prayer, we might have been more successful; but, with all our imperfections, the prayer of faith has been presented and heard! God hath given the word, and, compared with former times, great is the company of those that publish it. Can we overlook that providence which has been raising up numerous societies and plans, some for teaching the poor to read, and others for furnishing them with books, especially with the oracles of God? Ought we to overlook the translation of the Scriptures into the various languages of the east; or the circulation of them through the earth in such a degree as perhaps was never before known? Can we be inattentive to the desire after evangelical preaching which prevails, not in one or two countries only, but almost every where? If our Lord concluded, from the flocking of the Samaritans to hear the word, that "the fields were white already to harvest," are we not warranted to draw the same conclusion?

Let us observe the state of the public mind a little before the coming of Christ, and compare it with its present state. "The people were in expecta-

tion, and all men mused in their hearts whether John were the Christ or not." And who that is not blind to the operations of God's hand does not muse in his heart whether the extraordinary changes which have of late years taken place in the world do not indicate something great to be pending—whether, notwithstanding the many venders of false prophecies, and mistaken comments on the true, there be not a body of genuine and important prophecies fulfilling and about to be fulfilled—whether some of the convulsions among the nations may not issue in what is foretold of the restoration of the Jews—and, finally, whether all that is going on be not a preparing the way of the Lord, and making straight his paths?

Look at the blessing already attending the various attempts to propagate the gospel. To some it may appear a "day of small things;" but if God does not despise it, it will increase. Already have we been provoked to jealousy by Hindoos and Hottentots: nor is this all; look at our fleets and armies: did we ever before hear of so many lovely groups of Christian people amongst them? It would seem as if God had begun with these publicans and sinners to shame the rest of the nation.

Finally, If these be not sufficient, look at the state of mind amongst the *enemies* of religion. Do not their hearts fail them, like those of the Canaanites before Joshua and his army? Why do the Brahmans tremble for their gods? and why are practical unbelievers afraid of godliness, whether in or out of the establishment? It is pleasant to observe, while endeavouring to stigmatize it under the name of "Methodism," how despondingly they confess their inability to arrest its progress.* Surely these are tokens for good to the church of Christ.

On the period of the vials being closed, that of the Millennium will commence. "The Lord gave Solomon *rest* round about from all his enemies;" and the Lord will now give rest to his people from theirs. It is probably in allusion to his quiet and pacific reign that that of the Messiah is denominated a *rest*—"His rest shall be glorious," Isa. xi. 10. Then wars and oppressions will cease; then the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold of the image, being broken to pieces, and become like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors, the stone that smote it will have become a great mountain, and shall fill the whole earth; then the judgment having sat upon the little horn, and his dominion being taken away, "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Amen."

ADDED IN 1814.

The above was written in 1810 or 1811, since which time the tide of human affairs has taken another turn. A mighty change has taken place in Europe, in favour of old establishments, and so in favour of popery. We have seen the inquisition, which had been suppressed in Spain, revived; and the pope, whose temporal power had been taken away, restored. But as the foregoing exposition rests not on any hypothesis formed from passing events, so it is not materially affected by them. The direction that things have taken as it relates to the liberation of nations, and their restoration to peace and independence, must needs be grateful to every friend of humanity and

* See Edinburgh Review, No. XXII., p. 241, Art. Methodism.

justice; and though the papal cause may hereby regain some of its former ascendancy, yet this may be but for a short time, and *that it may be destroyed for ever*. These tides in human affairs may be permitted, as by a flux and reflux of the ocean, to wash away those things which it is the purpose of Heaven to destroy. The antichristian power may rise and fall repeatedly before it falls to rise no more. Irrespective of prophecy, it is easy for an observant mind to perceive that, notwithstanding the political advantages which have arisen from recent changes to most of the papal nations, yet they are not at ease. There remain in them the seeds of discontent and of future wars. Look at the state of Spain, in particular.—Popery must be what it always has been, a persecuting enemy of true religion, or nothing. The preponderating powers of Europe, by restoring its authority, and recommending it to exercise a liberal government, suited to the times, have done all perhaps that was in their power towards lengthening out its tranquillity; but it is in vain. **WE WOULD HAVE HEALED BABYLON, they may say, BUT SHE IS NOT HEALED!**

CIRCULAR LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO

THE CHURCHES OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ASSOCIATION.

1782—1815.

1782.

THE EXCELLENCY AND UTILITY OF THE GRACE OF HOPE.

DEAR BRETHREN,

ON this delightful subject, we feel great pleasure in addressing you. We congratulate you, amidst all your sorrows, on your possessing such a *hope*; a hope which has foundations the most solid, and objects the most substantial. God has not put this jewel into your hands to be made light of. He would have you to understand it in order to prize it. His bestowing upon you a spiritual illumination is to this very end. He does not open your eyes to present you with mere spectacles of misery, nor call you by his grace as having nothing to bestow upon you: no, blessed be his name, "the eyes of your understandings are enlightened that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."

To assisting your meditations on this cheering subject, by showing its *excellency* and pointing out its great *utility*, we devote this epistle.

We trust that what we have already communicated to you, on various important subjects, has not been received in vain. We would not wish to trifle with you, brethren, and we trust our letters to you have not been trifled with. Having therefore confidence in your readiness to examine and receive what we communicate, "we are willing to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye are dear unto us!"

HOPE, or an *expectation of future good*,* is of so extensive an influence, that whether true or false, well or ill founded, it is one of the principal springs that keep mankind in motion. It is vigorous, bold, and enterprising.

* Hope, as its objects are *future*, is distinguished from *enjoyment*. Herein the portion of the saints is unlike that of the worldling, and even that of saints in glory. Also from *love*, the objects of which are past and present as well as future, whereas hope is confined to the last. As they are *good* it is opposed to *fear*, which is the dread of evil. As they are both *future* and *good*, and merely so, it is distinct from *faith*. We may be said to believe things past, as that the worlds were made; and things evil, as the wrath to come; but cannot be said to hope in either. As it is an *expectation*, it is distinguished from *desire*. We may be said to desire what it is not possible we should ever enjoy; but we cannot hope unless there appear at least a possibility, and, generally speaking, some probability, of our possessing the object hoped for; and, in proportion as this probability appears to the mind great or small, hope or expectation is strong or weak.

It causes men to encounter dangers, endure hardships, and surmount difficulties innumerable, in order to accomplish the desired end. In religion it is of no less consequence. It is claimed by almost all ranks and parties of men. It makes a considerable part of the religion of those that truly fear God; for though in all true religion there is and must be a love to God and Divine things for their own excellency, yet God, who knows our frame, and draws us with the *cords of a man*, condescends also to excite us with the promise of gracious reward, and to allure us with the prospect of a crown of glory.

We wish you, brethren, seeing God has given you everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, to consider well the GOODNESS OF EXCELLENCY of that Divine gift. On this account it excels every other hope as much as a pearl excels a pebble. A great part of its excellency consists in its being so *well-founded*. Though our hope should aspire to the highest heavens, and could grasp in all the bliss of an eternal world! alas! what would it avail us if ill-founded? The hope that is ill-founded is said to *make ashamed*, and so terminates in disappointment. It is to be feared that many (oh that there may be none of us!) who are now towering high in expectation, will one day be "ashamed and confounded" because they thus had hoped.

The grand FOUNDATION of all good hope is *the Lord Jesus Christ, God's revealed Mediator, embraced by faith*. On this rock the people of God in all ages have built their hope, whatever other foundations sinners have devised. Of old God laid this in Zion. This was the subject of apostolic ministrations; they held forth none other than him "whom God had set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood."

That the mediation of Christ is the primary ground of all good hope will appear evident, if we do but recollect (and O let us never forget!) the hopeless condition in which sin involved us. By our breach of covenant with God, the very idea of future good for us was totally annihilated. Nothing but eternal tribulation and anguish, as the reward of evil-doers, was now to be expected. The image of God being totally effaced in us, his favour towards us was absolutely forfeited. Hence the least idea of hope from any other ground than the mediation of Christ, is not only declarative of opposition to God's way of salvation, but is altogether a wild chimera. By the state of the fallen angels we may learn what ground is left for hope where no mediation is provided; and what must have been our state had we been left in their condition. These, void of all hope whatever, "are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

We are not unacquainted with the many false grounds on which sinners rest their hopes, but we as well know who has said, "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." We doubt not, brethren, but you have perceived the vanity of a multitude of those things which buoy up the hopes of a great part of mankind. Yourselves, it may be, were once the subjects of those delusory dreams whereof we trust ye are now ashamed. It yields us great pain to see such numbers of our fellow sinners standing on such slippery places! The mere mercy of God, to the exclusion of Christ's mediation—not being so bad as some others—common honesty and civility between man and man—descent from pious parents—a place and a name among the godly—suffering much affliction in this life—legal convictions—superior knowledge—superstitious zeal—these are some of the dangerous foundations on which vast numbers of deluded mortals build their eternal ALL! But ye, brethren, have not so learned Christ. Be it your and our resolution, with holy Paul, to "know nothing" in this matter "but Christ and him crucified!"

You will remember, dear brethren, it was necessary that this glorious Mediator should be *revealed* ere he could become a ground of hope. The amazing design of mercy was first laid in the eternal council; hence the blood of Christ is termed the blood of the covenant, through which prisoners in the pit become prisoners of hope: but whatever design of mercy might exist in the mind of God, that could not become a ground of hope till revealed by the word of God. Hence the promise of the woman's Seed afforded the first and only dawn of hope to a lost world. Hence also the word of God is frequently represented in Scripture as that whereon our hope resteth.

Equally necessary is it that the mediation of Christ should be *embraced by faith*. We trust you need not be told, that though this mediation be the sole meritorious ground of our hope, yet a special work of the Spirit of God must take place in us, before we can reasonably put in our claim for eternal bliss. The work of Christ gives to the elect sinner a title to its possession; the work of the Spirit gives a meetness for its enjoyment. If we experience the latter, we may lay claim to a personal interest in the former. These God has joined together, and let no man dare to put them asunder. Christ must be *in* us, ere he can be to us the hope of glory. The hope that maketh not ashamed is wrought by *experience*. The graces of the Spirit, however, become a ground of hope, not through any inherent merit, but in virtue of the promise of God; or rather they are the evidence of our interest in the promise. In numerous passages of holy writ, God has promised eternal life to all such as bear certain characters; namely, to those that are of a broken and contrite spirit, that mourn for sin, believe in Christ, love him in sincerity, deny themselves, take up their cross, follow him, &c. Hence all who through grace are the subjects of these spiritual dispositions enjoy a right, founded on such promises, to hope for eternal bliss; and this is another reason why the word of God is frequently represented in Scripture as that whereon our hope resteth.

It is to be feared that many split upon this rock. We cautioned you against those who professedly build on other foundations than Jesus Christ; but these are not the only self-deceivers. There is a more refined sort, as to their professed principles, who build their hope on something more specious in appearance, but not a whit better in reality. These, brethren, you have more reason to be guarded against, since they are more frequent in your assemblies, and some of them less discernible, though not less dangerous, than the former. These will frequently abound with supercilious treatment towards those who profess to build upon their own works—will abundantly exclaim against legal books and legal preaching, which, by the way, is the name they give not only to those performances wherein men are taught to expect eternal life as the fruit of their own doings, but as well to all those wherein practical godliness is pressed home. These much value themselves for their supposed orthodoxy or soundness in the doctrines of grace; nay, so valiant are they, many of them, for the TRUTH, that they will contend for it even at the tavern or upon the ale-bench! but they seem to have forgotten that part of sound doctrine, that “faith without works is dead, being alone.”* These talk loudly of building their hopes on Christ alone, but forget that he must be, as one says, a Christ believed in, loved, and obeyed, and not merely a Christ talked of. These are frequently heard

* Besides, it would be no great difficulty to prove that these people, with all their boasted soundness, are unbelievers in the very *essentials* of the gospel. That is an essential of the gospel, without which it would not be the gospel. Now what constitutes it gospel is its being *good news*; but whatever faith such people may have in it as a piece of *news*, they have none in the *goodness* of it, which is a most essential thing in it, and without which it would not be the gospel.

boasting how strong their hopes are of their being delivered from slavish fear, of their certainty of going to heaven, die when they may, with many such presumptuous things; but they forget surely what the Judge of all the earth has said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." These, whatever their professions may be, build not upon the Rock of ages, but upon a *concealed part of self*. There is no such great difference between them and professed legalists, against whom they so bitterly inveigh: those think to gain heaven by doing, and these by knowing, which they think to be believing. Their hope is but the hope of the hypocrite, which will in the end prove no better than the spider's web. Nor do they draw their evidences for glory from such things as the Scriptures speak of as characterizing the godly, but from their supposed orthodoxy or soundness in religious principles, with perhaps some texts of Scripture which may have occurred to their minds with a certain impulse, tending mightily to lift them up with joy, but not to fill them with holy mourning, or self-loathing, or with a desire and endeavour to walk humbly with their God. Real religion has no worse enemies than these. By approaching near unto it, and being accounted its votaries, they are capable of doing it much more injury than its professed foes. While, Joab-like, they embrace it with a dissimulating kiss, by their works they stab it as under its fifth rib!

We do not mean to suggest but that the Holy Scriptures are often of great consolation to the godly; nor yet to deny that some passages of it may be more consolatory to the godly than others, and the same passages at one time which are not at another: these are things which we freely acknowledge and happily experience. For the truth or duty contained in any passage of Scripture to be, by the Spirit of God, opened to the mind, and impressed upon the heart, and afford strong consolation to the person, is a part of experience which we can set seal to, as both reasonable and desirable. It is *through patience and comfort of the Scriptures that we have hope*. But when impressions have no tendency to humble, sanctify, and lead the soul to God, we affirm, and are ready to give proof, that they are no better than "lying vanities," though they lie at the bottom of some mighty fabrics. Our having certain passages of Scripture impressed upon our minds is in itself no evidence for glory at all, either to ourselves or others; no, not though those passages should be promises of heaven itself: but if by this we are humbled and sanctified—if a spirit of holy mourning, self-loathing, watchfulness, love to Christ and holiness, as well as joy, be hereby wrought in us, *that* is an evidence for glory.

Many persons are the subjects of Scripture impressions, and, to the great scandal of religion, are *hence* supposed to have God's good work begun in them, when it appears evident by their spirit and conduct that they are utter strangers to real Christianity. Balaam could have produced plenty of such evidence as this. All those things of his speaking are recorded as a part, and an excellent part, of Holy Scripture, and were suggested to him even by God himself. "The Lord," we are told, "put a word in Balaam's mouth." But as none of these things had any tendency to sanctify his heart, they left him but where they found him! Besides, we have no reason to think but that Satan can and does suggest many things in the words of Scripture. We know he did thus to Christ himself; and if to him, why not to us? He has ends to answer in so doing; namely, to deceive poor souls with such airy dreams, to draw them away from resting their hopes on Scriptural grounds, and to substitute these illusory foundations in their room.—On the other hand, whatever be the means, whether hearing the word preached, reading, conversation, prayer, or meditation; and whether, in so meditating,

any part of the word be *suddenly* brought to our mind, and impressed upon our heart, or whether it be more *gradually*—whether we have never thought of the passage before, or whether we have read it a thousand times over—it matters not.* If it tend to produce a spirit of pure love to Christ, lowliness, and holiness, *that* affords us a ground for hope, and a reason for thankfulness. God has plentifully promised salvation to all who are the subjects of these spiritual dispositions.

Should an enemy to your holy religion, after all, require of you a reason for the hope that is in you—should he demand what grounds you have to conclude that the things you hope for have a *real existence*—we trust you would not be at a loss for a reply. There is not one of all those solid arguments which prove the Divinity of the sacred oracles, (which, for brevity's sake, we forbear to enumerate,) but would furnish you with sufficient reason to give an answer substantial in its nature, though in its manner “with meekness and fear.”

The glorious OBJECTS with which your hope is conversant next demand your attention, brethren; as they much, very much, contribute to its excellency and your felicity.—You may be assured they are something *good*. Hope of every kind has to do with nothing but what in the view of the mind appears such; and this hope has to do with nothing but what is really such. That which we hope for is not merely an apparent, but a real good; and not only a good, but a substantial good; and not only a substantial, but a suitable, a great, yea, an everlasting good!

The hope of worldlings terminates on trifles; on things which, when enjoyed, do but cloy, and cannot satisfy.—Let a man in pursuit of happiness knock at the door of every created good, every created good must answer, “It is not in me!” Riches make themselves wings and fly away; honour is empty as the wind; mirth, what is it but madness? Crowns of earthly glory commonly prove crowns of thorns to them that wear them; all are lying vanities, promising what they cannot perform. O brethren, let the resolve of the church made wise by affliction be our resolve: “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him.”

Here we find what the wisest of men well termed *substance*.—Only a taste thereof affords substantial bliss. Oh to enjoy God! To enjoy God in Christ! To enjoy him with the society of the blessed! To enjoy him with soul and body, the latter raised and reunited to the former! To enjoy him to all eternity! To enjoy him, and be changed into the same image! These, brethren, these are the things on which our hope centres; nor is it a matter of small consolation that God himself has pledged his faithfulness for their bestowment on all his faithful followers. However desirable these things might be, we should have little reason to rejoice therein, if he on whose word it rested were either false or fickle; but, blessed be his name, we live “in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began!”

Nor let it seem the less glorious that it is a *future* good.—In the view of infinite wisdom, “it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” It seems good to him to place the blessings he means to bestow upon us at a distance; so at a distance that they must be hoped in, and waited for, ere they are enjoyed. Doubtless, God could have bestowed all his blessings on us as quickly as he did paradise on the converted thief: but he has not seen fit in common so to do. Certainly by his suspending for a time our enjoyment of promised favours, and at length bestowing them, he glorifies his faithfulness in the end, as well as that in the

* See *Help to Zion's Travellers*, a piece published at the request of the Association by our brother Hall, pp. 139–141.

mean time he exercises our faithfulness, patience, and resignation to his will. But this is not all; they are the more welcome when they do come. If the object hoped for prove less in value than we expected, then indeed its having been suspended only sinks it the more in our esteem; but if it surpass all expectation, if it exceed desire itself when it makes its appearance, then its having been so long in coming only makes it the more welcome when come. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick" for a time; "but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life!" Let us not think much at waiting a little while; no, not though during that time exposed to great tribulations; since our dwelling before the throne will by this be rendered the more blissful, and our *weight of glory* by this increased. With what sacred pleasure did the patriarch Jacob resign his life, having *waited* for God's salvation! With what unspeakable joy did good old Simeon embrace the *long-looked-for* blessing! With what raptures of bliss will the Lord again be welcomed on an approaching period, when all who love his appearing will unite, saying, "Lo, this is our God, we have *waited* for him!"

Nay, it seems to be a glory in some sense peculiar to religion *to reserve the best till the last*.—That you may enjoy strong consolation, brethren, in your passage through life, God has placed his favours in a glorious ascending gradation. The inviting language of every one of them is, *Press forward*. The pleasures of the world and sin, if they speak truth, can afford no such encouragement to their admirers: no, Ezekiel's roll is descriptive of their utmost prospects; that roll which had written within and without "lamentations, mourning, and woe." But religion presents a train of rising glories: he that enters it aright will find it like the waters of the sanctuary; first to his ancles, then to his knees, then to his loins, and at last a river to swim in!—The different stages of the church maintain the same idea; the Mosaic dispensation contained greater discoveries than the patriarchal; the gospel contains greater than the Mosaic; latter-day glory will outshine this; and ultimate bliss will exceed them all. "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"

Give us your attention, brethren, while we next attempt to point out the *UTILITY* of this heavenly grace throughout the Christian life.—Truly this is beyond expression. If hope in general is of so much use among men as to stimulate them in all their labours, support them in their sorrows, and extricate them from a thousand labyrinths in life—if by it they brave dangers, encounter hardships, and endure difficulties—if, in short, it be that by which, as a means, even God himself as it were bears up the pillars of the world—then what must be the use of that hope which, as we have already seen, so much surpasses this in excellence! As far as the objects of Christian hope exceed in value, and its grounds in solidity, those of natural hope, so far does the use of one exceed that of the other. Its special use will, however, be best ascertained by taking a view of some of those exercises, cases, and circumstances wherein you are concerned in your passage through life.—Particularly,

You have known its value from the time when you were first *converted* unto God, when in that time of need it presented before you an all-sufficient refuge.—You remember, dear brethren, it may be some of you particularly, "the wormwood and gall" in that great work, which is commonly begun with a painful conviction of sin. You remember when a sense of the nature and demerit of sin, of *your* sin, was such that your souls had almost dwelt in silence! Ah, you remember when the glorious character of God appeared, though excellent, yet terrible, approaching judgment unavoidable, and the Judge at the door! And have you forgotten the "door of hope"

which then was opened to you? Have you forgotten the sound of the great trumpet which invited you to come when you were ready to perish? No, surely. While many, like Cain and Judas, despair of mercy, and so "die in the pit," you have reason to bless God for having enabled you to "turn to the strong hold as prisoners of hope!"

Moreover, as *servants* of God, you have a great work to do.—Though the meritorious part of your salvation has been long since finished, yet there is a salvation for you still to work out. By prayer, by patience, by watchfulness, and holy strife, you have to overcome the world, mortify sin, and run the race set before you. Hope is of excellent use in this great work. It is well denominated a "lively hope." Its tendency is not to lull the soul asleep, but to rouse it to action. We trust, dear brethren, that the hope of which you are partakers will more and more animate your breasts with generous purposes, and prompt your souls to noble pursuits. For this you have the greatest encouragements surely that a God can give! God will employ none in his service without making it their inestimable privilege. They that plough for him shall plough in hope. Mansions of bliss stand ready to receive you, and crowns of unfading glory to reward you; therefore, beloved brethren, "be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Again, You are attended with *indwelling sin*: a "body of sin," which, in the account of every one that loves and longs for purity, is a body of *death*; yea, worse than death itself!—You wish to think spiritually, pray fervently, hear profitably, and, in a word, grow in grace; but this proves a dead weight to all: "the good that ye would, that ye do not!"—You wish to hate and avoid evil, and all its detestable appearances; but you find it in ten thousand forms haunting, surprising, and drawing you aside, so that too often "the evil that ye would not, that ye do!" We doubt not, dear brethren, but that in secret you frequently groan with the apostle, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Now we ask what can afford relief in this case, but a good hope through grace of being freed at the hour of death? This proves a helmet in your spiritual warfare. This will inspire you with courage in every conflict: nothing invigorates the soldier like the hope of conquering at last. With this you will tread down strength, and, in prospect of approaching victory, sing with the apostle, "*I thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Again, You are subject to many *fears* and *despondings* of mind ere you reach your desired haven. Too often, through an unwatchful, unholy conduct, the Spirit of God is grieved. His presence once withdrawn, darkness will overspread the mind, and evidences for glory seem blotted out. Satan is often permitted at such seasons to stand as at your right hand, accusing you of your filthy garments; suggesting that such a one cannot be "a brand plucked out of the burning." Under these exercises the mind is apt to be depressed beyond measure; the soul, afraid of acting presumptuously, in laying hold of consolation, is ready, strangely ready, to sink beneath the waves of dark despair. If any offer consolation, like Rachel on the loss of her children, he "refuseth to be comforted." The spirit, at some such seasons, is so dejected, it is as if all must be given up. The painful language of the heart is, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and" he whom I once thought "my God hath forgotten me!"—"My hope is dried up, and I am cut off for my part!" Ah, farewell hope! farewell heaven! farewell Christ!—No,—no,—nor Christ, nor heaven, nor hope will suffer this! Let deep call to deep, let waves, let billows overflow, deliverance shall arise, hope will not fail, but will afford relief. It will prove "an anchor to your soul, sure and steadfast."

Yes, it will cheer your heart, and enable you to sing, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God!" Again,

You are subject to various *trying providences* in your passage through life.—Enjoyments in this life are very precarious. While we are feathering our nests, and promising ourselves that we shall die therein unmolested, how soon are we disappointed! yea, how many have been nearly stripped of their earthly all! These, being deprived of almost every comfort of this life, have then tasted the sweetness of hope in another. These look to their Maker, and their eyes have respect to the HOLY ONE of Israel for the reparation of their losses. Thus sang the church in affliction, stripped, and bound in Babel's yoke, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him."

Some of you are *poor* in this world, and are subject to numerous hardships.—*You* are often entangled in mazes of difficulty; you have a thousand fears that you shall never get honourably through life. Especially at times, God seems to have set you in "dark places;" your hopes confounded, your fears come upon you, and your prospects at an end! Yes, say you, "Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone. He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out; he hath made my chain heavy!" Poor people, we feel for you! wherewith shall we comfort you? Shall we recommend and exercise benevolence towards you in our respective churches? Shall we exhort you "to trust in the Lord, and do good;" and assure you, in God's name, that "so shall ye dwell in the land, and verily ye shall be fed?" Or shall we hold up before you a kingdom to which ye are heirs; a period when "every tear shall be wiped away?" O brethren, the hope of the gospel furnishes you with these strong consolations! Again.

You are *members of Christian society*; and though by your letters it appears you enjoy peace in general, yet you are not unacquainted with many things of a grieving tendency. In this state of imperfection offences will come. Unhappy feuds will sometimes arise, and grievous scandals will take place. When church members become self-sufficient, and cease to be afraid of entering into temptation—when carnal ease is substituted in the room of gospel peace—when love grows cold, and complaisance takes its place—when we are so watchful over one another as to forget ourselves—when godly jealousy is exchanged for an uncharitable temper, "more cruel than the grave"—when, instead of "submitting to one another in the fear of God," each one becomes headstrong and resolved to have his own way—when superior gifts are envied, and inferior ones despised—when zeal for the truth degenerates into vain jangling—when we are very apt to take an offence, but not to forgive one—when talebearers are encouraged, and a spirit of animosity cherished—then, brethren, then expect "confusion, and every evil work." We are happy that we can say (and blessed be God for it) that such a spirit is far from generally prevailing among you; yet, so far as it does prevail, (which the all-seeing God knows is too far,) it dishonours the great Head of the church, and wounds every upright member! However, this should be far from discouraging religious society *itself*; not to mention that these are things that must always be expected, more or less, in this state of trial, and that they always existed even in the purest ages; we can affirm, and ye are our witnesses, that it has pleasures which abundantly outweigh all these unhappinesses. Nor is this all: hope holds up a period, even within the limits of time, a heaven compared with the present state of things, when "*holiness*

to the Lord shall be written as upon the bells of the horses, and Zion shall become a quiet habitation!" But this, say you, is a period that *we* have but little hope of living to see. Perhaps so: still you live in prospect of a better. Blessed society, where purity and amity for ever reign! Yes, brethren, immediately on entering members of the church triumphant, you will "enter into peace," and *each one* of you "walk" for ever "in his uprightness!" Moreover,

You are members of *civil society*.—You wish well to your country, and must have been the subjects of grief to see what you have of late years seen—its glory eclipsed by unhappy wars and dissensions; to see it conspired against by surrounding nations and divided by domestic feuds, forsaken by its friends and derided by its enemies. It may be, at times, fear has been ready to seize you, and tempted you to ask, What will be the end of these things? The sounds of "Nineveh is fallen," "Babylon is fallen," yea, of "*Judah* is fallen," has been long since heard in the world; and what, say you, are we better than they? Under these exercises, brethren, we trust you have found, and will yet find, hope of excellent use to you. Great have been the deliverances your God has wrought in former ages, which afford a ground of hope to us. He can defend our coasts, and still preserve our country; yea, he can, and blessed be his name for any encouragement afforded us. Let us then hope and pray: "It may be the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of his people." Or should he refuse that, should a consumption be decreed to overflow, in righteousness, still he can preserve his faithful followers as he did *Baruch*, and those who "sighed and cried" in the day of Jerusalem's ruin. Nay, suppose him to refuse that; suppose that not only your country must sink, but you must sink with it, and perish in the general wreck! Still all is not lost. Did your portion lie in this world, then, indeed, like the owner of a vessel whose all is on board, you might dread its sinking; but seeing your inheritance is far beyond the reach of these vicissitudes, there is reason for you to mingle joy with trembling. Yes, brethren, we trust there is reason for you to unite with holy David, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble—therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea!"

Once more, You and we all, by some means, must shortly *die*.—Be it so that no untimely end befall us, the hour cometh when we must bid farewell to every creature comfort; when every created union must be dissolved, and we appear before the judgment-seat of Christ! Oh, then to be without hope! better had we never been born! Let the reluctance and horror of those who are *driven* away in their wickedness teach us the value of a well-grounded hope in that awful hour. Verily, words cannot describe it, nor thoughts conceive it! Here is a rock when all beside sinks under us! With this, brethren, like the priests that bore the ark of God, your feet will stand firm amidst all the swellings of Jordan! With this you can behold the ghastly spectre, yea, the horrors of the grave itself, with a cheerful countenance, and sing with holy Job, "Although after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself; mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me!"

Upon the whole, permit us to advise and exhort you, dear brethren, to a few things which become persons who have expectations like yours.—While you guard against presumption, beware of *despair*. The latter, as well as the former, is dangerous to men, and offensive to God. Despair is the death of action. To despair of mercy, and so never apply for it, is to act like the wicked and slothful servant, than which nothing tends more to cast reproach on the character of God. Even a *man* of honour cannot bear to be dis-

trusted. While fear keeps you from presumption, let hope preserve you from despair. As condemned criminals in yourselves considered, cast yourselves on him for mercy; as servants, serve him cheerfully and rely on his bounty; and as suffering the loss of all things for him, trust him, like Moses, to make up your losses. Remember, "the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."

Observe, also, he that has this hope must *purify himself as Christ is pure*.—He must take him for his example, and aim at no less than a complete conformity to his temper and spirit. That which true hope centres in is not only to see him as he is, but to be "like him." Be constant, then, dear brethren, in holy exercises. We trust your hope is not of that kind which, in proportion as it increases, slackens the hand of diligence. Neglect neither public nor private duties; it is at the peril of your souls' welfare if you do. Shame may keep you to the one, but rather let the love of Christ constrain you to both. Think nothing too great to perform, too much to lose, or too hard to endure, that you may obtain so blessed a hope. O brethren, be it our daily concern and earnest endeavour to grow in every grace, to excel in every virtue. Remember, he whose eyes are flames of fire surveys our heart and life: how transporting the thought, could we conceive him addressing each of us as he did the Thyatiran church, "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first!"

Finally, Use all means to cultivate this heavenly grace.—Remember sin is its worst enemy; beware of that. The Holy Spirit is its best friend; see that you grieve not him. Tribulations themselves, though they may seem to destroy it, in the end cherish it. They "work patience, and patience experience, and experience hope;" therefore be reconciled to them. Read the Holy Scriptures; pray in secret as well as openly; though sojourners on earth, let your conversation be in heaven; learn to set light by this world; court not its smiles, nor fear its frowns; live in daily expectation of dying, and die daily in humble expectation of living for evermore; realize and anticipate those enjoyments and employments to which ye are hastening: in proportion to this, your desires will be strong and your hopes lively. Remember, hope is one of those graces which must do its all within the limits of time; "be sober," therefore, "and hope to the end;" aim, like Enoch, to "walk with God" till God shall take you; "let your loins be girt, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find so doing! Verily, I say unto you," said this blessed Lord of yours, (O hearken, and be astonished,) "Verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them!"

Dearly beloved brethren, farewell! "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work!"

1785

CAUSES OF DECLENSION IN RELIGION, AND MEANS OF REVIVAL.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,

THROUGH the good hand of our God upon us we met together according to appointment, and enjoyed the pleasure of an agreeable interview with several of our dear friends and brethren in the Lord. We trust also that our God was with us in the different stages of the opportunity. The letters from the several churches, which were attended to the first evening of our meeting together, afforded us matter for pain and pleasure. Two of the associate churches continue destitute of the stated means of grace, others are tried with things of an uncomfortable nature, and most complain of the want of a spirit of fervour and constancy in the ways of God. Yet, on the other hand, we met with some things which afforded us pleasure. Many of our congregations are well attended; a spirit of desire after the word is, we think, upon the increase; nor are our labours, we hope, altogether in vain, as the work of the Lord, in a way of conversion, appears to be carrying on, though not in instances very remarkable.

'Tis true we have reason to bewail our own and others' declensions, yet we are not, upon the whole, discouraged. It affords us no little satisfaction to hear in what manner the *monthly prayer meetings* which were proposed in our letter of last year have been carried on, and how God has been evidently present in those meetings, stirring up the hearts of his people to wrestle hard with him for the revival of his blessed cause. Though as to the number of members there is no increase this year, but something of the contrary; yet a spirit of prayer in some measure being poured out more than balances in our account for this defect. We cannot but hope, wherever we see a spirit of earnest prayer generally and perseveringly prevail, that God has some good in reserve, which in his own time he will graciously bestow.

But while we rejoice to see such a spirit of united prayer, we must not stop here, brethren, lest in so doing we stop short. If we would hope for the blessing of God upon us, there must be added to this *a spirit of earnest inquiry into the causes of our declensions, and a hearty desire and endeavour for their removal*. When Israel could not go forward, but were smitten by the men of Ai, Joshua and the elders of the people prostrated themselves before the Lord. In this they did well; but this was not sufficient—"Get thee up," said the Lord to his servant—"wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned—Up, sanctify the people—and search for the accursed thing!"—This, it is apprehended, is the case with us, as well as it was with Israel; and this must be our employment as well as theirs. With a view to assist you, brethren, and ourselves with you, in this very necessary inquiry, we appropriate the present letter to the pointing out of some of those evils which we apprehend to be causes of that declension of which so many complain, and the means of their removal.

The *first* thing that we shall request you to make inquiry about is, whether there is not a *great degree of contentedness with a mere superficial acquaintance with the gospel, without entering into its spirit and end*; and whether *this be not one great cause of the declension complained of*.—In the apostles' time, and in all times, *grace and peace* have ever been multiplied by *the knowledge of God*; and, in proportion as this has been neglected, those have always declined. If we are sanctified *by the word of truth*, then, as this

word is received or disrelished, the work of sanctification must be supposed to rise or fall. We may give a sort of idle assent to the truths of God, which amounts to little more than taking it for granted that they are true, and thinking no more about them, unless somebody opposes us; but this will not influence the heart and life, and yet it seems to be nearly the whole of what many attain to, or seek after.

We maintain the doctrine of one infinitely glorious God; but do we realize the amiableness of his character? If we did, we could not avoid loving him with our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.—We hold the doctrine of the universal depravity of mankind; but do we enter into its evil nature and awful tendency? If we did the *one*, how much lower should we lie before God, and how much more should we be filled with a self-loathing spirit! If the *other*, how should we feel for our fellow sinners! how earnest should we be to use all means, and have all means used, if it might please God thereby to pluck them as brands out of the burning!—We hold the doctrine of a trinity of Persons in the Godhead; but do we cordially enter into the glorious economy of redemption, wherein the conduct of the sacred Three is most gloriously displayed? Surely if we did, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost would be with us more than it is.—We avow the doctrines of free, sovereign, and efficacious grace; but do we generally *feel* the grace therein discovered? If we did, how low should we lie! how grateful should we be! We should seldom think of their sovereign and discriminating nature, without considering how justly God might have left us all to have had our own will, and followed our own ways; to have continued to increase our malady, and despise the only remedy! Did we properly enter into these subjects, we could not think of a *great* Saviour, and a *great* salvation, without loathing ourselves for being such *great* sinners; nor of what God had done for and given to us, without longing to give him our little all, and feeling an habitual desire to do something for him.—If we realized our redemption by the blood of Christ, it would be natural for us to consider ourselves as bought with a price, and therefore not our own; “a *price*, all price beyond!” O, could we enter into this, we should readily discern the force and propriety of our body and spirit being his; *his* indeed! dearly bought, and justly due!—Finally, we all profess to believe the vanity of this life and its enjoyments, and the infinitely superior value of that above; but do we indeed enter into these things? If we did, surely we should have more of heavenly-mindedness, and less of criminal attachment to the world.

It is owing in a great degree to this contentment with a superficial knowledge of things, without entering into the spirit of them, that we so often hear the truths of the gospel spoken of with a tone of disgust, calling them “*dry doctrines!*” Whereas gospel truths, if preached in their native simplicity, and received with understanding and cordiality, are the grand source of all well-grounded consolation. We know of no consolation worth receiving but what arises from the influence of truth upon the mind. Christ’s words are *spirit* and *life* to them who hunger and thirst after them, or have a heart to live upon them; and could we but more thoroughly enter into this way of living, we should find the doctrines of the gospel, instead of being *dry*, to be what they were in the days of Moses, who declared, “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass,” Deut. xxxii. 2. O brethren, may it be our and your concern not to float upon the surface of Christianity, but to enter into the spirit of it! “For this cause” an apostle bowed his knees “to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” that we might “comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of

things; and for this cause we also wish to bow our knees, knowing that it is by this, if at all, that we are "filled all the fulness of God," Eph. iii. 14-19.

Another thing which we apprehend to be a great cause of declension is, *a contentedness with present attainments, without aspiring after eminence in grace and holiness.*—If we may judge of people's thoughts and aims by the general tenor of their conduct, there seems to be much of a contentment with about so much religion as is thought necessary to constitute them good men, and that will just suffice to carry them to heaven; without aiming by a course of more than ordinary services to glorify God in their day and generation. We profess to do what we do with a view to glorify God, and not to be saved by it; but is it so indeed? Do these things look like it? How is it, too, that the positive institutions of Christ are treated with so little regard? Whence is it that we hear such language as this so often as we do—"Such a duty, and such an ordinance, is not essential to salvation—we may never be baptized in water, or become church members, and yet go to heaven as well as they that are?"

It is to be feared the old puritanical way of devoting ourselves wholly to be the Lord's, resigning up our bodies, souls, gifts, time, property, with all we have and are to serve him, and frequently renewing these covenants before him, is now awfully neglected. This was to make a *business* of religion, a *life's work*, and not merely an accidental affair, occurring but now and then, and what must be attended to only when we can spare time from other engagements. Few seem to aim, pray, and strive after *eminent* love to God and one another. Many appear to be contented if they can but remember the time when they had such love in exercise, and then, tacking to it the notion of perseverance without the *thing*, they go on and on, satisfied, it seems, if they do but make shift just to get to heaven at last, without much caring how. If we were in a proper spirit, the question with us would not so much be, What *must* I do for God? as, What *can* I do for God? A servant that heartily loves his master counts it a *privilege* to be employed by him, yea, an *honour* to be intrusted with any of his concerns.

If it is inquired, What then is to be done? wherein in particular can we glorify God more than we have done? We answer by asking, Is there no room for amendment? Have we been sufficiently earnest and constant in private prayer? Are there none of us that have opportunities to set apart particular times to pray for the effusion of the Holy Spirit? Can we do no more than we have done in instructing our families? Are there none of our dependants, workmen, or neighbours that we might speak to, at least so far as to ask them to go and hear the gospel? Can we rectify nothing in our tempers and behaviour in the world, so as better to recommend religion? Cannot we watch more? Cannot we save a little more of our substance to give to the poor? In a word, is there no room or possibility left for our being more meek, loving, and resembling the blessed Jesus than we have been?

To glorify God, and recommend by our example the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus, are the chief ends for which it is worth while to live; but do we sufficiently pursue these ends? Even these chief ends of our existence, are they in any good degree so much as kept in view? Ah, what have we done for God in the towns, villages, and families where we reside? Christians are said to be the *light* of the world, and the *salt* of the earth—do we answer these characters? Is the world enlightened by us? Does a savour of Christ accompany our spirit and conversation? Our business, as Christians, is practically to be *holding forth the word of life*. Have we, by our *earnestness*, sufficiently held forth its *importance*? or by our *chaste* conversation, coupled with fear, its *holy* tendency? Have we all along, by a

becoming *firmness* of spirit, made it evident that religion is no *low, mean, or dastardly* business? Have we by a *cheerful complacency* in God's service, gospel, and providence sufficiently held forth the *excellency* of his government and the *happy* tendency of his holy religion?—Doubtless, the most holy and upright Christians in these matters will find great cause for reflection, and room for amendment; but are there not many who scarcely ever think about them, or, if they do, it only amounts to this, to *sigh, and go backward*, resting satisfied with a few lifeless *complaints*, without any real and abiding efforts to have things otherwise?

Another cause of declension, we apprehend, is *making the religion of others our standard, instead of the word of God*.—The word of God is the only safe rule we have to go by, either in judging what is real religion, or what exertions and services for God are incumbent upon us. As it is unsafe to conclude ourselves real Christians because we may have such feelings as we have heard spoken of by some whom we account good men, so it is unjust to conclude that we have religion *enough* because we may suppose ourselves to be equal to the generality of those that now bear that character. What if they be good men? they are not our standard—and what if their conversation in general be such as gives them a reputation in the religious world? Christ did not say, Learn of *them*, but, Learn of *me*. Or if in a measure we are allowed to follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises, still it is with this restriction, as far as they are *followers of Christ*.

Alas, how much is the professing part of mankind governed by ill example! If the question turns upon religious diligence, as, How often shall I attend at the house of God—once or twice on the Lord's day? or how frequently shall I give my company at church meetings, opportunities for prayer, and such like? is not the answer commonly governed by what others do in these cases, rather than by what is right in itself?—So, if it turns on *liberality*, the question is not, What am I able to spare in this case, consistent with all other obligations? but, What does Mr. *such a one* give? I shall do the same as he does.—Something of this kind may not be wrong, as a degree of proportion among friends is desirable; but if carried to too great lengths, we must beware lest our attention to precedent should so far exclude principle in the affair as to render even what we do unacceptable in the sight of God.—So if the question turns on *any particular piece of conduct*, whether it be defensible or not, instead of searching the Bible, and praying to be led in the narrow way of truth and righteousness, how common is it to hear such language as this—Such and such good men do so; surely, therefore, there can be no great harm in it!—In short, great numbers appear to be quite satisfied if they are but about as strict and as holy as other people with whom they are connected.

Many *ill effects* appear evidently to arise from this quarter. Hence it is that, for the want of bringing our religion and religious life to the test of God's holy word, we are in general so wretchedly *deficient in a sense of our vast and constant defects*, have *no spirit to press forward*, but go on and on, *without repentance* for them, or so much as *a thought of doing otherwise*.—Hence also there is so much *vanity* and *spiritual pride* among us. While we content ourselves with barely keeping pace with one another, we may all become wretched idlers, and loose walkers; and yet, as one is about as good as another, each may think highly of himself; whereas, bring him and his companions with him to the glass of God's holy word, and if they have any sensibility left, they must see their odious picture, abhor themselves, and feel their former conduct as but too much resembling that of a company of evil conspirators who keep each other in countenance.—Finally, to this it

may be ascribed in part that so many are constantly waxing *worse* and *worse*, more and more loose and careless in their spirit and conduct.—For those who are contented not to do better than other people, generally allow themselves to do a little worse. An imitator is scarcely ever known to equal an original in the good, but generally exceeds him in the bad; not only in imitating his feelings, but adding others to their number. If we would resemble any great and good man, we must do as he does, and that is, keep our eye upon the mark, and follow Christ as our model. It is by this means that he has attained to be what he is. Here we shall be in no danger of learning any thing amiss; and truly we have failings enow of our own, in not conforming to the model, without deriving any more from the imperfections of the model itself.

Once more,—*The want of considering THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR OWN GOOD AND EVIL CONDUCT is, we apprehend, another great cause of declension in many people.*—It is common for people on many occasions to think within themselves in some such manner as this—“What signify *my* faults, or *my* efforts? They can weigh but little for or against the public good. What will *my* prayers avail? and what great loss will be sustained by an individual occasionally omitting the duty of prayer, or attendance on a church meeting, or it may be the public worship and ordinances of God? And what consequences will follow if one be a little now and then off one’s watch—nobody is perfect,” &c. &c. This, and a great deal more such horrid atheism, it is to be feared, if a thorough search were made, would be found to lie at the bottom of our common departures from God.

If, when an army goes forth to engage the enemy, every soldier were to reason with himself thus—Of what great consequence will *my* services be? it is but little execution that I can do; it will make but very little difference, therefore, if I desert or stand neuter—there are enow to fight without me,—what would be the consequence? Would such reasoning be admitted? Was it admitted in the case of the *Reubenites*, who cowardly abode by their sheep-folds while their brethren jeopardized their lives upon the high places in the field? Was not *Meroz* cursed with a bitter curse because its inhabitants came not forth to the help of the Lord in the day of the mighty? Judg. v. 15, 16, 23. If an army would hope to obtain the victory, every man should act as if the whole issue of the battle depended upon *his* conduct: so, if ever things go well in a religious view, it will be when every one is concerned to act as if he were the only one that remained on God’s side.

We may think the *efforts* of an individual to be trifling; but, dear brethren, let not this atheistical spirit prevail over us. It is the same spawn with that cast forth in the days of Job, when they asked concerning the Almighty, “What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?” At this rate Abraham might have forborne interceding for Sodom, and Daniel for his brethren of the captivity. James also must be mistaken in saying that the prayer of a single, individual righteous man availeth much. Ah, brethren, this spirit is not from above, but cometh of an evil heart of unbelief departing from the living God! Have done with that bastard humility, that teaches you such a sort of thinking low of your own prayers and exertions for God as to make you decline them, or at least to be slack and indifferent in them! Great things frequently rise from small beginnings. Some of the greatest good that has ever been done in the world has been set a going by the efforts of an individual.—Witness the Christianizing of a great part of the heathen world by the labours of a *Paul*, and the glorious reformation from popery began by the struggles of a *Luther*.

It is impossible to tell what good may result from one earnest wrestling with God, from one hearty exertion in his cause or from one instance of a

meek and lowly spirit, overcoming evil with good. Though there is nothing in our doings from which we could look for such great things, yet God is pleased frequently to crown our poor services with infinite reward. Such conduct may be, and often has been, the means of the conversion and eternal salvation of souls; and who that has any Christianity in him would not reckon this reward enough? A realizing sense of these things would stir us all up; ministers to preach the gospel to every creature, private Christians, situated in this or that dark town or village, to use all means to have it preached, and both to recommend it to all around by a meek and unblemished conversation.

Again, We may think the *faults* of an individual to be trifling, but they are not so. For the crime of *Achan* the army of Israel suffered a defeat, and the whole camp could not go forward. Let us tremble at the thought of being a dead weight to the society of which we are members! Besides, the awful tendency of such conduct is seen in its *contagious* influence. If people continue to be governed by example, as they certainly will in a great degree, then there is no knowing what the consequences will be, nor where they will end. A single defect or slip, of which we may think but little at the time, may be copied by our children, servants, neighbours, or friends, over and over again; yea, it may be transmitted to posterity, and pleaded as a precedent for evil when we are no more! Thus it may kindle a fire which, if we ourselves are saved from it, may nevertheless burn to the lowest hell, and aggravate the everlasting misery of many around us, who are "flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone!"

These, brethren, we apprehend, are some of the causes, among many others, which have produced those declensions which you and we lament. But what do we say? Do we indeed *lament* them? If we do, it will be natural for us to inquire, *What shall we do? What means can be used towards their removal, and a happy revival?* If this be now indeed the object of our inquiry, we cannot do better than to attend to the advice of the great Head of the church to a backsliding people—"Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works."—"Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die."—"Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent!" Rev. ii. 5; iii. 2, 3. Particularly,

First, Let us *recollect the best periods of the Christian church, and compare them with the present; and the best parts of our own life, if we know when they were, and compare them with what we now are.*—A recollection of the disinterestedness zeal and godly simplicity of the primitive Christians, and their successors in after-ages, millions of whom, in Christ's cause, loved not their lives unto death, would surely make us loathe ourselves for our detestable lukewarmness! As *Protestants*, let us think of the fervent zeal and holy piety of our Reformers—think what objects they grasped, what difficulties they encountered, and what ends they obtained! As *Protestant Dissenters*, let us reflect on the spirit and conduct of our puritan and non-conforming ancestors. Think how they served God at the expense of all that was dear to them in this world, and laid the foundation of our churches in woods, and dens, and caves of the earth! Say, too, was their love to God more than need be? Is the importance of things abated since their death? Might not they have pleaded the danger and cruelty of the times in excuse for a non-appearance for God, with much more seeming plausibility than we can excuse our spirit of hateful indifference? O let us remember whence we are fallen, and repent!

As to *our own lives*, if we are real Christians, probably we can remember times wherein the great concerns of salvation seemed to eclipse all other

objects. We covenanted with God—we resigned over all to him—we loved to be his, wholly his, rather than our own—we were willing to do any thing, or become any thing, that should glorify his name. And is it so now? No! but why not? what iniquity have we found in him, that we are gone away backward? “O my people, saith the Lord, what have I done unto thee? wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me!” Have I been a hard master, or a churlish father, or a faithless friend? Have I not been patient enough with you, or generous enough towards you? Could I have done any thing more for you that I have not done? Was the covenant you made with me a hard bargain? Was it hard on your side for me to be made sin, who knew no sin, that you might be made the righteousness of God in me? Were the rewards of my service such as you could not live upon? Is it better with you now than then?—O Christian reader! pause awhile; lay aside the paper, and retire before God! reflect, and pour out thy soul before him.—Say unto him, “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face!” Thus, thus, remember whence thou art fallen, and repent!

But do not stop here—think it not sufficient that we lament and mourn over our departures from God; we must return to him with full purpose of heart—“Strengthen the things that remain which are ready to die.” Cherish a greater love to the truths of God—pay an invariable regard to the discipline of his house—cultivate love to one another—frequently mingle souls by frequently assembling yourselves together—encourage a meek, humble, and savoury spirit, rather than a curious one. These are some of the things among us that are “ready to die!” To this it is added,

“*Do thy first works.*”—Fill up your places in God’s worship with that earnestness and constancy as when you were first seeking after the salvation of your souls—flee from those things which conscience, in its most tender and best informed state, durst not meddle with, though since perhaps they may have become trifling in your eyes—walk in your family, in the world, and in the church, with God always before you—live in love, meekness, and forbearance with one another—whatever your hands find you to do, “do it with all your might;” seeking to promote, by all means, the present and eternal welfare of all around you.

Finally, brethren, let us not forget to intermingle *prayer* with all we do. Our need of God’s Holy Spirit to enable us to do any thing, and every thing, truly good, should excite us to this. Without his blessing all means are without efficacy, and every effort for revival will be in vain. Constantly and earnestly, therefore, let us approach his throne. Take all occasions especially for *closet prayer*; here, if any where, we shall get fresh strength, and maintain a life of communion with God. Our Lord Jesus used frequently to retire into a mountain alone for prayer: he, therefore, that is a *follower* of Christ, must follow him in this important duty.

Dearly beloved brethren, farewell! “Unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy—to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

1795

WHY CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT DAY POSSESS LESS JOY THAN THE PRIMITIVE DISCIPLES.

DEAR BRETHREN,

WHILE the judgments of God are abroad in the earth, and multitudes are trembling for the fate of nations, and dreading lest famine, or war, or pestilence, which have desolated other countries, should receive a commission to lay waste our own, we have reason to bless God that he has manifested his care of his churches, by continuing the gospel among us, and granting it to be attended with some increasing success. The wall of Jerusalem is built up even in troublous times; and we were not only permitted to assemble in peace, but received tidings from most of the churches of a peculiarly pleasing nature.

In our letter of last year we addressed you on the nature and grounds of *joy in God*. In pursuance of the resolution of the last association, we shall in this attempt an answer to the following inquiry: WHY IS IT THAT CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT DAY COME SO FAR SHORT OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS IN THE POSSESSION OF JOY?

That the thing itself is a fact can admit but little doubt. It is true, the joy of the primitive Christians was not always the same: previous to the resurrection and ascension of Christ they appeared to possess it in a far less degree than afterwards; and in their brightest days they, no doubt, as well as we, occasionally experienced intervening clouds. The account, nevertheless, which is given of them, intimates that a vein of sacred enjoyment ran through their lives. No sooner had they beheld the Lord Jesus taken up into heaven than they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. And after the day of Pentecost, and the addition of three thousand souls by the preaching of Peter, they are described as "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Persecution itself did not destroy their happiness, but helped, on some considerations, to increase it. Having been summoned before the Jewish council for preaching Christ, they "departed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name's sake." Covered with stripes, thrust into an inner prison, and with their feet made fast in the stocks, "at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God!" Nor was this happy frame of mind confined to the apostles, or to the first few years after the introduction of Christianity: Peter could say of the generality of Christians at the time when he wrote his First Epistle, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet, believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Such accounts of the primitive disciples afford an affecting view of the great disparity between them and the generality of modern Christians. The following particulars, amongst others, must needs strike an attentive observer:—First, They rejoiced in all their labours, complying with the commands of Christ rather as an honour and a privilege than as mere matter of duty. The prompt and cheerful manner in which they attended to Divine institutions exhibits a lovely picture of genuine Christianity. "They that gladly received the word were baptized.—And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." There is not a single instance in all the New Testament of an avowed Christian living in the neglect of the ordinances of Christ. Such

an idea seems never to have entered into their minds; but it is unnecessary to say that with us it is a common case.—Secondly, They *rejoiced*, as we have seen, *in tribulation*, considering the reproaches of the world as an honour, and counting it all joy when they fell into divers temptations: but the highest exercises of grace that are common amongst us fall short in this particular; instead of rejoicing *in tribulation*, we are ready to account it pretty much if we rejoice *notwithstanding* it.—Thirdly, They experienced an habitual consciousness of their being the subjects of gracious dispositions, and consequently enjoyed a settled persuasion of their interest in Christ. In all the New Testament we have scarcely an instance of a Christian being at a loss to perceive the evidence of his Christianity. What are called doubts and fears amongst us, and which make up so large a proportion of our religious experiences, seem to have occupied scarcely any place amongst them. This fact, if there were no other, calls for serious inquiry into the cause or causes of it. The *language* that we are in the habit of using, when speaking of our love, or faith, or obedience, betrays a sad defect in the exercise of these heavenly graces. Instead of being able to say, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee”—“I have believed, and therefore have I spoken”—“God, whom I serve in the gospel,”—and the like, we are ready to be startled at such professions, and feel ourselves under a kind of necessity to soften the language into a wish, a willingness, or a desire. I *desire* to love, I *would* believe, I *wish* to be obedient, are expressions which frequently occur in our prayers and hymns; but wishing to love, and desiring to obey, when substituted in the place of love and obedience themselves, are inadmissible. Such language is unknown in the Scriptures, unless it be found in the character of the slothful, whose *desire* is said to *kill him*; and indicates, to say the least, but a small degree of real religion.

To account for this disparity is of importance, as by a knowledge of the causes of a malady we may be directed to the proper means of a cure. Peculiar dejection in *individuals* may often be accounted for from the peculiarity of their habits, constitution, circumstances, opportunities, and connexions; but when it affects a body or generation of men, it must be traced to other causes. Why should not we go on our way rejoicing in the same manner, and to the same degree, as the primitive Christians? We have the same gospel, the same promises, and the same hopes. The *joy and peace* which they experienced was *in believing*: the great, interesting, and transporting truths of the gospel were the source whence they derived their bliss. The Lord Messiah was come according to promise, and by laying down his life had delivered all who should believe in him from the wrath to come.—Through his death also they were freed from the spirit of bondage attendant on the former dispensation, and received the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cried, Abba, Father.—The thunders of Sinai gave place to the blessings of Zion, the city of the living God; to the holy society of which, as to a kind of heaven upon earth, they were introduced.—Commissioned to publish these glad tidings to every creature, and persuaded that the cause in which they had engaged would sooner or later universally prevail, they laboured with courage and unwearied assiduity, and the work of the Lord prospered in their hands.—Finally, in hope of eternal life, the joy set before them, like their Lord and Master, they endured the cross, despised the shame, and went and sat down with him on his throne, as he had overcome, and sat down with his Father on his throne.

Now which of these sources of joy has been exhausted? Are not Christ and the gospel, and its promises, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? Is not God as willing now that the heirs of promise should have strong con-

solation as he was formerly? Are not the great blessings of eternal life as real and as interesting in the present age as in any that have gone before? and being promised to the smallest degree of real grace, even to the giving of a cup of cold water to a disciple of Jesus because he belongs to him, can it, in ordinary cases, be a difficult matter for a decided friend of Christ to obtain a clear satisfaction of his interest in them? Wherefore is it then, if the Son hath made us free, that we are not, in the most extensive meaning of the term, *free indeed*?

Some would probably attribute the whole to *Divine sovereignty*, alleging that the Holy Spirit divideth to every age and generation, as well as to every man, severally as he will. It is allowed that the Holy Spirit, in all his gifts and operations, acts in a way of sovereignty, since we have no claim upon him for any thing which he bestows; but it does not belong to the idea of sovereignty that there be no reason for it, or wisdom in it. The Holy Spirit divideth to every age and every man severally as he will, but he always willeth what is wise and good, or what is best upon the whole. The sovereignty of creatures may degenerate into caprice; but this cannot be supposed of God. Now it belongs to the wisdom of God to bestow his favours in such a way as to encourage righteousness, and stamp an honour upon the means of his own appointment; hence it is that the joys of salvation, though bestowed in a way of sovereignty, are generally connected with a close walk with God, and communicated through means adapted to the end.

It has been thought by others that the difference betwixt us and the primitive Christians, in these things, may be accounted for, at least in some degree, by a difference of *circumstances*. Life and immortality were *brought to light*, as the Scriptures express it, by the gospel. The wonderful transition therefore which they experienced, some of them from the darkness of Judaism, and others from the still grosser darkness of paganism, together with the great success of their labours, must have forcibly impressed their minds with both surprise and joy. There is some truth, no doubt, in this observation; but it ought to be considered, on the other hand, that our circumstances are in some respects more favourable to joy than theirs; sufficiently so perhaps to balance, if not overbalance, those in which theirs were superior to ours. Let the following things be considered in connexion with each other: First, Glorious things are spoken in prophecy of what shall be done for the church in the last periods of time. All the light and glory that have ever yet appeared will be eclipsed by what is to come. One peculiar characteristic of the kingdom of Christ is, that it is *progressive*. God is saying to his church under every new dispensation, or period of her existence, "Remember not the former things, neither consider the things of old: behold, I do a new thing in the earth."—As if he should say, You may forget the past, and yet have enough to fill you with joyful admiration. The Jewish dispensation contained a greater display of God than had ever been made before; yet, compared with the dawn of gospel glory, it was but as the moon to the sun; and glorious as this was, with regard to all that had gone before, it will bear no comparison to that which is to follow after. Not only shall "the moon be confounded," but "the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and before his ancients gloriously!" Secondly, The time when things shall be accomplished cannot be very far off. The sacred writers of the New Testament frequently intimate that they had passed the meridian of time, and were entered, as it were, into the afternoon of the world. They speak of their times as the *last days*, and of themselves as those "on whom the ends of the world were come." They declared that "the end of all things was at hand;" that the Judge was "at the door;" and the concluding warning of the book of God is couched in this strong

expression, "Surely I come quickly!" But if the end of all things was then at hand, what must we think of it after a lapse of nearly 1800 years? Thirdly, It is highly probable, if not more than probable, that in the ages yet to come there may be much more effected than in all preceding ages put together. Some of the greatest events in prophecy we know remain to be accomplished; particularly, the utter downfall of antichrist, the conversion of the Jews, and the universal spread of true religion: but if the end of all things be at hand, and such great events are first to be accomplished, we have every reason to expect great changes, in quick succession, and at no great distance of time. The convulsions of the present day may, for aught we know, be some of the throes of creation travelling in pain for the glorious liberty of the sons of God. At all events, the day of the church's redemption draweth nigh; it is time therefore to "lift up our heads," and to go forth in prayer, and praise, and joyful exertion to meet the Bridegroom. Could the apostles and primitive Christians have been placed in our situation, they would have rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.—We must turn our attention then to some other objects besides the circumstances in which we are placed as the causes of our want of joy.

We pass over the cases of such as indulge themselves in known sin, or live in the neglect of known duty, as cases easily accounted for, at one period of time as well as another; and confine our inquiry to those whose conversation is allowed in general to be regular and circumspect; so much so, at least, as to be equal to that of the body of professing Christians around them.

In the first place, Let it be considered whether it does not arise from *the want of a greater degree of religion in general*.—Joy is a grace which cannot thrive by itself; it is a kind of appendage to the lively exercise of other graces. "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."—"Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask, and receive, that your joy may be full."—"The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." From these passages, and many others which might be cited, it is apparent that holy joy stands connected with appropriating the great truths of the gospel to our particular cases—with importunate prayer in the name of Christ—and with the practice of righteousness and peace. The same persons who were daily employed in praising and blessing God have this testimony given of them, "and great grace was upon them all."

Secondly, Let it be considered whether another reason be not *our neglect of a more frequent and intense application to those objects whence joy arises*. We have seen already, that the sources from which the primitive Christians derived their joy were the great doctrines of the gospel; but it is a lamentable fact, that the generality of professing Christians amongst us content themselves with a very superficial knowledge of these things. There are but few even amongst the godly in our day, that so enter into the spirit and glory of the gospel as clearly to distinguish it from error speciously disguised. Hence, if a minister who is much respected by his people turn aside from even important truth, it is common for many of them to go off with him. If Christians were properly rooted and grounded in the gospel—if they understood not only *what* they believe, but *wherefore* they believe it—they would not be shaken with every wind of doctrine; nor would many of the principles which prevail in the present age excite even a momentary hesitation in their minds. But if we do not so understand the truth as clearly to distinguish it from error, it cannot be supposed that we should be greatly affected by it. It is by drawing waters from the wells of salvation that we have joy; but these wells are deep, and, in proportion as we are wanting in an understanding of Divine things, we may be said to have nothing to draw with.

Thirdly, To this may be added *the want of public spirit*.—The primitive Christians were all intent on disseminating the gospel through the world; and it was in the midst of this kind of employment, and the persecutions which attended it, that they are said to have been “filled with joy and the Holy Ghost,” Acts xiii. 52. Much of the joyful part of religion is lost by rendering it the *immediate* object of our pursuit. The chief end for which great numbers read their Bibles, and hear the word, is that they may be comforted, and obtain some satisfaction of their being in a state of salvation; but this is not the way in which the comforts of the gospel are obtained. There are things which, if pursued as our chief end, will elude our grasp and vanish from our sight: such is reputation amongst men, and such is religious joy. If we pursue the public good, not for the sake of applause, but from a disinterested regard to the well-being of our species, reputation will follow us; and if the glory of God and the prosperity of his cause occupy the first place in our affection, we shall not in ordinary cases be wanting in peace and heavenly consolation. If a portion of that time which we spend in ransacking for evidence in the mass of past experiences, were employed in promoting the cause of God in the world, and seeking the welfare of the souls and bodies of men, it would turn to a better account. In seeking the salvation of others we should find our own. The love of Zion has the promise of personal prosperity. Ardently to promote the honour of God, and the good of mankind, is itself an evidence, and the highest evidence, of true religion: while, therefore, we feel conscious of the purity of our present motives, we have less occasion for reflections on the past. There is a much greater satisfaction too in this way of obtaining comfort than in the other; for however former exercises of grace might be strong and decisive at the time, yet it must be difficult to realize them merely by a distant recollection. It is much better also, and more for our profit, to live in the exercise of grace, than barely to remember that we did so at some former period of our lives. We appeal to your own hearts, brethren, with respect to your late disinterested exertions for carrying the gospel amongst the heathen,—we appeal to those of you especially who have had the undertaking most at heart, whether, since your own comfort has in a sort been overlooked, and swallowed up in concern for the salvation of others, you have not felt more of the joyful part of religion than you did before; yea, may we not add, more than at any former period in your remembrance?

Fourthly, Much may be owing to our *viewing the mixture of evils which pervade creation on a contracted scale*.—If the evils which befall creatures be considered merely as evils, and our minds are disposed to pore upon them, we must necessarily feel dejected; but if every partial evil contribute to the general good—if every adversity, whether it respect our persons, families, Christian connexions, country, or species, be but as a wheel acting upon other wheels, and all necessary to complete the vast but well-ordered machinery—the contemplation of evil itself in this view must raise the heart instead of depressing it. The miseries of the present and of the future life, if contemplated by a good man merely as evils, must overwhelm him and destroy his present peace. What can he do? He cannot shun the abodes of the wretched in this world, and so put the thoughts of their miseries far from him, for that were inhumanity; neither can he allow himself to doubt of the execution of Divine threatenings in the world to come, for that were to arraign the justice, goodness, wisdom, and veracity of God in denouncing them: but he may view things on an enlarged scale, and thus perceive that *all is right and best upon the whole*. This is to be of one mind with God, and so to be truly happy. It is in this way that we are reconciled to our own adversities: could Jacob have seen through the gracious designs of God

with regard to his children, or, though he might be unable to do this, had he properly recollected the Divine promise, "I will surely do thee good," he would not have concluded, as he did, that *all these things were against him*.

It is thus that upon some occasions we are reconciled to the miseries of a public execution. Awful beyond conception it must be to the party who suffer; but justice may require the sacrifice. However natural affection, therefore, may for a moment revolt at the idea of inflicting death, all concern for a suffering individual is absorbed by the love of our species, and a regard for the general good. It is thus that the heavenly inhabitants are described as being not only reconciled to the overthrow of mystical Babylon, but as rejoicing in it. While the merchants who traded in her wares bitterly lament her fall, crying, "Alas! alas! that great city! In one hour is she made desolate!" the friends of God are called to a very different employment: "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her. And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven saying, *Hallelujah!*—true and righteous are his judgments, for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, *Hallelujah!*—and her smoke rose up for ever and ever!" Was there any malevolence or unchristian bitterness in all this? No: it was only viewing things on a large scale; viewing them as God views them, and feeling accordingly.

The primitive Christians were in the habit of considering all things as working together for good, and so of deriving joy from every occurrence. If the world smiled upon them, they rejoiced, and availed themselves of the opportunity for spreading the gospel; or if it frowned on them for their attachment to Christ, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name's sake. By thus converting every thing into food for joy, they answered to the exhortations of the apostles, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice that he is exalted; but the rich in that he is made low."—"Beloved, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."—"Rejoice evermore.—In every thing give thanks." If we would feel like them, we must enter into their views; we must have less of the complaining patriarch, as well as of the whining merchants; and more of that temper which prompted the holy inhabitants of heaven, on every new dispensation of providence, to cry, "Amen, Hallelujah!"

Fifthly, Much is owing, no doubt, to a *spirit of conformity to the present world*, by which many Christians, especially those in prosperous circumstances, are influenced. It was a complaint made by one of the fathers (Cyprian) in the middle of the third century, a time when the church had enjoyed a considerable respite from persecution, that "each one studied how to increase his patrimony, and, forgetting what the faithful had done in apostolic times, or what they ought always to do, their great passion was an insatiable desire of enlarging their fortunes."

This complaint, every one knows, is too applicable to our times. The primitive Christians were persecuted. The Waldenses, the Reformers, the puritans, and the non-conformists were the same; and, having but little security for property, they had but little motive to increase it: being driven also from the society of their persecutors, they were under very little temptation to imitate their manners; their trials were great, but they were of a different kind from ours. Having long enjoyed the blessings of religious liberty, we have relaxed in watchfulness, and the world has seemed in a measure to have lost its enmity, and to smile upon us. In consequence of this we have become upon more friendly terms with it; not merely by behaving courteously and affectionately to men in common, which is our duty; but

by imbibing their spirit, courting their company, and subjecting ourselves to a servile compliance with their customs.

These things were extremely unfriendly to true religion. If the cares of this world be compared to thorns, which choke the word, the alluring pleasures of it are with no less propriety compared to the burning sun, through whose influence many a promising plant has withered away. Or, should the root of the matter be found in us, yet if our heads and hearts are occupied with appearance, dress, entertainments, and the like, there can be but little room for heaven or heavenly things; and consequently this joyful part of religion will be slighted and lost.

Finally, It is not to be dissembled that much is to be traced to *the manner in which the gospel is preached*. The Holy Spirit ordinarily works by means of the word. It is the office of ministers to be "helpers of your joy;" but if they partake of the spirit common to the age in which they live, their preaching will partake of it too. If the great and interesting truths of the gospel are not thoroughly understood, and felt, they cannot, in the ordinary course of things, be communicated in such a manner as greatly to interest the hearts of others. While, therefore, we recommend serious reflection to you, brethren, you also have a right to expect the same of us; and we trust we are willing to receive as well as to administer the word of exhortation. Dear brethren, farewell!

1799.

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES ILLUSTRATED AND ENFORCED.

DEAR BRETHREN,

WHEN the apostles, by the preaching of the word, had gathered in any place a sufficient number of individuals to the faith of Christ, it was their uniform practice, for the further promotion of his kingdom in that place, to proceed to the forming of them into a religious society, or Christian church. Being thus associated, in the name of Christ, Divine worship was carried on, Christian ordinances observed, holy discipline maintained, and the word of life, as the light by the golden candlesticks, exhibited. Amongst them our Lord Jesus Christ, as the High Priest of our profession, is represented as walking; observing the good, and applauding it; pointing out the evil, and censuring it; and holding up life and immortality to those that should overcome the temptations of the present state.

Let us suppose him to walk amongst our churches, and to address us in the manner he addressed the seven churches in Asia. We trust he would find some things to approve; but we are also apprehensive he would find many things to censure. Let us, brethren, look narrowly into the *discipline* of the primitive churches, and compare our own with it.

By discipline we do not mean to include the whole of the order of a Christian church. We have already touched on these subjects in the course of our annual address to you. The particular object to which we shall, at this time, request your attention, is that part of church government which consists in A MUTUAL WATCH OVER ONE ANOTHER, AND THE CONDUCT WE ARE DIRECTED TO PURSUE IN CASES OF DISORDER. A great part of our duty consists in cultivating what is lovely, but this is not the whole of it; we must prune as well as plant, if we would bear much fruit, and be Christ's disciples. One of the

things applauded in the church of Ephesus was, that *they could not bear them that were evil*.

Yet we are not to suppose from hence that no irregularity or imperfection whatever is an object of forbearance. If uniformity be required in such a degree as that every difference in judgment or practice shall occasion a separation, the churches may be always dividing into parties, which we are persuaded was never encouraged by the apostles of our Lord, and cannot be justified in trivial or ordinary cases. A contrary practice is expressly taught us in the Epistle to the Romans (chap. xiv.); and the cases in which it is to be exercised are there pointed out. An object of forbearance, however, must be one that may exist without being an occasion of dispute and wrangling in the church; it must "not be to doubtful disputations," ver. 1. It must also respect things which do not enter into the essence of God's *kingdom*, the leading principles of which are "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," ver. 16, 17. That which does not subvert the gospel of the kingdom, nor set aside the authority of the King, though it be an imperfection, is yet to be borne with. Finally, it must be something which does not "destroy the work of God," or which is not inconsistent with the progress of vital religion in the church, or in one's own soul, ver. 20. In all such cases we are not to judge one another, but every man's conscience is to be his judge, ver. 23.

In attending to those things which are the proper objects of discipline, our first concern should be to see that all our measures are aimed at *the good of the party, and the honour of God*. Both these ends are pointed out in the case of the Corinthian offender. All was to be done "that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord," and to *clear themselves* as a church from being partakers of his sin. If these ends be kept in view, they will preserve us from much error; particularly from the two great evils into which churches are in danger of falling—false lenity, and unchristian severity. There is often a party found in a community, who, under the name of tenderness, are for neglecting all wholesome discipline; or, if this cannot be accomplished, for delaying it to the utmost. Such persons are commonly the advocates for disorderly walkers, especially if they be their particular friends or relations. Their language is, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." My brother hath fallen to-day, and I may fall to-morrow. This spirit, though it exists only in individuals, provided they be persons of any weight or influence, is frequently known to impede the due execution of the laws of Christ; and if it pervade the community, it will soon reduce it to the lowest state of degeneracy. Such for a time was the spirit of the Corinthians; but when brought to a proper sense of things, "what carefulness it wrought in them, yea, what clearing of themselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!"—In opposing the extreme of false tenderness, others are in danger of falling into unfeeling severity. This spirit will make the worst of every thing, and lead men to convert the censures of the church into weapons of private revenge. Persons of this description know not of what manner of spirit they are. They lose sight of the good of the offender. It is not love that operates in them; for love worketh no evil. The true medium between these extremes is a union of *mercy and truth*. Genuine mercy is combined with faithfulness, and genuine faithfulness with mercy; and this is the only spirit that is likely to "purge iniquity," Prov. xvi. 6. Connivance will produce indifference; and undue severity will arm the offender with prejudice, and so harden him in his sin: but the love of God and of our brother's soul is adapted to answer every good end. If we love God, like Levi, we shall know no man after the flesh, nor acknowledge our nearest kindred; but shall

observe his word, and keep his covenant. And if we love the soul of our brother, we shall say, He is fallen to-day, and I will reprove him for his good : I may fall to-morrow, and then let him deal the same with me. Love is the grand secret of church discipline, and will do more than all other things put together towards insuring success.

In the exercise of discipline it is necessary to distinguish between faults which are the consequence of sudden temptation, and such as are the result of premeditation and habit. The former require a compassionate treatment, the latter a greater portion of severity. The sin of Peter in denying his Lord was great, and, if noticed by the enemies of Christ, might bring great reproach upon his cause ; yet, compared with the sin of Solomon, it was little. He first gave way to licentiousness, then to idolatry, and on finding that God, as a punishment for his sin, had given ten tribes to Jeroboam, he sought to kill him. Cases like this are imminently dangerous, and require a prompt and decided treatment, like that which we should use towards a child fallen into the fire ; in which a moment's delay might be fatal, and in which hesitating tenderness would be the height of cruelty. "Of some have compassion, making a difference : others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire ; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh," Jude 22, 23. See also Gal. vi. 1.

In all our admonitions regard should be had to the age and character of the party. An elder, as well as other men, may be in a fault, and a fault that may require to be noticed ; but let him be told of it in a tender and respectful manner. While you expostulate with younger men on a footing of equality, pay a deference to age and office. "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren," 1 Tim. v. 1.

In the due execution of Christian discipline there are many things to be done by the members of churches *individually* ; and it is upon the proper discharge of these duties that much of the peace and purity of a church depends. If we be faithful to one another, there will be but few occasions for public censure. Various improprieties of conduct, neglects of duty, and declensions in the power of godliness, are the proper objects of pastoral admonition. It is one essential branch of this office to "rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering," 2 Tim. iv. 2. Nor is this work confined to pastors ; Christians are directed to "admonish one another," Rom. xv. 14. Indeed there are things which a wise and affectionate people will be concerned to take upon themselves, lest a prejudice should be contracted against the ministry, which may prevent its good effects. This is peculiarly necessary in the settling of differences in which whole families may be interested, and in which it is extremely difficult to avoid the suspicion of partiality.

In all cases of *personal offence* the rule laid down by our Lord in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew ought to be attended to ; and no such offence ought to be admitted before a church till the precept of Christ has been first complied with by the party or parties concerned.

In many cases where faults are *not* committed immediately against us, but which are unknown except to a few individuals, love will lead us to endeavour to reclaim the party, if possible, without any further exposure. *A just man will not be willing* unnecessarily to make his brother *a public example*. The Scriptures give peculiar encouragement to these personal and private attempts. "If any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins," James v. 19, 20.

In cases of *evil report*, where things are said of a brother in our hearing which if true must affect his character, and the purity of the church, it cannot be right to go on to report it. Love will not lead to this. Many reports we

know are unfounded ; or, if true in the main, they may have been aggravated ; or there may be circumstances attending the case which, if fully understood, would make things appear very different from the manner in which they have been represented. Now it is almost impossible that any one but the party himself should be acquainted with all these circumstances, or able to give a full account of them. No time therefore should be lost ere we inquire at the hand of our brother, or if on any consideration we feel that to be unsuitable, it would be proper to apply to an officer of the church, who may conduct it with greater propriety.

There are also cases of a still more public nature, in which much of the peace and happiness of a church depends upon the conduct of its members in their individual capacity. The charge given by the apostle to the Romans, (chap. xvi. 17, 18,) though applicable to a church, yet seems to be rather addressed to the individuals who compose it :—" Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly ; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." The characters to be *avoided* appear to be persons whose object it is to set up a party in the church, of which they may be the heads or leaders—a kind of religious demagogues. Such men are found, at one time or other, in most societies ; and in some cases the peace of the churches has been invaded by strangers, who are not of their own community. Let the " brethren " have their eye upon such men. " Mark them." Trace their conduct, and you will soon discover their motives. Stand aloof from them, and " avoid " striking in with their dividing measures. In case of their being members, the church collectively considered ought, no doubt, to put away from amongst them such wicked persons ; but as every collective body is composed of individuals, if those individuals suffer themselves to be drawn away, the church is necessarily thrown into confusion, and rendered incapable of a prompt, unanimous, and decided conduct. Let members of churches therefore beware how they listen to the insinuations of those who would entice them to join their party. Men of this stamp are described by the apostle, and therefore may be known, particularly by three things :—First, By their doctrine : it is *contrary to that which has been learned of Christ*. Secondly, By their selfish pursuits : " they serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies." Thirdly, By their insinuating whining pretences of affectionate regard towards their partisans : " by good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple."

To this may be added, there are duties incumbent on individuals in their behaviour towards persons who *lie under the censure of the church*. If they still continue in a state of impenitence, persist in their sin, or be unconciled to the church's proceedings with them, it is of the utmost consequence that every member should act a uniform part towards them. We may, it is true, continue our ordinary and necessary intercourse with them as men, in the concerns of this life ; but there must be no familiarity, no social interchange, no visitings to them nor receiving visits from them, nothing, in short, that is expressive of connivance at their conduct. " 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, we must not keep company with such a one, no, not to eat," 1 Cor. v. 11. If individual members act contrary to this rule, and carry it freely towards an offender, as if nothing had taken place, it will render the censure of the church of none effect. Those persons also who behave in this manner will be considered by the party as his friends, and others who stand aloof as his enemies, or at least as being unreasonably severe ; which will work confusion, and render void the best and most whole-

some discipline. We must act in concert, or we may as well do nothing. Members who violate this rule are partakers of other men's sins, and deserve the rebukes of the church for counteracting its measures.

With respect to those things which fall under the cognizance of a church in its *collective capacity*, we earnestly recommend, in general, that every thing be done not only with a view to the honour of God and the good of the party, as before observed, but *with a special regard to the revealed will of Christ*. That some kind of order be preserved in every community is necessary to its existence. Decency, reputation, and even worldly policy, will induce us to take some notice of gross immoralities; but this is not Christian discipline, nor will it be productive of its salutary effects. In the choice of officers few, if any, churches would elect a profligate; but if opulence be allowed to supply the place of spirituality, or ambitious or litigious characters be preferred on the principle of expediency, as a means of keeping them in better humour, is it not carnal? So in matters of discipline, few churches would suffer a grossly immoral or litigious character to continue amongst them unnoticed; but if, instead of a calm, impartial, and decided procedure, we enter into pusillanimous compromises with the offender, consenting that he should withdraw of his own accord—if the crimes of rich men be either entirely overlooked or but slightly touched, lest the *cause* should suffer from their being offended—or if the misconduct of poor men be disregarded on the ground of their being persons of little or no account—"are we not carnal, and walk as men?" Brethren, are there any such things amongst us? Search and consider. Such things ought not to be. The private withdrawal of an individual, if it be without good reasons, may justify a church in admonishing him, and, if he cannot be reclaimed, in excluding him; but it cannot itself dissolve the relation. Till such exclusion has taken place he is a member, and his conduct affects their reputation as much as that of any other member. With regard to a neglect of discipline lest it should injure the *cause*, what cause must that be which requires to be thus supported? Be it our concern to obey the laws of Christ, and leave him to support his own cause. If it sink by a fulfilment of his commandments, let it sink. He will not censure us for not supporting the ark with unhallowed hands. And if it be criminal to fear the rich, it cannot be less so to despise the poor. Let brotherly love abound towards both. Do all things without partiality and without hypocrisy.

We cannot enumerate all the particular cases which fall under the cognizance of a Christian church, but shall mention a few which are recorded in the Scriptures for our imitation.

A DEPARTURE FROM THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL, OR ANY OF ITS LEADING DOCTRINES, is an object of Christian discipline. "I would they were even cut off that trouble you."—"I have a few things against thee, because thou hast them who hold the doctrine of Balaam—so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."—"A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself."

It is worthy of notice, that the only passage in the New Testament wherein heresy is introduced as *an object of discipline* makes no mention of any thing as composing it but *what relates to the principles of the party*. It may be supposed that those who were accounted heretics by the apostles were as impure in their lives as they were antichristian in their doctrine, and that they were commonly disturbers of the peace and unity of the churches; but however this might be, neither of these evils is alleged as the ground for which the heretic was to be *rejected*. All that is mentioned is this: He is "subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself."

He is "subverted;" that is, his professed faith in the gospel is in effect overturned, or rendered void; consequently he requires to be treated as an unbeliever. He is "condemned of himself;" that is, the gospel being a consistent whole, he that rejects some of its leading principles, while he professes to retain others, is certain to fall into self-contradiction; which if clearly pointed out in "a first and second admonition," he will be compelled, if he persist, obstinately to shut his eyes against the light, and thus *sin* against the dictates of his own conscience.

It has been asked, by persons who disapprove of all church proceedings on account of difference in religious principles, who is to judge what is heresy? We answer, those who are to judge what is immorality in dealing with loose characters. To suppose it impossible to judge what heresy is, or to deny that the power of so deciding rests in a Christian church, is to charge the apostolic precept with impertinence. It is true the judgment of a church may be erroneous, as well as that of an individual; and it becomes them in their decisions to consider that they will all be revised at the great day; but the same may be said of all human judgment, civil or judicial, to which no one is so void of reason as on this account to object.

It has been further objected, that censuring a person on account of his religious sentiments invades the right of private judgment, is inconsistent with the liberty of the gospel, and contrary to the leading principles on which protestants have separated from the Church of Rome, and Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England. The right of private judgment, while we claim no connexion with others, is an undoubted right. We may be Christians, infidels, or atheists, and none but God has any control over us; but if we desire the friendship and esteem of good men notwithstanding, or claim admission to a Christian church, or should we be in it already, and claim to continue our situation, surely they would not be obliged to comply. If so, our right of private judgment must interfere with that of others whose judgment tells them that there can be no fellowship between light and darkness, or communion between him that believeth and an infidel. If the liberty of the gospel consist in a right of fellowship with Christian churches whatever be our principles, it will follow not only that unbelievers may claim visible communion with believers, but that no exclusions for immorality can be justified, provided the party insists that his sentiments are in harmony with his practice. There is a great variety of opinion as to what is morality, as well as to what is truth. One loose character believes in polygamy, another in concubinage, and a third can see no harm in fornication, nor even in adultery, provided it be undiscovered.* If the Churches of Rome and England had done nothing more than exclude from their society characters whom they considered as deviating from the first principles of the gospel, without subjecting them to civil penalties or disabilities, however we might have disputed the truth of their doctrine, we could not have justly objected to their discipline. And on the other hand, we should suppose that the separation of protestants from the one, and of Protestant Dissenters from the other, was for the sake of enjoying a purer church state, wherein they might act up to the laws of Zion's King; and not that they might live as though there were no King in Israel, which is the case where every man does that which is right in his own eyes.

IN CASES OF NOTORIOUS AND COMPLICATED WICKEDNESS it appears that in the primitive churches immediate exclusion was the consequence. In the case of the incestuous Corinthian, there are no directions given for his being admonished, and excluded only in case of his being incorrigibly impenitent.

* Such was the morality taught by Mr. Hume.

The apostle determined what should be done—"In the name of the Lord Jesus, when ye are gathered together, to deliver such a one unto Satan." We cannot but consider it as an error in the discipline of some churches, where persons have been detected of gross and aggravated wickedness, that their exclusion has been suspended, and in many cases omitted, on the ground of their professed repentance. While the evil was a secret, it was persisted in, but, when exposed by a public detection, then repentance is brought forward, as it were, in arrest of judgment. But can that repentance be genuine that is pleaded for the purpose of warding off the censures of a Christian church? We are persuaded it cannot. The eye of a true penitent will be fixed upon the greatness of his sin, and he will be the last to discern or talk of his repentance for it. So far from pleading it in order to evade censure, he will censure himself, and desire nothing more than that testimony may be borne against his conduct for the honour of Christ.

But, allowing that repentance in such cases is sincere, still it is not of such account as to set aside the necessity of exclusion. The end to be answered by this measure is not merely the good of the party, but the *clearing* of a Christian church from the very appearance of conniving at immorality, and which cannot be accomplished by repentance only. Though *Miriam* might be truly sorry for her sin in having spoken against Moses, and though she might be healed of her leprosy; yet "the Lord said unto Moses, If her father had but spit on her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp seven days; and after that let her be received in again," Numb. xii. 14.

We do not suppose, however, that *every* notorious fault requires immediate exclusion. The general rule given is that NOTORIOUS EVILS SHOULD MEET WITH A PUBLIC REBUKE. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear," 1 Tim. v. 20. But this proceeding does not appear to amount to exclusion; it is rather of the nature of a *censure* or *reprimand*, accompanying an admonition. To us it appears that the circumstances attending a sin ought to determine whether it require immediate exclusion or not. If these be highly aggravating—if there appear to have been premeditation, intention, and perseverance in the crime—"put away from amongst yourselves that wicked person;" but if circumstances extenuate rather than heighten the evil, solemn admonition, accompanied with rebuke, ought to suffice, and no exclusion to follow but in case of incorrigible impenitence.

There are also faults which do not come under the denomination of notorious sins, wherein directions are given for recovering the offenders WITHOUT ANY MENTION BEING MADE OF EXCLUSION, EITHER IMMEDIATE OR ULTIMATE. There is perhaps in all the churches a description of men whose characters are far from being uniformly circumspect, and yet not sufficiently irregular to warrant their being separated from communion. They are disorderly walkers; busybodies in other men's matters, while negligent of their own; in a word, unamiable characters. Now those that are such we are directed to exhort, and charge that they conduct themselves as becometh Christians. If after this they continue disorderly, observe a degree of distance in your conduct towards them; withdraw your intimacy; let them feel the frowns of their brethren: yet be not wholly reserved, but occasionally explain to them the reasons of your conduct, affectionately admonishing them at the same time to repentance and amendment of life. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us.—For we hear that there are some who walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such

we command, and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." 2 Thess. iii. 6-15. If churches were to consult only their own reputation, they would often discard such persons at an early period; but where there is reason to hope that the heart is right in the main, great forbearance must be exercised, and long perseverance in endeavouring to recover. How many imperfections were discovered in the conduct of the twelve apostles, while their Lord was with them, and what an example of forbearance has he left us! One character reclaimed is of greater account, and more to the honour of a Christian church, than many discarded.

Finally, A watchful eye upon the state of the church, and of particular members, with a seasonable interposition, may do more towards the preservation of good order than all other things put together. Discourage whisperings, backbitings, and jealousies. Frown on talebearers, and give no ear to their tales. Nip contentions in the bud. Adjust differences in civil matters amongst yourselves. Bring together at an early period those in whom misconception and distrust have begun to operate, ere ill opinion ripen into settled dislike. By a frank and timely explanation, in the presence of a common friend, that may be healed in an hour, which, if permitted to proceed, a series of years cannot eradicate. Be affectionately free with one another. Give tender and faithful hints where it appears to you that one of your brethren is in danger of being drawn aside from the principles or spirit of the gospel. Let all be given, from their first entering into connexion with you, to expect them. If any one take offence at such treatment, give him to understand that he who cannot endure a caution, or a reproof, is unfit for Christian society, and is in the utmost danger of falling into mischief.

Brethren, consider what we say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things! The free circulation of the blood, and the proper discharge of all the animal functions, are not more necessary to the health of the body, than good discipline is to the prosperity of a community.

If it were duly considered how much the general interests of religion, and even the salvation of men, may be affected by the purity and harmony of Christian churches, we should tremble at the thought of their being interrupted by us. The planting of a church in a neighbourhood, where the gospel is preached, and the ordinances of Christ administered in their purity, is a great blessing. It is a temple reared for God, in which he deigns to record his name, to meet with his humble worshippers, and to bless them. We have seen churches of this description, in the midst of a career of spiritual prosperity, edifying one another in love, and gathering souls to the Redeemer's standard, all in a little time blasted and ruined by some unhappy event that has thrown them into disorder. One of the members, it may be, has acted unworthily—he is reproved—his relations or particular acquaintances take on his side—discipline is interrupted—the church is divided into parties—hard things are said on both sides—the bond of love is broken—tender minds are grieved, and retire—worship is but thinly attended, and the enjoyment of it is vanished—God's friends mourn in secret, and his enemies triumph, saying, "Aha! aha! so would we have it!" O brethren, it is a serious thing to occasion the ruin of a church of Christ! "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy!" Dearly beloved, farewell. Grace and peace be with you.

1802.

THE PRACTICAL USES OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

DEAR BRETHREN,

IN connexion with our last general letter, and agreeably to the appointment made at the yearly meeting, we now address you on a subject, not only of general interest, but which more immediately relates to that solemn profession which you have made of Christianity; namely, THE PRACTICAL USES OF THE ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM.

That Christian baptism is properly administered only by immersion, and to those who make a credible profession of faith in Christ, it is no part of our present design to prove. Addressing *you*, we shall take each of these particulars for granted. The only subject to which we now request your attention is the *influence* of this ordinance, where it produces its proper effects, in promoting piety in individuals, and purity in the church.

There is no part of true religion that is merely speculative; the whole is designed and adapted to sanctify the soul. We may presume, therefore, that if baptism be an ordinance of God, and of perpetual obligation in the church, it is of importance to Christian practice.

But it is not on presumptive evidence that we wish to rest the improvement of this institution, any more than the institution itself; neither shall we go about to connect with it acknowledged duties by imaginary alliances; but shall confine ourselves to those uses of the ordinance which are actually made, or suggested, in the New Testament. We could address many things to parents, and things of importance too, on bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord: we could also urge it upon the children of believers that they were committed to God from their earliest infancy; but as we find nothing of this kind in the Scriptures *connected with baptism*, however important these things would be in their place, they would be altogether irrelevant while treating on this ordinance.

Baptism is a Divine institution, pertaining to the kingdom of the Messiah, or the gospel dispensation. John received it *from heaven*, and administered it to the Jews, who, on his proclaiming that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*, confessed their sins. Jesus gave sanction to it by his example; and after his resurrection, when all power in heaven and earth was committed to him, he confirmed and extended it to believers of all nations. Whatever circumstantial differences there might be, therefore, between the baptism of John and that of Christ, they were substantially the same. There were things in former ages which bore a *resemblance* to it; as the salvation of Noah and his family in the ark, the passage of the Israelites through the sea, divers washings or bathings prescribed by the Mosaic ritual, &c.; but the thing itself existed not, till it was revealed to the immediate forerunner of Christ.

The principal design of it appears to be, *A solemn and practical profession of the Christian religion*. Such was the baptism of John, who "said unto the people, that they should believe on him who should come after him; that is, on Christ Jesus." And such was that in the times of the apostles. Paul addressing himself to the churches in Galatia, who, after having professed to believe in Christ, cleaved to the Mosaic law as a medium of justification, thus speaks: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith; but after that faith is come, we are no

longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have PUT ON CHRIST." The allusion is to the putting on of apparel, as when one that enters into the service of a prince puts on his distinguishing attire; and the design of the sacred writer is to remind those of them who had before professed the Jewish religion, that by a solemn act of their own they had, as it were, put off Moses, and put on Christ. There is a putting on of Christ which is internal, and consists in relinquishing the former lusts, and being of the mind of Christ; but that which is here referred to appears to be an *open profession* of his name, to the renouncing of every thing that stood in competition with him. It was therefore true of *as many as had been baptized*, whether they abode in the truth or not. And even their being "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" seems to express what they were in profession, rather than what they were in fact. They had by their baptism disowned all dependence on the privileges of birth, and the adoption which pertained to them as the children of Abraham; and declared their acquiescence in that power, or privilege, to become the sons of God, which the gospel imparts to them that believe. The mention of this was perfectly in point, as it greatly heightened the evil of their defection. The amount is, *That as many as were baptized in the primitive ages were voluntary agents, and submitted to this ordinance for the purpose of making a solemn and practical profession of the Christian faith.* It was their oath of allegiance to the King of Zion; that by which they avowed the Lord to be their God. Hence a rejection of it involved *a rejection of the counsel of God.* The sin of the Pharisees and lawyers consisted, not in their refusing to submit to baptism *as unbelievers*; but in not embracing the Messiah, and so putting on the badge of his profession. Their rejection of the sign was justly construed as a rejection of the thing signified; as when a rebel refuses to take the oath of allegiance, it is construed as a refusal of submission and subjection to his rightful prince.

Such, brethren, is the profession we have made. We have not only declared in words our repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ; but have said the same things by our baptism. We have solemnly surrendered ourselves up to Christ, taking him to be our Prophet, Priest, and King; engaging to receive his doctrine, to rely on his atonement, and to obey his laws. The vows of God are upon us. We have even sworn to keep his righteous judgments; and, without violating the oath of God, we cannot go back. If it be a sin not to confess the Lord Jesus, through fear or shame, it is a still greater sin, after we have confessed him, to turn from the holy commandment.

The religion of Jesus consists partly of *truths* to be believed, and partly of *precepts* to be obeyed; and the ordinance of baptism furnishes motives for a faithful adherence to both.

We have been baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;" and have thus practically avowed our belief in them. It was at Jordan that the Father bore witness to his well-beloved Son, and that the Holy Spirit descended upon him; hither, therefore, in the early ages, men were directed to repair, that they might learn the doctrine of the Trinity. If we relinquish this doctrine, we virtually relinquish our baptism. Of this there need not be a more convincing proof, than the inclination which has been discovered by those who have renounced the doctrine to disuse the form of baptizing in the name of the Sacred Three.

We have also professed by our baptism to embrace that great salvation which is accomplished by the united influence of the Sacred Three. We have in effect declared our acquiescence in the freeness of the Father's

grace, in the all-sufficient atonement of the Son, and in the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit; for these are the principal things by which, in the New Testament account of the economy of grace, each is distinguished. Nor can we renounce them, without virtually renouncing our baptism.

The immersion of the body in *water*, which is a purifying element, contains a profession of our faith in Christ, through the shedding of whose blood we are cleansed from all sin. Hence, baptism in the name of Christ is said to be *for the remission of sins*. Not that there is any such virtue in the element, whatever be the quantity; nor in the ceremony, though of Divine appointment: but it contains a *sign* of the way in which we must be saved. Sin is washed away in baptism in the same sense as Christ's flesh is eaten, and his blood drank, in the Lord's supper: the sign, when rightly used, leads to the thing signified. Remission of sins is ascribed by Peter not properly to baptism, but to the *name* in which the parties were to be baptized. Thus also Saul was directed to WASH AWAY HIS SINS, *calling on the name of the LORD*. Nearly akin to this is the idea conveyed to us in the First Epistle of Peter: "The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were *saved by water*. The like figure whereunto baptism doth *now save us* (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The salvation of Noah and his family by the ark was a *figure* of our salvation by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The ark for a time was surrounded, as it were, with waters from above, and from beneath; but it survived its trial, and those who were in it were at length brought safe to land. Christ, also, for a time sustained the deluge of wrath due to our sins; but survived the trial, rising triumphantly from the dead, and thereby saved us from everlasting death. Of this great transaction baptism is a *like figure*. It is another sign of the same thing. The resemblance of baptism by immersion to the death and resurrection of Christ, and the suitableness of the one to signify our faith in the other, are manifest. It is thus that baptism does *now save us*; not as putting away the filth of the flesh, (for all the virtue contained in the ordinance itself is "the answer of a good conscience toward God,") but as affording a sign of our salvation by the victorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And as we are taught by our baptism to adhere to the doctrine of God our Saviour, so we are furnished with motives to adorn it by a *holy conversation*. Thus it is introduced in the Epistles to the Romans and Colossians, as a sign of our being *dead* and *buried* to the principles and pursuits of the present world; and, by faith in Christ, *raised* as into a new world. The *death* of Christ is emphatically mentioned as that into which we are baptized—"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his *death*? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism *into death*; that like as Christ died, and was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Christ's dying *for sin* afforded a most powerful motive for our dying *to it*; and the immersion of the body in baptism, being *in the likeness* of the former, furnishes an additional motive to the latter.

The leading idea suggested by a death and burial seems to be that of *separation from the world*. There is no greater line of separation than that which is drawn between the dead and the living. "The dead know not any thing; and have no portion in all that is done under the sun." Such is the line which is drawn by the faith of the operation of God between the world renewed and the world depraved, of which baptism is the appointed sign. If, after this, we are found among evil-doers, we may well be considered and

shunned as a kind of apparitions, which have no proper concern in the affairs of mortals.

The apostle applied this reasoning against a conformity to abrogated ceremonies. "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" The same reasoning is applicable to other things, If we be dead with Christ, why, as though living, are we subject to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, which are of the world? Why are any of us conformed to this world; and not rather transformed by the renewing of our minds? If we be dead, and our life be hid with Christ in God, why are not our affections set on things above, and not on things on the earth? We cannot but express our concern that persons professing godliness should be carried away by the course of this world, as many are; meanly imitating the ungodly, whose conduct they ought rather to reprove. Such imitation, so far as it operates, contains a virtual renunciation of our baptism. The ideas of baptism and a separation from the world, whether connected by us or not, are strongly associated in the minds of men in general. After this, we cannot unite with them in evil, without drawing upon ourselves their most pointed censures. They may labour to seduce us for the sake of comforting themselves; and while accomplishing their purpose may suppress their private thoughts of us, and even compliment us for our liberality; but if we comply, their pretended esteem will be turned into reproach. Nor ought we to consider this as an evil; but rather as a mercy. God has hereby set a hedge about us, which tends more than a little to preserve us from temptation. If any think otherwise, and feel uneasy that they cannot act like other men, without drawing upon themselves the censures of mankind, it is a dark sign that their hearts are not right in the sight of God.

Nor is this ordinance adapted merely to separate between believers and unbelievers *individually* considered; its design is also to draw a line of distinction between *the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan*. Whatever may be said of baptism as it is now generally understood and practised, and of the personal religion of those who practise it, it was *originally* appointed to be the boundary of visible Christianity. This is a principle which, if properly acted upon, would go far to prevent the confounding of the church and the world; and which, consequently, tends more than any thing of the kind to counteract ecclesiastical degeneracy and corruption. Had the Christian church in all ages admitted none to baptism, from whomsoever descended, but those who professed to repent and believe the gospel, it is scarcely conceivable that any others would have been admitted to the Lord's supper; and if so, a stream of corruption which has actually deluged it with antichristianism would have been diverted at the spring-head. The church might, indeed, have been corrupted from other causes, but these would have been merely *accidental*. Hypocrites and formalists might have imposed themselves upon it, as they did in some degree in the apostolic age; but they would have been intruders. Whatever of this kind might have existed, believers could not have been *constitutionally* yoked together with unbelievers. The carnal descendants of godly people could not have claimed a place in Christ's visible kingdom. The church could not have become national, embracing as its children all who are born in a christianized country, without any profession of personal religion. Princes and nobles, if worthy, would have been received into its communion as brethren; but not as rulers or patrons: and, if unworthy, refused; even though an exposure to persecution had been the consequence. But if persons be admitted to baptism without any profession of personal religion, or upon the profession of others on their behalf, their admission to the Lord's supper will in most

cases follow as a matter of course. Indeed it *ought* to follow; for though among evangelical Dissenters these things are separated, yet from the beginning it was not so. Neither Scripture nor the practice of the ancient churches affords a single example of a baptized person, unless his conduct was grossly immoral, being ineligible to communion. And if all who are now baptized be admitted to the supper, the line of separation will be broken; the church will be no longer *a garden enclosed*, but an open wilderness, where every beast of prey can range at pleasure. Thus, indeed, it was foretold it should be. The writer of the Apocalypse, describing the corruptions which should prevail in the *visible church* during the twelve hundred and sixty years' reign of antichrist, represents it under the form of the *outer court* of the temple being *left out* of the measurement as profane, and *given to the Gentiles to be trodden under foot*, in like manner as the holy place and holy city had been trodden down by the heathen, in the time of Antiochus.

As the principle of believers' baptism, properly acted upon, would prevent the admission of all unconverted characters, except hypocrites and self-deceivers, so it would have its influence in repelling *them*. The habits of some hypocritical characters, it is true, would render it an easy thing to overleap this boundary; but it is equally true that to others it would be an effectual bar. There are not a few in the religious world who like well to be members of a Christian church, especially where the pastor is a man of respectability, provided they could be admitted without drawing upon themselves the laugh of the irreligious. There is reason to believe that many persons of genteel connexions, who wish to be thought religious, and whose consciences approve of believers' baptism, are withheld by this kind of shame from offering themselves to our churches. An ordinance which thus operates possesses a mark of its pertaining to that kingdom which is *not of this world*, and into which it is *hard for a rich man to enter*.

As the leading idea suggested by a death and burial is that of *separation* from the world, so the principal thing denoted by a resurrection is an entrance into a *new* state of being. Such is that *newness of life* of which the emersion of the body from the waters of baptism is a sign, and to which it furnishes an important motive. The religion of Jesus does not consist in mere negatives. It is not enough that we be dead to the world; we must be alive to God. With real Christians old things are passed away, and all things are become new. Unless our baptism, therefore, be merely a sign, or an unmeaning ceremony, our hopes, fears, sorrows, joys, companions, principles, and pursuits are opposite to those of this world. Even a partial return to it is inconsistent with our baptismal vows. If those who profess to be dead to the world cannot walk in the course of it without being considered and shunned as a kind of apparitions, those who are alive from the dead cannot return without resembling a living character who should take up his abode in a sepulchre.

A few general reflections will conclude this epistle.

The baptism of a number of serious Christians is an interesting and impressive spectacle! Often on such solemn occasions have we witnessed the falling tear; not only from the parties baptized, and others immediately connected with them, but from indifferent spectators. We could appeal to the consciences of many serious Christians, whether they did not receive their first convictions of the reality of religion at such opportunities. We could appeal to all of you, who have been in the habit of attending the administration of this ordinance, whether it has not frequently furnished you with the most solemn and tender reflections. Has not the sight of a number of young Christians, offering themselves willingly to the Lord, touched the secret springs of holy sensibility? Yes; you have been reminded by it of

your own solemn engagements, and led to inquire in what manner they have been fulfilled. You have remembered the days of your espousals, when you first went after your Saviour as in the wilderness, and have been sweetly impelled to renew the solemn surrender. Nor have your reflections been confined to yourselves; you have considered these new accessions to the church of God as supplying the place of others that were taken away, and as fulfilling the promise, "Instead of thy fathers, shall be thy children." When a number of dear friends and useful characters have, one after another, been removed by death, you have been ready to ask, Who shall fill up their place; and by whom shall Jacob arise? But when others of promising gifts and graces have come forward and yielded up themselves to the Lord in baptism, they have seemed in a manner to be "baptized for the dead." Thus, when the ranks of an army in a besieged city are thinned by repeated engagements, and the hearts of survivors are ready to faint, a reinforcement arrives: a body of new companions throw themselves in to its relief, and inspire them with new vigour.

Further, If the foregoing remarks be just, the *importance* of believers' baptism must appear in a very different light from that in which some have represented it. If the ordinary acknowledgments of many who live in the neglect of this ordinance, and disapprove of the zeal of others who submit to it, may be considered as expressive of their principles, their conduct is not owing to a solid conviction, arising from impartial inquiry accompanied with prayer, that it is unscriptural, or that they have already been baptized according to the institution of Christ; but to a notion that it is of *little or no account*. If it be of little or no account to bind ourselves to the Lord *in the way of his own prescribing*—to confess his name before men—to avow our being dead to the world, and alive to him—to preserve the church from being constitutionally corrupted, and yoked together with unbelievers—to obey his commandments who saith, "Repent, and be baptized *every one of you*;" and to follow his example who yielded obedience to this institute, saying, "Thus it *becometh us* to fulfil all righteousness"—then may this excuse be admitted. But if these things be important, then is believers' baptism important; and all attempts to depreciate it are offensive in the sight of Him who is the Lord and Lawgiver of Zion.

Finally, brethren, it becomes us to beware lest that which is good in itself should, through the corruption of our nature, become an occasion of evil. There is, perhaps, no temptation more common among religious people than to think too highly of themselves on account of their advantages. Where such a spirit is cherished, baptism may become an idol, and the table of the Lord itself a snare. It is more than possible that some may so value themselves on account of their baptism, as to make it a substitute for a life of holiness and universal righteousness. It appears that some among the Corinthians approached too near, at least, to this spirit. They had been baptized . . . they had eaten and drank at the table of the Lord . . . yet they trifled with idolatry, and worldly lusts. "I would not that ye should be ignorant," said Paul, "how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud, and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink (for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ). But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples."—"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!" As if he had said,—Are you members of a community which has the promised presence of Christ? Our fathers also were "under the cloud." Has God interposed in your favour? They "passed

through the sea," as on dry land. Have you been baptized? So were they. They "descended" in a body into the sea; were "buried," as it were, by the cloud above them and the waters on each hand of them; and afterwards "ascended" on the other side. Have you been admitted to the holy supper? They also ate of that food, and drank of that stream, the spiritual intent of which was much the same. Yet all this afforded them no security, when they provoked the Divine jealousy. Notwithstanding these privileges they fell, and were destroyed of the destroyer. These things are recorded for our admonition.—Of what account then will our baptism be to us, if, instead of being dead to the world and alive to God, we be the reverse? Will baptism save us? No: it will bear witness against us!

And though we may not fall into so fatal an error as to substitute baptism in the place of holiness, righteousness, and godliness; yet if we cherish a fond conceit of ourselves, magnifying our advantages to the neglect of a spirit of humble watchfulness, our baptism, instead of aiding us, will become a snare. We do not always act up to our advantages. It is very possible that Christians who are behind us in this particular, may notwithstanding be before us in their general character. It were vain and foolish to imagine that our possessing the truth in one instance will secure us from error in every other; or that our fulfilling this command of Christ, however important, will insure a course of universal obedience.

Let us never forget, that however adapted this or that ordinance, form, or mode of church government may be to promote our spiritual interests, yet if we rest in the means, they will deceive us; or rather we shall deceive ourselves. It is the presence of Christ only that can keep us alive, either as individuals or as churches. While, therefore, we recommend the means which he has prescribed, we devoutly add, with the apostle, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all!" Amen.

1806.

THE PASTOR'S ADDRESS TO HIS CHRISTIAN HEARERS, ENTREATING THEIR ASSISTANCE IN PROMOTING THE INTEREST OF CHRIST.

BELoved BRETHREN,

THE ministry to which God by your election has called us forms a distinguished part of the gospel dispensation. Divine instruction was communicated under the Old Testament, and an order of men appointed of God for the purpose; but their work can scarcely be denominated *preaching*. They foretold the good news; but it is for us to *proclaim* it. The poor having the gospel preached to them is alleged in proof that the Messiah was come, and that they were not to look for another.

The very existence of Christian churches is in subserviency to the preaching of the gospel; or they would not have been described as "golden candlesticks," the use of which is to impart light to those around them. We speak not thus, brethren, to magnify ourselves. There is an important difference between Christian ministers and the Christian ministry. The former, we are ready to acknowledge, exist for your sakes. "Whether Paul, Apollos, or Cephas—all are yours;" but the latter, as being the chosen

means of extending the Redeemer's kingdom, is that for which both we and you exist. "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

These considerations will enable us to account for the joy which the apostle expressed in "Christ's being preached," even though it were from "envy;" and may teach us to rejoice in the same thing, though it be in the most corrupt communities, or even from the most suspicious motives. But though God may cause his truth to triumph wherever and by whomsoever it is taught, yet it should be our concern to publish it willingly, and to the best advantage.

The primitive churches were not mere assemblies of men who agreed to meet together once or twice a week, and to subscribe for the support of an accomplished man who should on those occasions deliver lectures on religion. They were men gathered out of the world by the preaching of the cross, and formed into society for the promotion of Christ's kingdom in their own souls and in the world around them. It was not the concern of the ministers or elders only; the body of the people were interested in all that was done, and, according to their several abilities and stations, took part in it. Neither were they assemblies of heady, high-minded, contentious people, meeting together to argue on points of doctrine or discipline, and converting the worship of God into scenes of strife. They spoke the truth; but it was in love: they observed discipline; but, like an army of chosen men, it was that they might attack the kingdom of Satan to greater advantage. Happy were it for our churches if we could come to a closer imitation of this model!

We trust it is our sincere desire as ministers to be more intent upon our work; but allow us to ask for your ASSISTANCE. Nehemiah, zealous as he was, could not have built the wall if the people had not had a mind to work. Nor could Ezra have reformed the abuses among the people if nobody had stood with him. But in this case the elders, when convinced of the necessity of the measure, offered themselves willingly to assist him. "Arise," said they, "for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it." Such is the assistance, brethren, which we solicit at your hands.

We might enumerate the different ways in which your assistance in promoting the interest of Christ is needed. We might ask for your prayers, your early attendance, your counsels, your contributions, and your example; but what we have to offer will arise from a review of the different branches of our own labours.

In the discharge of our work we have to do with four descriptions of people, and in dealing with each we stand in need of your assistance—namely, serious and humble Christians—disorderly walkers—persons under concern about salvation—and persons manifestly unconverted.

First, It may be supposed that in every church of Christ there will be a considerable proportion of *serious and humble Christians*.—Our work in respect of them is to feed them with the wholesome doctrine of the word, and to teach them the mind of Christ in all things. The assistance which we ask of you, brethren, in this part of our ministry, is, that you would not only pray for us, but be free to impart to us the state of your minds, and whether our labours be edifying to you or not. It is not so much by a systematical statement and defence of Christian doctrines that believers are edified, as by those doctrines being applied to their respective cases. This is the way in which they are ordinarily introduced in the Scriptures, and in which they become "words in due season." But we cannot well preach to the cases of people unless we know them. Add to this, the *interest* which you discover in the things of God has a more than ordinary influence on

our minds in the delivery of them. You cannot conceive the difference between addressing a people full of tender and affectionate attention, whose souls appear in their eyes, and answer, as it were, to the word of God; and preaching to those who are either half asleep, or their thoughts manifestly occupied by other things. By looking at the one, our hearts have expanded like the flowers before the morning sun: thoughts have occurred, and sensations have been kindled, which the labours of the study could never have furnished. But, by observing the other, our spirits are contracted like the flowers by the damps of the evening, and thoughts which were interesting when alone have seemed to die as they proceeded from our lips.

It will tend not a little to increase your interest in hearing, if you exercise yourselves on other occasions in reading and reflection. If you attend to the things of God only, or chiefly, while hearing us, we shall preach to you under great disadvantage. The apostle complained of many things being hard to be uttered, owing to the Hebrews being dull of hearing; and that, when for the time they ought to have been teachers, they had need that one should teach them again which were the first principles of the oracles of God. Thinking hearers give a facility to preaching, even upon the most difficult subjects; while those whose minds are seldom occupied at other times can scarcely understand the most easy and familiar truths.

Secondly, In every church we must expect a greater or less proportion of *disorderly walkers*.—Our work, in respect of them, is to warn, admonish, and, if possible, to reclaim them; or, if that cannot be, to separate them, lest the little leaven should leaven the whole lump. But in these cases, more than in many others, we stand in need of your assistance. It is not ministers only, but all “who are spiritual,” that the apostle addresses on this subject; and spiritual characters may always expect employment in restoring others in the spirit of meekness. It is of great importance to the well-being of a church that men are not wanting who will watch over one another in love, observe and counteract the first symptoms of declension, heal differences at an early period, and nip disturbances in the bud. By such means there will be but few things of a disagreeable nature, which will require either the censures of the church or the interference of the pastor.

There will be instances, however, in which both the pastor and the church must interfere; and here it is of the utmost consequence that they each preserve a right spirit, and act in concert. There are two errors in particular into which individuals have frequently fallen in these matters. One is a harsh and unfeeling conduct towards the offender, tending only to provoke his resentment, or to drive him to despair; the other is that of siding with him, apologizing for him, and carrying it so familiarly towards him in private as to induce him to think others who reprove him his enemies. Beware, brethren, of both these extremes, which, instead of assisting us in our work, would be doing the utmost to counteract us. We may almost as well abandon discipline as not to act in concert. It was on this principle that the apostle enjoined it on the Corinthians “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 a one, no, not to eat.”

Your assistance is particularly necessary to resist and overcome those unlovely *partialities* which are too often found in individuals towards their relations or favourites. We have seen and heard of disorderly walkers, whose connexions in a church have been so extensive, that, when they should have been censured or admonished, either a strong opposition was raised in their favour, or at least a considerable number have chosen to stand neuter, and so to leave the officers of the church to act in a manner alone. It is glorious to see a people in such cases acting in the spirit of Levi, who

"did not acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children; but observed God's word, and kept his covenant!"

It is often extremely difficult for a pastor to go through with such matters without injury to his character and ministry. He, being by his office obliged to take the lead, becomes the principal object of resentment; and every idle story is raked up by the party and their adherents which may wound his reputation, and impute his conduct to suspicious motives. If, in such circumstances, his brethren stand by him, he will disregard the slander of his enemies: but if they be indifferent, it will be death to him. Should such a conduct issue in his removal, it is no more than might be expected.

Thirdly, In every church of Christ we may hope to find some persons *inquiring after the way of salvation*.—This may be the case much more at some periods than at others; but we may presume, from the promise of God to be with his servants, that the word of truth shall not be any length of time without effect. Our work in this case is to cherish conviction, and to direct the mind to the gospel remedy. But if, when men are inquiring the way to Zion, there be none but the minister to give them information, things must be low indeed. It might be expected that there should be as many persons capable of giving direction on this subject as there are serious Christians; for who that has obtained mercy by believing in Jesus should be at a loss to recommend him to another? It is matter of fact, however, that though, as in cases of bodily disease, advisers are seldom wanting; yet, either for want of being interested in the matter, or sufficiently skilful in the word of righteousness, there are but few, comparatively, whose advice is of any value; and this we apprehend to be one great cause of declension in many churches. Were we writing on ministerial defects, we should not scruple to acknowledge that much of the preaching of the present day is subject to the same censure; but in the present instance we must be allowed to suppose ourselves employed in teaching the good and the right way, and to solicit your assistance in the work. When the apostle tells the Hebrews that, considering the time, "they ought to have been teachers," he does not mean that they ought all to have been ministers; but able to instruct any inquirer in the great principles of the gospel.

It has been already intimated that, to give advice to a person under concern about salvation, it is necessary, in the first place, that we be *interested* on his behalf, and treat him in a free and affectionate manner. Some members of churches act as if they thought such things did not concern them, and as if their whole duty consisted in sending the party to the minister. A church composed of such characters may be opulent and respectable; but they possess nothing inviting or winning to an awakened mind. To cherish conviction, and give a right direction to such a mind, we must be free and affectionate. When a sinner begins to think of his condition, such questions as the following will often cross his mind:—Was there ever such a case as mine before? Are there any people in the world who have been what I am, and who are in the way to eternal life? If there be, who are they? Where are they? But if, while he is thinking what he must do to be saved, he neither sees nor hears any thing among you which renders it probable that such was ever your concern—if, as soon as a sermon is ended, he sees merely an exchange of civilities, and, on leaving the place, observes that all the congregation immediately fall into conversation about worldly things, what can he think? Either that there is nothing in religion, or, if there be, that he must seek elsewhere for it. The voice of a Christian church to those who attend upon their ministry should be that of Moses to Hobab: "We are journeying to the place of which the Lord hath said, I

will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

It is of great consequence to the well-being of a church, that there be persons in particular in it who are accessible to characters of this description, and who would take a pleasure in introducing themselves to them. Barnabas, who, by a tender and affectionate spirit, was peculiarly fitted for this employment, was acquainted with Saul while the other disciples were afraid of him. It was he that introduced him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Affection, however, is not the only qualification for this work: it requires that you be *skilful in the word of righteousness*; else you will administer false consolation, and may be instrumental in destroying, instead of saving souls. Not that it requires any extraordinary talents to give advice in such cases; the danger arises principally from inattention and erroneous views of the gospel.

If, brethren, you would assist us in this delightful work, allow us to caution you against one prevailing error, and to recommend one important rule. The *error* to which we allude is, **TAKING IT FOR GRANTED THAT THE PARTY HAS NO DOUBTS AS TO THE GOSPEL WAY OF SALVATION, AND NO UNWILLINGNESS TO BE SAVED BY IT, PROVIDED GOD WERE BUT WILLING TO SAVE HIM.** Such are probably his thoughts of himself; and the only question with him is, whether he have an *interest* in Christ and spiritual blessings. Hence he is employed in searching for something in his religious experience which may amount to an evidence of his conversion; and in talking with you he expects you to assist him in the search. But do not take this account of things as being the true one: it is founded in self-deception. If he understood and believed the gospel way of salvation, he would know that God was willing to save any sinner who is willing to be saved by it. A willingness to relinquish every false confidence, every claim of preference before the most ungodly character, and every ground of hope save that which God has laid in the gospel, is all that is wanting. If he have this, there is nothing in heaven or earth in the way of his salvation. In conversing with such a character we should impress this truth upon him, assuring him that if he be straitened it is not of God, but in his own bowels—that the doubts which he entertains of the willingness of God, especially on account of his sinfulness and unworthiness, are no other than the workings of a self-righteous opposition to the gospel (as they imply an opinion, that if he were less sinful and more worthy, God might be induced to save him)—and that if he be not saved, it will be owing to his thus continuing to stumble at the stumbling-stone. Instead of allowing that he believes the gospel, and is willing to be saved in the gospel way, while yet his very moans betray the contrary, we should labour to persuade him that he does not yet understand the deceit of his own heart—that if he were willing to come to Christ for life, there is no doubt of his being accepted; in short, that, whenever he is brought to be of this mind, he will not only ask after the good way, but walk in it, and will assuredly find rest unto his soul.

The *rule* we recommend is this: **POINT THEM DIRECTLY TO THE SAVIOUR.** It may be thought that no Christian can misunderstand or misapply this important direction, which is every where taught in the New Testament. Yet if you steer not clear of the above *error*, you will be unable to keep to it. So long as you admit the obstruction to believing in Christ to consist in something distinct from disaffection to the gospel way of salvation, it will be next to impossible for you to exhort a sinner to it in the language of the New Testament. For how can you exhort a man to that which you think

he desires with all his heart to comply with, but cannot? You must feel that such exhortations would be tantalizing and insulting him. You may, indeed, conceive of him as ignorant, and as such labour to instruct him—but your feelings will not suffer you to exhort him to any thing in which he is involuntary. Hence, you will content yourselves with directing him to wait at the pool of ordinances, and it may be to pray for grace to enable him to repent and believe, encouraging him to hope for a happy issue in God's due time. But *this is not pointing the sinner directly to Christ*. On the contrary, it is furnishing him with a resting-place short of him, and giving him to imagine that duties performed while in unbelief are pleasing to God.

If you point the awakened sinner directly to the Saviour, after the manner of the New Testament, you will not be employed in assisting him to analyze the distresses of his mind, and administering consolation to him from the hope that they may contain some of the ingredients of true conversion, or at least the signs that he will be converted. Neither will you consider distress as ascertaining a happy issue, any otherwise than as it leads to Christ. If the question were, Do I believe in Jesus for salvation? then, indeed, you must inquire what effects have been produced. But it is very different where the inquiry is, What shall we do? or, What shall I do to be saved? The murderers of Christ were distressed; but Peter did not attempt to comfort them by alleging that this was a hopeful sign of their conversion, or by any way directing their attention to what was within them. On the contrary, he exhibited the Saviour, and exhorted them to repent and be baptized in his name. The same may be said of the Philippian jailer. He was in great distress, yet no comfort was administered to him from this quarter, nor any other, except the salvation of Christ. Him Paul and Silas exhibited, and in him directly exhorted him to believe. The promise of rest is not made to the weary and heavy laden, but to those who *come to Christ* under their burdens.

Once more, If you keep this *rule*, though you will labour to make the sinner sensible of his sin, (as till this is the case he will never come to the Saviour,) yet you will be far from holding up this his sensibility as affording any warrant, qualification, or title to believe in him, which he did not possess before. The gospel itself is the warrant, and not any thing in the state of the mind; though, till the mind is made sensible of the evil of sin, it will never comply with the gospel.

Fourthly, There is in all congregations and neighbourhoods a considerable number of people who are *living in their sins*, and in a state of *unconcernedness about salvation*.—Our work in respect of them is, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, to declare unto them their true character, to exhibit the Saviour as the only refuge, and to warn them to flee to him from the wrath to come. In this also there are various ways in which you may greatly assist us. If, as heads of families, you were to inquire of your children and servants what they have heard and noticed on the Lord's day, you would often find occasion to second the impressions made by our labours. It is also of great consequence to be endued with that wisdom from above which dictates a word in season to men in our ordinary concerns with them. Far be it from us to recommend the fulsome practice of some professors, who are so full of what they call religion as to introduce it on all occasions, and that in a most offensive manner. Yet there is a way of dropping a hint to a good purpose. It is admirable to observe the easy and inoffensive manner in which a patriarch introduced some of the most important truths to a heathen prince, merely in answer to the question, How old art thou? "The days of the years of my pilgrimage," said he, "are a

hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage." This was insinuating to Pharaoh that he and his fathers before him were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth—that their portion was not in this world, but in another—that the life of man, though it extended to a hundred and thirty years, was but a few days—and that those few days were mixed with evil—all which, if the king reflected on it, would teach him to set light by the earthly glory with which he was loaded, and to seek a crown which fadeth not away.

You are acquainted with many who do not attend the preaching of the word. If, by inviting them to go with you, an individual only should be caught, as we say, in the gospel net, you would save a soul from death. Such examples have frequently occurred. It is an established law in the Divine administration, that men, both in good and evil, should in a very great degree draw and be drawn by each other. The ordinary way in which the knowledge of God is spread in the world is, by every man saying to his neighbour and to his brother, Know the Lord. It is a character of gospel times, that "Many people shall go and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Add to this, by visiting your neighbours under affliction you would be furnished with many an opportunity of conversing with them to advantage. Men's consciences are commonly awake at such seasons, whatever they have been at others. It is as the month to the wild ass, in which they that seek her may find her.

Finally, Enable us to use strong language when recommending the gospel by its holy and happy effects.—Unbelievers constantly object to the doctrine of grace as licentious; and if they can refer to your unworthy conduct, they will be confirmed, and we shall find it impossible to vindicate the truth of God without disowning such conduct, and it may be you on account of it: but if we can appeal to the upright, the temperate, the peaceable, the benevolent, the holy lives of those among whom we labour, it will be of more weight than a volume of reasonings, and have a greater influence on the consciences of men. A congregation composed of kind and generous masters, diligent and faithful servants, affectionate husbands, obedient wives, tender parents, dutiful children, and loyal subjects, will be to a minister what children of the youth are said to be to a parent: *As arrows in the hand of a mighty man*:—"Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate."

These, brethren, are some of the principal ways in which we affectionately solicit your assistance in promoting the interest of Christ. In doing this, we virtually pledge ourselves to be ready on all occasions to engage in it. We feel the weight of this implication. Let each have the other's prayer, that we may both be assisted from above, without which all the assistance we can render each other will be unavailing. Should this address fall into the hands of one who is yet in his sins, let him consider that the object of it is his salvation; let him reflect on the case of a man whom many are endeavouring to save, but he himself, with hardened unconcern, is pressing forward to destruction; and finally, should he bethink himself, and desire to escape the wrath to come, let him beware of false refuges, and flee to Jesus. the hope set before him in the gospel.

1807.

ON MORAL AND POSITIVE OBEDIENCE.

DEAR BRETHREN,

IN addressing these our annual letters to you, it is our desire to lead you on in the Divine life, that, not contented with a superficial acquaintance with religion, you may clearly understand its most discriminating principles. The winds of doctrine which abound, by which many, like children, are tossed to and fro and carried away, require that you grow up into Him in all things who is the Head, even Christ.

Concerning the subject of our present address, namely, *moral and positive obedience*, suffice it to say, we think we perceive some serious evils growing up in certain parts of the Christian world for want of distinct ideas concerning it, and wish to arm your minds against them. All we shall attempt will be to give a clear statement of this distinction, and to point out the use of it in the Christian religion.

An unreserved obedience to the revealed will of God, in whatever form it is delivered, is the Scriptural test of faith and love. You have professed to believe in Christ for salvation, and have been baptized in his name; but this is not all; the same commission which requires this directs also that the disciples should be instructed in the whole mind of Christ: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." As the commandments of Christ, however, are not all of the same kind, so neither is our obedience required to be yielded in all respects on the same principles.

The distinction of obedience into *moral* and *positive* is far from being novel. It has been made by the ablest writers, of various denominations, and must be made if we would understand the Scriptures. Without it, we should confound the eternal standard of right and wrong given to Israel at Sinai (the sum of which is love to God and our neighbour) with the body of "carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation." We should also confound those precepts and examples of the New Testament which arise from the relations we stand in to God and to one another, with positive institutions which arise merely from the sovereign will of the Law-giver, and could never have been known had he not expressly enjoined them. Concerning the former, an inspired writer does not scruple to refer the primitive Christians to that sense of right and wrong which is implanted in the minds of men in general; saying, "Whatsoever things are *true*, whatsoever things are *honest*, whatsoever things are *just*, whatsoever things are *pure*, whatsoever things are *lovely*, whatsoever things are of *good report*; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." But concerning the latter, he directs their whole attention to Christ, and to those who acted under his authority. "Be ye followers of me as I also am of Christ."—"Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the *ordinances* as I delivered them to you." The one is commanded because it is right; the other is right because it is commanded. The great principles of the former are of perpetual obligation, and know no other variety than that which arises from the varying of relations and conditions; but those of the latter may be binding at one period of time, and utterly abolished at another.

We can clearly perceive that it were inconsistent with the perfections of God not to have required us to love him and one another, or to have allowed

of the contrary. Children also must needs be required to "obey their parents; for this *is right*." But it is not thus in positive institutions. Whatever wisdom there may be in them, and whatever discernment in us, we could not have known them had they not been expressly revealed; nor are they ever enforced as being *right* in themselves, but merely as being of Divine appointment. Of them we may say, Had it pleased God, he might in various instances have enjoined the opposites; but of the other we are not allowed to suppose it possible, or consistent with righteousness, to require any thing different from that which is required.

The design of moral obligation is to preserve order in the creation; that of positive institutions, among other things, to prove us, whether, like Abraham in offering up his son, we will yield implicit obedience to God's commandments, or whether we will hesitate till we perceive the reason of them. The obligation of man to love and obey his Creator was coeval with his existence; but it was not till God had planted a garden in Eden, and there put the man whom he had formed, and expressly prohibited the fruit of one of the trees on pain of death, that he came under a positive law. The former would approve itself to his conscience as according with the nature of things; the latter as being commanded by his Creator.

Having briefly stated our views of the subject, we proceed to point out the uses to which it is applicable in the exercise of Christian obedience.

Far be it from us to amuse the churches we represent with useless distinctions, or speculations which apply not to the great purposes of practical godliness. If we mistake not, brethren, a clear view of the subject, as stated above, will furnish you with much important instruction.

We need only remind you of the use of this distinction in reducing to a narrow compass the *baptismal* controversy. Your ablest writers have shown from hence the fallacy of all reasonings in favour of infant baptism from the Abrahamic covenant, from circumcision, or from any ground of mere *analogy*: and not your writers only; for the principle is conceded by a considerable number of our most learned opponents.* In instituted worship, we have only to understand the will of our Divine Lawgiver *in relation to the subject in question*, and to obey it.

But this is not the sole, nor perhaps the principal use to be made of the distinction. We are not only taught by it to look for express precept or example, in things positive, but *not to look for them in things moral*. In obedience of the latter description there is not that need of minute rules or examples as in the former; but merely of general principles, which naturally lead to all the particulars comprehended in them. To require express precept or example, or to adhere in all cases to the literal sense of those precepts which are given us, in things of a moral nature, would lead to very injurious consequences. We may, by a disregard of that for which there is no express precept or precedent, omit what is manifestly right; and, by an adherence to the letter of Scriptural precepts, overlook the spirit of them, and do that which is manifestly wrong.

If we do nothing without express precept or precedent, we must build no places for Christian worship, form no societies for visiting and relieving the afflicted poor, establish no schools, endow no hospitals, nor contribute any thing towards them, nor any thing towards printing or circulating the Holy Scriptures. Whether any person pretending to serious religion would deny these things to be the duty of Christians, we cannot tell; some, however, on no better ground, have thought themselves at liberty to lay aside *family worship, and the sanctification of the Lord's day*. There is no

* See Booth's *Pædobaptism Examined*, Vol. I. Chap. I.

express precept or precedent for either, that we recollect, in the New Testament. But the worship of God, being of moral obligation, extends to the various relations and situations in life. In duties of this description, it is not God's usual, at least not his universal method, to furnish us with minute precepts, but rather with general principles which will naturally lead us to the practice of them. We have no account of any particular injunction given to Abraham respecting the order of his family. God had said to him in general, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect;" and this was sufficient. "I know Abraham, said the Lord, that *he will* command his children, and his household after him, that they shall keep the way of the Lord, and do justice and judgment." And with respect to "the sanctification of the Lord's day," so far as it relates to its being the day appointed for Christian worship, rather than the seventh—that is to say, so far as it is positive—though we have no express precept for it, yet there are not wanting precedents, which amount to the same thing. As to the keeping of the day "holy to the Lord," this is moral, and not positive, and is therefore left to be inferred from general principles. If God be publicly worshipped, there must be a time for it; and that time requires to be devoted to him. Whatever was moral in the setting apart of the seventh day for Divine worship (and that something was so may be presumed from its being one of the ten commandments) applies to *any* day that shall be appointed for the like purpose. Positive institutions have all something moral pertaining to them, as it respects the holy manner in which they are to be observed. It was on this principle that Paul censured as immoral the manner in which the Corinthians attended to a positive institute. His reasoning on that subject applies to the Lord's day. He argued from the ordinance of breaking bread being *the Lord's* supper that eating *their own* supper while attending to it was rendering it null and void. And, by a parity of reasoning, it follows, from the first day of the week being *the Lord's* day, that to do *our own* work, find *our own* pleasure, or speak *our own* words on that day, is to render it null and void. Of the former the apostle declared, "THIS IS NOT TO EAT THE LORD'S SUPPER;" and of the latter he would, on the same principle, have declared, THIS IS NOT TO KEEP THE LORD'S DAY. After all, it is surprising if any who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity can feel this to be a burden. "Why, even of your own selves, judge ye not what is right?"

If, on the other hand, we do every thing according to the letter of moral precepts, we shall often overlook the true intent of them, and do that which is manifestly wrong. Our Lord's precepts, in his sermon on the mount, if so understood, would contain a prohibition of all *public* prayers, and *public* contributions, and require such an acquiescence in injuries as he himself, when smitten before Pilate, did not exemplify. The right hand, in certain cases, must be cut off, and the right eye plucked out. If God prosper our lawful undertakings, we must not only avoid all increase of property, but must retain no part of what we have. No beggar nor borrower that asks assistance, whether he need it or not, must, on any consideration, be refused.

We believe self-love will be a sufficient preservative against such expositions being reduced to practice; but if the principle be retained, it will be at work in some other form, diverting the attention from weightier matters, and reducing religion to ceremony and litigious trifling.

It was not our Lord's design, in these precepts, to regulate external actions so much as motives. Many of his precepts, it is true, mention the act, and the act only; but their aim is at the principle. It was the spirit of *ostentation* in prayer and almsgiving, of *selfish resentment* in cases of injury, and of *the love of the world* in cases of accumulating and retaining property, that he meant to censure.

Neither is it by attending to a ceremony which the country and climate ordinarily render unnecessary, that we comply with our Lord's precept, "Ye ought to wash one another's feet;" but "by love serving one another." We may wash the saints' feet, and neglect to dry their clothes, or administer necessary comfort to them when cold and weary. We may give a disciple a cup of cold water, and keep back what is more valuable for our own use. If we be taught of God to love one another, we shall find little difficulty in understanding and practising these precepts.

By confounding moral and positive obedience, some have reasoned thus: "You agree to take your children to family and public worship, teach them to read the Bible with seriousness and attention, instruct them in catechisms, &c., and *why do you not take them to the Lord's supper?*" We answer, The former are moral obligations; but the latter is not. These are binding on all mankind, and therefore ought to be inculcated from the earliest dawn of knowledge, even though we had never been told to "bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" but this is the immediate duty of believers only. Others, on the same principle, have argued thus, or to this effect: "You withhold the unconverted from joining at the Lord's table, and *why not also from joining in family and public prayer?*" Our answer is the same. The Lord's supper is the immediate duty of believers only; but prayer is binding on men in general, however far they may be from performing it in an acceptable manner. To join with unbelievers in what is not their immediate duty is to become partakers of their sin; but to allow them to join with us in what is the duty of every one is not so. We ought to pray for such things as both we and they stand in need of, and if they unite with us in desire it is well for them; if not, the guilt remains with themselves, and not with us.

If we be not greatly mistaken, many disputes which have divided Christians on the *form, order, and government of the church of Christ*, might at least have been considerably diminished by a proper attention to this subject. While one party contends for an Erastian latitude, or that no Divine directions are left us on these subjects, and that the church must be modelled and governed according to circumstances, the other seems to have considered the whole as a system of positive institutions, requiring in all things the most literal and punctilious observance. The truth lies, we apprehend, between these extremes; and the way to find it is to ascertain *on what principles* the apostles proceeded in forming and organizing Christian churches, *POSITIVE* or *MORAL*. If the former, they must have been furnished with an exact model, or pattern, like that which was given to Moses in the mount, and have done all things according to it; but if the latter, they would only be furnished with *general principles*, comprehending, but not specifying, a great variety of particulars.

That the framing of the tabernacle was positive there can be no doubt; and that a part of the religion of the New Testament is so is equally evident. Concerning this, the injunctions of the apostle are minute and very express. "Be ye followers (imitators) of me, as I also am of Christ."—"In this I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the *ordinances* as I delivered them to you."—"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." But were we to attempt to draw up a formula of church government, worship, and discipline, which should include any thing more than *general outlines*, and to establish it upon express New Testament authorities, we should attempt what is impracticable.

We doubt not but the apostles acted under Divine direction; but in things of a moral nature that direction consisted, not in providing them with a model, or pattern, in the manner of that given to Moses, but in furnishing

them with general principles, and enduing them with holy wisdom to apply them as occasions required.

We learn from the Acts and the Epistles that the churches were congregations of faithful men, voluntarily united together for the stated ministration of the word, the administration of Christian ordinances, and the mutually assisting each other in the cause of Christ; that they were governed by bishops and deacons; that a bishop was an overseer, not of other ministers, but of the flock of God; that the government and discipline of each church was within itself; that the gifts of the different members were so employed as to conduce to the welfare of the body; and that, in cases of disorder, all proper means were used to vindicate the honour of Christ, and reclaim the party.

These, and others which might be named, we call *general principles*. They are sometimes illustrated by the incidental occurrence of examples, and which, in all *similar cases*, are binding; but it is not always so. That a variety of cases occur in our times, in which we have nothing more than general principles to direct us, is manifest to every person of experience and reflection. We know that churches were formed, elders ordained, and prayer and praise conducted with "the understanding," or so as to be understood by others; but in what particular manner they proceeded in each we are not told. We have no account of the formation of a single church, no ordination service, nor any such thing as a formula of worship. If we look for express precept or example for the removal of a pastor from one situation to another, we shall find none. We are taught, however, that for the church to grow unto a holy temple in the Lord it requires to be "fitly framed together." The want of "fitness" in a connexion, therefore, especially if it impede the growth of the spiritual temple, may justify a removal. Or if there be no want of fitness, yet, if the material be adapted to occupy a more important station, a removal of it may be very proper. Such a principle may be misapplied to ambitious and interested purposes; but if the increase of the temple be kept in view, it is lawful, and in some cases attended with great and good effects.

This instance may suffice instead of a hundred, and goes to show that the forms and orders of the New Testament church, much more than of the Old, are founded on the reason of things. They appear to be no more than what men who were possessed of the wisdom from above would, as it were instinctively, adopt, even though no specific directions should be given.

But to place the matter beyond all doubt, let us refer to the professions and practices of the apostles themselves. The principles on which they *professed* to act, and which they inculcated on others, were these: "Let all things be done to edifying."—"Let all things be done decently, and in order." Whatever measures had a tendency to build up the church of God and individuals in their most holy faith, these they pursued. Whatever measures approved themselves to minds endued with holy wisdom as fit and lovely, and as tending, like good discipline in an army, to the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, these they followed, and inculcated on the churches. And however worldly minds may have abused the principle, by introducing vain customs under the pretence of *decency*, it is that which, understood in its simple and original sense, must still be the test of good order and Christian discipline.

The way in which the apostles actually proceeded in the forming and organizing of churches corresponds with this statement of things. When a number of Christians were assembled together in the days of Pentecost, they were considered as a Christian church. But at first they had no deacons, and probably no pastors, except the apostles. And if the *reason* of things

had not required it, they might have continued to have none. But in the course of things *new service* rose upon their hands, therefore they must have *new servants* to perform it; for, said the apostles, "It is not *reason* that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. *Wherefore*, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom, whom ye may appoint over this business." In this process we perceive nothing of the air of a ceremony, nothing like that of punctilious attention to forms, which marks obedience to a positive institute; but merely the conduct of men endued with the wisdom from above; servants appointed when service required it, and the number of the one regulated by the quantity of the other. All things are done "decently and in order;" all things are done "to edifying."

It is not difficult to perceive the wisdom of God in thus varying the two dispensations. The Jewish church was an army of soldiers who had to go through a variety of forms in learning their discipline; the Christian church is an army going forth to battle. The members of the former were taught punctilious obedience, and led with great formality through a variety of religious evolutions; but those of the latter (though they also must keep their ranks, and act in obedience to command whenever it is given) are not required to be so attentive to the mechanical as to the mental, not so much to the minute observance of forms as to the spirit and design of them. The order of the one would almost seem to have been appointed for order's sake; but in that of the other the utility of every thing is apparent. The obedience of the former was that of children; the latter that of sons arrived at maturer age.

As our Saviour abolished the Jewish law of divorce, and reduced marriage to its original simplicity; so, having abolished the form and order of the church as appointed by Moses, he reduced it to what, as to its first principles, it was from the beginning, and to what must have corresponded with the desires of believers in every age. It was natural for "the sons of God," in the days of Seth, to assemble together, and to "call upon the name of the Lord;" and their unnatural fellowship with unbelievers brought on the deluge. And even under the Jewish dispensation, wicked men, though descended from Abraham, were not considered as Israelites indeed, or true citizens of Zion. The friends of God were then "the companions of those that feared him." They "spoke often one to another," and assembled for mutual edification. What then is gospel church fellowship, but godliness ramified, or the principle of holy love reduced to action? There is scarcely a precept on the subject of church discipline, but what may, in substance, be found in the Proverbs of Solomon.

Nor does it follow that all forms of worship and church government are indifferent, and left to be accommodated to times, places, and circumstances. The principles, or general outlines of things, are marked out, and we are not at liberty to deviate from them; nor are they to be filled up by worldly policy, but by a pure desire of carrying them into effect according to their true intent.

It does follow, however, that Scripture precedent, important as it is, is not binding on Christians in things of a *moral* nature, unless the *reason* of the thing be the same in the case to be proved as in the case adduced. The first Christians met in an "upper room;" for they had no proper places of worship. But it does not follow that we who have more convenient houses should do so. The first Christians were exhorted to "salute one another with a *holy kiss*." The reason was, it was the custom in the East for men in general in this manner to express their affection; and all that the apostle did was to direct that this common mode of affectionate salutation should

be used in a religious way. In places where it is a common practice, it may still be used to express the strength of Christian affection; but in a country where the practice is nearly confined to the expression of affection between the sexes, it is certainly much more liable to misconstruction and abuse. And as it was never a Divine institution, but merely a human custom applied to a religious use, where this custom has ceased, though the spirit of the precept remains, yet the form of it may lawfully be dispensed with, and Christian affection expressed in the ordinary modes of salutation.

Again, The Corinthian men were forbidden to pray or prophesy with their heads covered. The reason was, the head being uncovered was then the sign of authority, and its being covered of subjection. But in our age and country each is a sign of the contrary. If, therefore, we be obliged to wear any sign of the one or the other, in our religious assemblies, it requires to be reversed.

It also follows that, in attending to *positive institutions*, neither express precept nor precedent is necessary in what respects the *holy manner* of performing them, nor binding in regard of mere *accidental circumstances*, which do not properly belong to them. It required neither express precept nor precedent to make it the duty of the Corinthians, when they met to celebrate the Lord's supper, to do it soberly and in the fear of God, nor to render the contrary a sin. There are also *circumstances* which may on some occasions accompany a positive institution, and not on others; and which, being therefore no part of it, are not binding. It is a fact that the Lord's supper was first celebrated with "unleavened bread;" for no leaven was found at the time in all the Jewish habitations: but no mention being made of it, either in the institution or in the repetition of it by the apostle, we conclude it was a mere accidental circumstance, no more belonging to the ordinance than its having been in "a large upper room." It is a fact, too, that our Lord and his disciples sat in a reclining posture at the supper, after the manner of sitting at their ordinary meals; yet none imagine this to be binding upon us. It is also a fact, with regard to the *time*, that our Saviour first sat down with his disciples on the evening of the "fifth day" of the week, "the night in which he was betrayed;" but though that was a memorable night, and worthy to be noticed as a circumstance tending to show the strength of his love, yet seeing the words of the institution decide not *how often* it shall be attended to, and no mention is made of its being afterwards a rule, but, on the contrary, of the church at Troas meeting for the purpose on another day, no one imagines it to be a rule of conduct to us.

The same might be said of *females* being admitted to communion, a subject on which a great deal has been written of late years in the baptismal controversy. Whether there be express precept or precedent for it, or not, is of no consequence; for the distinction of sex is a mere *circumstance*, in no wise affecting the qualifications required, and therefore not belonging to the institution. It is of just as much account as whether a believer be a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free man; that is, it is of no account at all.—"For there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female; but all are one in Christ Jesus." Express precept or precedent might as well be demanded for the parties being tall or low, black or white, sickly or healthy, as for their being male or female. If the difference between a professed believer and an unconscious infant, with respect to baptism, were no greater than this is with respect to the supper, we would allow it to be lawful to baptize the latter, though neither express precept nor precedent be found for the practice.

It follows, lastly, that many disputes on which Christians have divided and crumbled into parties might well have been spared, and that without

any disadvantage to the cause of pure religion. Whatever necessity there may be for withdrawing from those who walk disorderly, we have no warrant to consider those things as the standard of order, and to censure our brethren for deviating from them, which belong not to the laws of Christ, but either to a mere difference of opinion respecting their application, or to some accidental circumstance which may or may not attend them.

Finally, brethren, while you guard against the extremes of certain disciplinarians on the one hand, avoid those of anti-disciplinarians on the other. Allow us to repeat, what was observed at the beginning, that *an unreserved obedience to the revealed will of God, in whatever form it is delivered, is the Scriptural test of faith and love.* "Prove what that good, perfect, and acceptable will of the Lord is." "Do all things without murmurings and disputings." Remember that "the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." Dearly beloved, farewell. The God of love and peace be with you.

1810.

THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT THE GRAND ENCOURAGEMENT IN PROMOTING
THE GOSPEL.

DEAR BRETHREN,

IN our last public letter, we addressed you on the work of the Holy Spirit; in this we would direct your attention to THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT AS THE GRAND ENCOURAGEMENT IN PROMOTING THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL.

We take for granted that the spread of the gospel is the great object of your desire. Without this it will be hard to prove that you are Christian churches. An agreement in a few favourite opinions, or on one side of a disputed subject, or even a disagreement with others, will often induce men to form themselves into religious societies, and to expend much zeal and much property in accomplishing their objects; but this is not Christianity. We may be of what is called a sect, but we must not be of a sectarian spirit, seeking only the promotion of a party. The true churches of Jesus Christ travail in birth for the salvation of men. They are the armies of the Lamb, the grand object of whose existence is to extend the Redeemer's kingdom.

About eighteen years ago God put it into the hearts of a number of your ministers and members to do something for his name among the heathen; the effect of which has been to give an impulse to those labours for the attainment of the same object in our several stations at home. The success which has followed is sufficient to induce us to press forward in the work, and to search after every direction and every consideration that may aid our progress.

The influence of the Holy Spirit is by some disowned, by others abused; and even those who are the subjects of it, from various causes, enjoy much less of it than might be expected.

Those who *disown* it apply all that is said in the Scriptures on the subject to the communication of miraculous and extraordinary gifts, as though the Lord had long since forsaken the earth, and men were now to be converted by the mere influence of moral suasion. It is on this principle that

writers, according to the leaning which they have felt towards the opinions of this or that political party, have represented the work of converting the heathen as either extremely easy or absolutely impossible. It is not for us to acquiesce in either; but, while we despair of success from mere human efforts, to trust in Him who, when sending forth his servants to teach all nations, promised to be with them "to the end of the world."

There are those, on the other hand, who *abuse* the doctrine, by converting it into an argument for sloth and avarice. God can convert sinners, say they, when he pleases, and without any exertions or contributions of ours.—Yes, he can; and probably he will. Deliverance will arise from other quarters, and they who continue in this spirit will be destroyed!

Even those in whom the Spirit of God is *enjoy much less of it than might be expected*; and this principally for want of the things which were stated in our letter of last year; namely, setting a proper value upon it, seeking it with fervent prayer, placing an entire dependence upon it, and maintaining a deportment suitable to it. In proving, therefore, that the promise of the Holy Spirit is the grand encouragement in promoting the spread of the gospel, we have not merely to oppose the adversaries of the doctrine, but to instruct and impress the minds of its friends. With these ends in view, let us recommend to your consideration the following remarks.

First, The success of God's cause under the Old Testament was considered by believers in those days as depending entirely upon God.—God had a cause in the world from the earliest ages, and this it was which interested the hearts of his servants. It was for the setting up of his spiritual kingdom in the world that he blessed the seed of Abraham, and formed them into a people. This was the *work* that he carried on from generation to generation among them. When, therefore, sentence was passed on the people who came up out of Egypt, that they should die in the wilderness, Moses, who seems on that occasion to have written the 90th Psalm, was deeply concerned, lest, in addition to temporal judgments, the Lord should withdraw from them his Holy Spirit. "Let thy *work*," said he, "appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children; and let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; the work of our hands establish thou it." It is worthy of notice that this prayer was answered. Though the first generation fell in the wilderness, yet the labours of Moses and his companions were blessed to the second. These were the most devoted to God of any generation that Israel ever saw. It was of them that the Lord said, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase." It was then that Balaam could not curse, but, though desirous of the wages of unrighteousness, was compelled to forego them, and his curse was turned into a blessing. We are taught by this case, amidst temporal calamities and judgments, in which our earthly hopes may be in a manner extinguished, to seek to have the loss repaired by spiritual blessings. If God's work does but appear to us, and our posterity after us, we need not be dismayed at the evils which afflict the earth.

Similar remarks might be made on the state of the church at the captivity. When the temple was burnt, and the people reduced to slavery in a foreign land, it must seem as if the cause of God in the world would go to ruin. Hence the prayer of Habakkuk, "O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid. O Lord, revive (or preserve alive) thy *work* in the midst of the years: in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." This prayer also was answered. The work of God did not suffer, but was

promoted by the captivity. The church was purified, and the world, beholding the Divine interposition, acknowledged, "The Lord hath done great things for them."

After the return of the captives, they went about to rebuild the temple; but they had many adversaries, and no military force to protect them. On this occasion the prophet Zechariah (who with Haggai stood to strengthen the builders) had a vision. He saw, and behold "a candlestick, all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it; and his seven lamps therein; and seven pipes to the seven lamps; and two olive trees on each side of the bowl, which, through the golden pipes, emptied the golden oil out of themselves." On inquiry of the angel what these meant, he was answered, "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but *by my Spirit*, saith the Lord of hosts." As if he had said, This vision contains a message of encouragement to Zerubbabel, the purport of which is, Not by army or by power, &c. For, like as the candlestick is supplied without the hand of man, so God will prosper his cause, nor by worldly power or armies, but by his gracious influence and superintending providence. Here, also, a lesson is taught us, not to wait for legal protection, or even toleration, before we endeavour to introduce the gospel into a country; but to engage in the work, trusting in God, not only to succeed our labours, but, while acting on Christian principles, either to give us favour in the eyes of those with whom we have to do, or strength to endure the contrary.

Further, The success of the gospel in the times of the apostles is ascribed to the influence of the Holy Spirit, as its first or primary cause. That the truth of the doctrine, and even the manner in which it was delivered, contributed as second causes to its success, is allowed. Such appears to be the meaning of Acts xiv. 1, "They *so* spake that a great multitude believed." But if we look to either of these as the first cause, we shall be unable to account for the little success of our Lord's preaching when compared with that of his apostles. He spoke as never man spoke; yet compared with them he laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought and in vain. It is the Holy Spirit to which the difference is ascribed. They did greater works than he, because, as he said, "I go to the Father."

In promising to "be with his disciples to the end of the world," he could refer to no other than his *spiritual* presence; to this, therefore, he taught them to look for encouragement. To this cause the success of the apostles is uniformly ascribed. "The *hand* of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord.—*God always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.—The Lord opened the heart of Lydia*, and she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.—The weapons of our warfare are mighty *through God* to the pulling down of strong holds."

The great success which prophecy gives us to expect in the latter days is ascribed to the same cause. Upon the land of my people shall be thorns and briers—"until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high." Then the wilderness would be a fruitful field, and that which had been hitherto considered as a fruitful field would be counted a forest.

If the success of the gospel were owing to the pliability of the people, or to any preparedness, natural or acquired, for receiving it, we might have expected it to prevail most in those places which were the most distinguished by their morality, and most cultivated in their minds and manners. But the fact was, that in Corinth, a sink of debauchery, God had "much people;" whereas in Athens, the seat of polite literature, there were only a few individuals who embraced the truth. Nor was this the greatest display of the freeness of the Spirit: Jerusalem, which had not only withstood the preach-

ing and miracles of the Lord, but had actually put him to death—Jerusalem bows at the pouring out of his Spirit; and not merely the common people, but “a great company of the priests, were obedient to the faith.”

To the above may be added, the *experience* of those whose ministry has been most blessed to the turning of sinners to God.—Men of light and speculative minds, whose preaching produces scarcely any fruit, will go about to account for the renewal of the mind by the established laws of nature; but they who see most of this change among their hearers see most of God in it, and have been always ready to subscribe to the truth of our Lord’s words to Peter, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.”

To this brief statement of the evidence of the doctrine, we shall only add a few remarks to enforce “the prayer of faith” in your endeavours to propagate the gospel both at home and abroad.—This is the natural consequence of the doctrine. If all our help be in God, to him it becomes us to look for success. It was from a prayer-meeting, held in an upper room, that the first Christians descended, and commenced that notable attack on Satan’s kingdom in which three thousand fell before them. When Peter was imprisoned, prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. When liberated by the angel, in the dead of night, he found his brethren engaged in this exercise. It was in prayer that the late undertakings for spreading the gospel among the heathen originated. We have seen success enough attend them to encourage us to go forward; and probably if we had been more sensible of our dependence on the Holy Spirit, and more importunate in our prayers, we should have seen much more. The prayer of faith falls not to the ground. If “we have not,” it is “because we ask not;” or, if “we ask and receive not,” it is “because we ask amiss.” Joash smote thrice upon the ground and stayed, by which he cut short his victories. Something analogous to this may be the cause of our having no more success than we have.

Consider, brethren, the dispensation under which we live.—We are under the kingdom of the Messiah, fitly called “the ministration of the Spirit,” because the richest effusions of the Holy Spirit are reserved for his reign, and great accessions to the church from among the Gentiles ordained to grace his triumphs. It was fit that the death of Christ should be followed by the outpouring of the Spirit, that it might appear to be what it was, its proper effect; and that which was seen in the days of Pentecost was but an earnest of what is yet to come. To pray under such a dispensation is coming to God in a good time. In asking for the success of the gospel, we ask that of the Father of heaven and earth in which his soul delighteth, and to which he has pledged his every perfection; namely, to glorify his Son.

Finally, Compare the current language of prophecy with the state of things in the world, and in the church.—In whatever obscurity the minutiae of future events may be involved, the events themselves are plainly revealed. We have seen the four monarchies, or preponderating powers, described by Daniel as successively ruling the world; namely, the Babylonian, the Persian, the Macedonian, and the Roman. We have seen the last subdivided into ten kingdoms, and the little papal horn growing up among them. We have seen the saints of the Most High “worn out” for more than a thousand years by his persecutions. We have seen his rise, his reign, and, in a considerable degree, his downfall. “The judgment is set,” and they have begun to “take away his dominion;” and will go on “to consume and to destroy it unto the end.” And when this is accomplished, “the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, will be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.” It is not improbable

that "the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound," have already commenced; which voice, while it ushers in the vials or seven last plagues upon the antichristian powers, is to the church a signal of prosperity: for, the seventh angel having sounded, voices are heard in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." The glorious things spoken of the church are not all confined to the days of the millennium; many of them will go before it, in like manner as the victorious days of David went before the *rest*, or pacific reign, of Solomon, and prepared its way. Previous to the fall of Babylon, an angel is seen flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth; and before that terrible conflict in which the beast and the false prophet are taken, the Son of God is described as riding forth on a white horse, and the armies of heaven as following him. The final ruin of the antichristian cause will be brought upon itself by its opposition to the progress of the gospel.

The sum is, that the time for the promulgation of the gospel is come; and, if attended to in a full dependence on the promise of the Spirit, it will, no doubt, be successful.—The rough places in its way are smoothing, that all flesh may see the salvation of God. The greatest events pertaining to the kingdom of heaven have occurred in such a way as to escape the observation of the unbelieving world, and, it may be, of some believers. It was so at the coming of our Lord, and probably will be so in much that is before us. If we look at events only with respect to instruments, second causes, and political bearings, we shall be filled with vexation and disquietude, and shall come within the sweep of that awful threatening, "Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operations of his hands, he will destroy them, and not build them up." But if we keep our eye on the kingdom of God, whatever become of the kingdoms of this world, we shall reap advantage from every thing that passes before us. God in our times is shaking the heavens and the earth: but there are things which cannot be shaken. "Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear."

1815.

THE SITUATION OF THE WIDOWS AND ORPHANS OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS, ETC.

DEAR BRETHREN,

THE subject to which we this year invite your attention, is THE SITUATION OF THE WIDOWS AND ORPHANS OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS, AND OF MINISTERS THEMSELVES WHO BY AGE, OR PERMANENT AFFLICTION, ARE LAID ASIDE FROM THEIR WORK.

We have not been used to address you on subjects relating to our own temporal interests; nor is this the case at present; for the far greater part of those who have been most active in forming the institution for which we plead have no expectation of deriving any advantage from it, but, feeling for many of their brethren, they are desirous of alleviating their condition.

Mercy is a distinguishing character of the religion of the Bible, especially to the *fatherless and the widow*. The great God claims to be their Protector and Avenger. "A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the

widow, is God in his holy habitation.”—“Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry. And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword: and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.” Mercy to the fatherless and the widow is introduced as a test of true religion. “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.” The affliction of the fatherless and the widow is a subject taken for granted. From the day of their bereavement, dejection takes possession of their dwelling, and imprints its image on every object around them. And when to this is added, that from time to time their sources of the necessities of life are in a great measure dried up, a full cup of affliction must needs be their portion. At first many feel for them, and weep with them: but time and a number of similar cases wear away these impressions; and, being unprotected, it is well if they be not exposed to oppression; and even where there is no particular want of kindness towards them, yet their cases, being but little known, are often but little regarded.

The widow and fatherless children of *ministers* have peculiar claims on the benevolence of the churches. The ministerial profession, like that of arms, requires the subjects of it, if possible, not to “entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, that they may please him who has chosen them to be soldiers.” On this ground, a large proportion of ministers, living entirely on the contributions of their hearers, have no opportunity of providing for their families after their decease. You, brethren, by the blessing of God on your diligent attention to business, are generally enabled to meet this difficulty. You have business in which to bring up your children from their early years; but they seldom have: and when you have taught them an honourable calling, you can spare something to set them up in trade; but it is rarely so with them.

Yet the post occupied by your ministers is honourable and important. Regardless of the sneers of the irreligious, they feel it to be so. To be chosen and approved by a Christian congregation, next to the choice and approbation of Christ, is their highest ambition. This honour, however, involves them in circumstances which require your consideration. You expect them to maintain a respectable appearance, both in their persons and families; but to do this, and at the same time to pay every one his due, often renders it impossible to provide for futurity.

Our churches, when in want of ministers, are solicitous to obtain men of talent. There may be an excess in this desire, especially where personal godliness is overlooked; and it is certain that great talents are far from being common. But view Christian ministers as a body, and we may appeal to you whether they be not possessed of talents, which, if employed in business, would with the blessing of God, ordinarily bestowed on honest industry, have rendered both them and their families equally comfortable with you and yours. And shall their having relinquished these temporal advantages to serve the cause of Christ, and to promote your spiritual welfare, be at the expense of the comfort of their widows and children when they have finished their course?

In the persecuting times which preceded the revolution of 1688, our Protestant Dissenting forefathers had but little encouragement to provide for futurity, as the fruits of their industry were taken from them: but it is not so with us; our property is secure; and we are therefore able to contribute to those benevolent objects which tend to the good of mankind.

It was an object that attracted the attention of our fathers, early in the

last century, to provide for the widows of their ministers; and a noble fund it is which was then established in London for the widows of the three denominations. Besides this, a liberal plan has been pursued within the last two-and-twenty years to increase the sum, by an addition from the profits of a magazine. It is not to supersede these benevolent means of relief, but to add to them according to the exigences of the times, and to include not only widows, but superannuated ministers and orphans, that societies like ours have of late been formed in various counties and religious connexions.

The case of superannuated ministers, or ministers who by affliction are permanently laid aside from their work, has a serious influence on the well-being of the churches. Where no provision of this kind is made, every humane and Christian feeling revolts at the idea of dismissing an aged and honourable man, even though his work is done. Yet if the congregation continue to support him, they may be able to support another. The consequence is, in a few years the congregation has dwindled almost to nothing. To meet these cases, along with those of the fatherless and the widow, is the object of this institution.

Brethren, we feel it an honour to be supported by the free contributions of those whom we serve in the gospel of Christ. To receive our support as an expression of love renders it doubly valuable. And if you view things in a right light, you will esteem it a privilege on your part. If your places of worship were ready built for you, your ministers supported, and their families provided for, would it be better? Would you feel equally interested in them? Would you not feel as David did when Araunah the Jebusite offered his thrashing-floor, his oxen, and his wood? "Nay, but I will not offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing!"

Should any object that ministers ought to set an example of trust in their heavenly Father, who knoweth what things they need, and of leaving their widows and fatherless children with him; we answer, when all is done that can be done to alleviate their wants, there will be abundant occasion for these graces. The trust that we are called to place in our heavenly Father does not however preclude the exercise of prudent foresight, either in ourselves, or in the friends of Christ towards us for his sake.

It is one of the most lovely features of our mission in the East, that, while our brethren are disinterestedly giving up all their temporal acquirements to the cause in which they are engaged, they have provided an asylum for their widows and orphans; so that when a missionary dies, he has no painful anxiety what is to become of them. They have a home, which some have preferred to their native country. Is it any distrust of the Lord's goodness to be thus tender of those who are flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone, and who have helped to bear the burden of their cares? Say, rather, is it not a truly Christian conduct? But, if so, why should we not go and do likewise?

It is one of the most endearing traits in the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, while the salvation of the world was pending, he did not neglect to provide for his aged mother. Joseph is thought to have been dead for some years, and Mary seems to have followed Jesus, who, while upon earth, discharged every branch of filial duty and affection towards her. But now that he is going to his Father, who shall provide for her? Looking down from the cross on her, and on his beloved disciple, he saith to the one, "Behold thy son!" and to the other, "Behold thy mother!" What exquisite sensibility do these words convey! To her it was saying, Consider me as living in my beloved disciple; and to him, Consider my mother as your

own. It is no wonder that "from that time that disciple took her to his own home."

We live in times very eventful ; and it cannot have escaped your observation that the success of the gospel has kept pace with the mighty changes which have agitated the world. Never, perhaps, were there such great calls on our liberality as of late years, and never were more honourable exertions made. Yet God, that giveth us all things richly to enjoy, has not suffered us to want, and has promised to supply all our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

MEMOIRS

OF THE

REV. SAMUEL PEARCE, M.A.

TO THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF MR. PEARCE, THESE MEMOIRS, COMPILED WITH
THEIR APPROBATION, AND FROM A TENDER REGARD TO HIS MEMORY,
ARE AFFECTIONATELY AND RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED BY

THE COMPILER

INTRODUCTION.

It was observed by this excellent man, during his affliction, that he never till then gained any personal instruction from our Lord's telling Peter by *what death* he should glorify God. To die by a consumption had used to be an object of dread to him ; but, "O my dear Lord," said he, "if by *this death* I can most *glorify thee*, I prefer it to all others." The lingering death of the cross, by which our Saviour himself expired, afforded him an opportunity of uttering some of the most affecting sentences which are left on sacred record ; and to the lingering death of this his honoured servant we are indebted for a considerable part of the materials which appear in these Memoirs. Had he been taken away suddenly, there had been no opportunity for him to have expressed his sentiments and feelings in the manner he has now done in letters to his friends. While in health, his hands were full of labour, and consequently his letters were written mostly upon the spur of occasion ; and related principally to business, or to things which would be less interesting to Christians in general. It is true, even in them it was his manner to drop a few sentiments, towards the close, of an experimental kind ; and many of these hints will be interspersed in this brief account of him ; but it was during his affliction, when being laid aside nearly a year, and obliged to desist from all public concerns, that he gave scope to all the feelings of his heart. Here, standing as on an eminence, he reviewed his life, re-examined the ground of his hope, and anticipated the crown which awaited him, with a joy truly *unspeakable and full of glory*.

Like Elijah, he has left the "chariot of Israel," and ascended as in a "chariot of fire ;" but not without having first communicated of his eminently Christian spirit. Oh that a double portion of it may rest upon us !

MEMOIRS.

CHAPTER I.

HIS PARENTAGE, CONVERSION CALL TO THE MINISTRY, AND SETTLEMENT AT BIRMINGHAM.

MR. SAMUEL PEARCE was born at Plymouth, on July 20th, 1766. His father, who survives him, is a respectable silversmith, and has been many years a deacon of the Baptist church in that place.

When a child, he lived with his grandfather, who was very fond of him, and endeavoured to impress his mind with the principles of religion. At about eight or nine years of age he came home to his father with a view of learning his business. As he advanced in life, his evil propensities, as he has said, began to ripen; and forming connexions with several vicious school-fellows, he became more and more corrupted. So greatly was his heart at this time set in him to do evil, that had it not been for the restraining goodness of God, which somehow, he knew not how, preserved him in most instances from carrying his wicked inclinations into practice, he supposed he should have been utterly ruined.

At times he was under strong convictions, which rendered him miserable; but at other times they subsided, and then he would return with eagerness to his sinful pursuits. When about fifteen years old he was sent by his father to inquire after the welfare of a person in the neighbourhood, in dying circumstances, who (though before his departure he was in a happy state of mind) at that time was sinking into deep despair. While in the room of the dying man, he heard him cry out with inexpressible agony of spirit, "I am damned for ever!" These awful words pierced his soul; and he felt a resolution at the time to serve the Lord; but the impression soon wore off, and he again returned to folly.

When about sixteen years of age, it pleased God effectually to turn him to himself. A sermon delivered by Mr. *Birt*, who was then co-pastor with Mr. *Gibbs* of the Baptist church at Plymouth, was the first means of impressing his heart with a sense of his lost condition, and of directing him to the gospel remedy. The change in him appears to have been sudden, but effectual; and though his vicious propensities were bitter to his recollection, yet, being now sensibly subdued, he was furnished with so much the clearer evidence that the work was of God. "I believe," he says, "few conversions were more joyful. The change produced in my views, feelings, and conduct was so evident to myself, that I could no more doubt of its being from God than of my existence. I had the witness in myself, and was filled with peace and joy unspeakable."

His feelings being naturally strong, and receiving a new direction, he entered into religion with all his heart; but not having known the devices of Satan, his soul was injured by its own ardour, and he was thrown into great perplexity. Having read Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion

in the Soul," he determined formally to dedicate himself to the Lord, in the manner recommended in the seventeenth chapter of that work. The form of a covenant, as there drawn up, he also adopted as his own; and, that he might bind himself in the most solemn and affecting manner, *signed it with his blood*. But afterwards, failing in his engagements, he was plunged into great distress, and almost into despair. On a review of his covenant, he seems to have accused himself of a pharisaical reliance upon the strength of his own resolutions; and therefore, taking the paper to the top of his father's house, he tore it into small pieces, and threw it from him to be scattered by the wind. He did not however consider his obligation to be the Lord's as hereby nullified; but, feeling more suspicion of himself, he depended solely upon *the blood of the cross*.

After this he was baptized, and became a member of the Baptist church at Plymouth, the ministers and members of which, in a few years, perceived in him talents for public work. Being solicited by both his pastors, he exercised as a probationer; and receiving a unanimous call from the church, entered on the work of the ministry in November, 1786. Soon after this he went to the academy at Bristol, then under the superintendence of Dr. Caleb Evans.

Mr. Birt, now pastor of the Baptist church, in the Square, Plymouth Dock, in a letter to the compiler of these Memoirs, thus speaks of him:—"Though he was, so far as I know, the very first-fruits of my ministry on my coming hither, and though our friendship and affection for each other were great and constant, yet previously to his going to Bristol I had but few opportunities of conversing with him, or of making particular observations on him. All who best knew him, however, well remember and most tenderly speak of his loving deportment; and those who attended the conferences with him soon received the most impressive intimations of his future eminence as a minister of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

"Very few," adds Mr. Birt, "have entered upon and gone through their religious profession with more exalted piety or warmer zeal than Samuel Pearce; and as few have exceeded him in the possession and display of that *charity* which 'suffereth long, and is kind, that envieth not, that vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up, that doth not behave itself unseemly, that seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, that beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things.' But why should I say this to you? You know him yourself."

While at the academy he was much distinguished by the amiableness of his spirit and behaviour. It is sometimes observable, that where the talents of a young man are admired by his friends, and his early efforts flattered by crowded auditories, effects have been produced which have proved fatal to his future respectability and usefulness. But this was not the case with Mr. Pearce. Notwithstanding the popularity which even at that early period attended his ministerial exercises, his tutors have more than once remarked that he never appeared to them to be in the least elated, or to have neglected his proper studies; but was uniformly the serious, industrious, docile, modest, and unassuming young man.

Towards the latter end of 1789, he came to the church in Cannon Street, Birmingham, to whom he was recommended by Mr. Hall, now of Cambridge, at that time one of his tutors. After preaching to them awhile on approba-

* The excellent and venerable Isaiah Birt, about fourteen years after the death of Mr. Pearce, succeeded him in the pastoral office at Birmingham. His piety, public spirit, and success endeared him to a very large circle of friends, and make his name fragrant now that he has joined Pearce, and Fuller, Hall and Ryland, and the rest of his early companions on earth, in a better world.—B.

tion he was chosen to be their pastor. His ordination was in August, 1790. Dr. Evans gave the charge, and the late venerable Mr. Hall, of Arnsby, delivered an address to the church on the occasion.

About two months after this he wrote to his friend Mr. Summers. Whether the sentiments contained in that letter arose from the recollection of his late solemn engagement is uncertain; but they were certainly very appropriate to the occasion. Requesting his friend to pray for him, he says,—"Paul speaks of blessings received through the prayers of his fellow Christians; no wonder, therefore, he so often solicits their continuance. But if it be well to be interested in the prayers of fellow Christians, how much more to believe the great High Priest of our profession, Jesus the Son of God, is gone into the holy of holies, with our names on his breastplate, ever to plead in the presence of God for us—for us; O transporting thought! Who can doubt of the success of such an Intercessor?"

"I have of late had my mind very pleasantly, and I hope profitably, exercised on this subject, more than ever, and find increasing pleasure from a well-grounded faith in the *Divinity* of my incarnate Advocate. I see the glory of his office, arising from the infinite extent of his knowledge, power, and love, as well as from the efficacy of his atoning sacrifice. I do not wonder at those men who deny the priestly office of Christ, when they have refused him *the honours of Deity*. I rejoice in that he who pleads for us knows our wants individually, as well as the necessities of the whole church collectively. Through his intercession alone I expect my sins to be pardoned, my services accepted, and my soul preserved, guided, and comforted; and, with confidence in his intercession, I cannot doubt but I shall enjoy all. Oh how sweet is it, my dear friend, to exercise a lively faith in a living Saviour! May you and I do this daily. Thus for us to live will be Christ, and to die gain; living or dying, we shall be the Lord's."

In this early stage of his ministry, redemption by the blood of Christ appears to have been his chosen theme. Writing to the same friend as above, on Sept. 30, 1791, he says,—“I have for my evening discourse the best subject in all the Bible—*redemption*, Eph. i. 7. How welcome to the captive! Forgiveness, how delightful to the guilty! Grace, how pleasing to the heart of a saved sinner! O my dear friend, how much do we lose of gospel blessings for want of realizing our personal concern with them! Hence it is that we are no more humble, thankful, watchful, prayerful, joyful. We view the glories of the gospel at a distance; and for want of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and evidence of things not seen, think too lightly of them. ‘Lord increase our faith!’”

In the year 1791 he married Miss Sarah Hopkins, daughter of Mr. Joshua Hopkins of Alcester—a connexion which appears to have been all along a source of great enjoyment to him. The following lines addressed to Mrs. Pearce when he was on a journey, a little more than a year after their marriage, seem to be no more than a common letter; yet they show, not only the tenderness of his affection, but his heavenly-mindedness, his gentle manner of persuading, and how every argument was fetched from religion, and every incident improved for introducing it:—

“Chipping Norton, August 15, 1792.

“I believe, on retrospection, that I have hitherto rather anticipated the proposed time of my return, than delayed the interview with my dear Sarah for an hour. But what shall I say, my love, now to reconcile you to my procrastinating my return for several days more? Why I will say—It appears I am called of God; and I trust the piety of both of us will submit and say, ‘Thy will be done.’

"You have no doubt perused Mr. Ryland's letter to me, wherein I find he solicits an exchange. The reason he assigns is so obviously important, that a much greater sacrifice than we are called to make should not be withheld to accomplish it. I therefore propose, God willing, to spend the next Lord's day at Northampton. I thought of taking tea with you this evening: *that* would have been highly gratifying to us both; but it must be our meat and drink to do and submit to the will of our heavenly Father. All is good that comes from him, and all is done right which is done in obedience to him. Oh to be perfectly resigned to his disposal—how good is it! May you, my dearest Sarah, and myself, daily prove the sweetness of this pious frame of soul: then all our duties will be sweet, all our trials will be light, all our pleasures will be pure, and all our hopes sanctified.

"This evening I hope to be at Northampton. Let your prayers assist my efforts on the ensuing sabbath. You will, I trust, find in Mr. R. a ship richly laden with spiritual treasures. Oh for more supplies from the exhaustless mines of grace!"

The soul of Mr. Pearce was formed for friendship; it was natural therefore to suppose that, while engaging in the pursuit of his studies at the academy, he would contract religious intimacies with some of his brethren; and it is worthy of notice, that the grand cement of his friendship was *kindred piety*. In the two following letters, addressed to his friend Mr. Steadman, the reader will perceive the justness of this remark, as well as the encouraging prospects which soon attended his labours at Birmingham:—

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,

May 9, 1792.

"You live so remote that I can hear nothing of your prosperity at Broughton. I hope you are settled with a comfortable people, and that you enjoy much of your Master's presence, both in the study and in the pulpit. For my part, I have nothing to lament but an insensible, ungrateful heart, and that is sufficient cause for lamentation. This, only this, bows me down; and under this pressure I am ready to adopt the words I preached from last evening—'Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest.'

"As a people we are generally united; I believe more so than most churches of the same dimensions. Our number of members is about 295, between forty and fifty of whom have joined us since I saw you, and most of them I have the happiness of considering as my children in the faith.—There is still a crying out amongst us after salvation; and still, through much grace, it is my happiness to point them to 'the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world.'

"In preaching, I have often peculiar liberty; at other times barren. I suppose my experience is like that of most of my brethren; but I am not weary of my work. I hope still that I am willing to spend and be spent, so that I may win souls to Christ, and finish my course with joy: but I want more heart religion; I want a more habitual sense of the Divine presence; I want to walk with God as Enoch walked. There is nothing that grieves me so much, or brings so much darkness on my soul, as my little spirituality, and frequent wanderings in secret prayer. I cannot neglect the duty; but it is seldom that I enjoy it.

'Ye that love the Lord indeed,
Tell me, is it so with you?'

When I come to the house of God, I pray and preach with freedom. Then I think the presence of the people seems to weigh more with me than the presence of God, and deem myself a hypocrite, almost ready to leave my

pulpit, for some pious preacher. But the Lord does own the word; and again I say, If I go to hell myself, I will do what I can to keep others from going thither; and so in the strength of the Lord I will.

“An observation once made to me helps to support me above water:—‘If you did not plough in your closet, you would not reap in the pulpit.’ And again I think, ‘the Lord *dwelleth in Zion*, and loveth it *more* than the dwellings of Jacob.’”

“Feb. 1, 1793.

“The pleasure which your friendly epistle gave me rises beyond expression; and it is one of the first wishes of my heart ever to live in your valued friendship. Accept this, and my former letters, my dear brother, as sufficient evidences of my ardent wishes to preserve, by correspondence, that mutual remembrance of each other which on my part will ever be pleasurable, and on yours, I hope, never painful.

“But, ah, how soon may we be rendered incapable of such an intercourse! When I left Bristol, I left it with regret. I was sorry to leave my studies to embark, inexperienced as I am, on the tempestuous ocean of public life, where the high blowing winds, and rude noisy billows, must more or less inevitably annoy the trembling voyager. Nor did it make a small addition to my pain that I was to part with so many of my dear companions, with whom I had spent so many hours, either in furnishing or unburdening the mind. I need not say, amongst the first of these I considered Josiah Evans.* But ah, my friend, we shall see his face no more! Through Divine grace I hope we shall go to him; but he will not return to us. ‘He wasted away, he gave up the ghost, and where is he?’ I was prepared for the news because I expected it. The last time I heard directly from him was by a very serious and affectionate letter, which I received, I think, last September. To it I replied; but received no answer. I conjectured—I feared; and now my conjectures and fears are all realized. Dear departed youth! Thy memory will ever be grateful to this affectionate breast. May thy amiable qualities live again in thy surviving friend, that, to the latest period of his life, he may thank God for the friendship of Josiah Evans!

“I assure you, my dear Steadman, I feel, keenly feel, the force of the sentiment which Blair thus elegantly expresses:

‘Of joys departed, ne’er to be recalled,
How painful the remembrance!’

“But I sorrow not as one without hope. I have a two-fold hope; I hope he is now among the spirits of the just made perfect, and that he will be of the blessed and holy number who have part in the first resurrection; and I hope also, through the same rich, free, sovereign, almighty, matchless grace, to join the number too. Pleasing thought! Unite to divide no more!

“I preached last night from Rev. xxi. 6, ‘I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.’ I took occasion to expound the former part of the chapter, and found therein a pleasure inexpressible; especially when speaking from the first verse—‘and there was no more sea.’ The first idea that presented itself to me was this—*There shall be no bar to intercourse.* Whether the thought be just, or not, I leave with you and my hearers to determine; but I found happy liberty in illustrating it. What is it that separates one nation, and one part of the globe, from another? Is it not the sea? Are not Christians, though all of one family, the common Father of which is God, separated by this sea, or that river, or the other stream below? Yes; but they are one family still. *There shall be none of*

* See a brief account of him, given in part by Mr. Pearce, in Dr. Rippon’s Register, Vol. I. p. 512-516.

these obstructions to communion, of these bars to intercourse; nothing to divide their affections or disunite their praise for ever.—Forgive my freedoms. I am writing to a friend, to a brother.”

There are few, if any, thinking men but who at some seasons have had their minds perplexed with regard to religious principles, even those which are of the greatest importance. In the end, however, where the heart is right, such exercises commonly issue in a more decided attachment to the truth. Thus it was with Mr. Pearce. In another part of the above letter, he thus writes to his friend Steadman:—“I have, since I saw you, been much perplexed about some doctrinal points, both Arminian and Socinian, I believe through reading very attentively, but without sufficient dependence on the Spirit of truth, several controversies on those subjects; particularly the writings of Whitby, Priestley, and others. Indeed, had the state of mind I was in about ten weeks since continued, I should have been incapable of preaching with comfort at all. But in the mount of the Lord will he be seen. Just as I thought of giving up, He who hath the hearts of all men in his hand, and turneth them as the rivers of water are turned, was pleased, by a merciful though afflicting providence, to set me at a happy liberty.

“I was violently seized with a disorder very rife here, and which carried off many, supposed to be an inflammation of the bowels. One sabbath evening I felt such alarming symptoms that I did not expect to see the Monday morning. In these circumstances I realized the feelings of a dying man. My mind had been so accustomed to reflect on virtue and moral goodness, that the first thing I attempted was a survey of my own conduct; my diligence and faithfulness in the ministry, my unspotted life, &c. &c. But, ah, vain props these for dying men to rest on! Such heart sins, such corruptions, and evil propensities, recurred to my mind, that if ever I knew the moment when I felt my own righteousness to be as loathsome and filthy rags, it was then. And where should I, where could I, where did I flee, but to Him whose glory and grace I had been of late degrading, at least in my thoughts? Yes, there I saw peace for guilty consciences was to be *alone* obtained through an almighty Saviour. And oh, wonderful to tell, I again came to him; nor was I sent away without the blessing. I found him full of all compassion, ready to receive the most ungrateful of men.

‘Oh to grace how great a debtor
Daily I’m constrained to be!’

Thus, my dear brother was the snare broken, and thus I escaped.

‘A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing.’

Join with me in praising Him who remembered me in my low estate, because his mercy endureth for ever. Yet this is among the *all things*. I have found it has made me more spiritual in preaching. I have prized the gospel more than ever, and hope it will be the means of guarding me against future temptations.”

From his first coming to Birmingham, his meekness and patience were put to the trial by an Antinomian spirit which infected many individuals, both in and out of his congregation. It is well known with what affection it was his practice to beseech sinners to be reconciled to God, and to exhort Christians to the exercise of practical godliness; but these were things which they could not endure. Soothing doctrine was all they desired. Therefore it was that his ministry was traduced by them as Arminian, and treated with neglect and contempt. But, like his Divine Master, he bore the contradiction of sinners against himself, and this while he had the strongest

satisfaction that, in those very things to which they objected, he was pleasing God. And though he plainly perceived the pernicious influence of their principles upon their own minds, as well as the minds of others, yet he treated them with great gentleness and long forbearance; and when it became necessary to exclude such of this description as were in communion with him, it was with the greatest reluctance that he came into that measure, and not without having first tried all other means in vain. He was not apt to deal in harsh language; yet, in one of his letters about that time, he speaks of the principles and spirit of these people as a "cursed leaven."

Among his numerous religious friendships, he seems to have formed one for the special purpose of *spiritual improvement*. This was with Mr. Summers, of London, who often accompanied him in his journeys; to whom, therefore, it might be expected he would open his heart without reserve. Here, it is true, we sometimes see him, like his brethren, groaning under darkness, want of spirituality, and the remains of indwelling sin; but frequently rising above all, as into his native element, and pouring forth his ardent soul in the expression of joy and praise.—On Aug. 19, 1793, he writes thus:—

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"When I take my pen to pursue my correspondence with *you*, I have no concern but to communicate something which may answer the same end we propose in our annual journeys, viz. lending some assistance in the important object of *getting and keeping nearer to God*. This, I am persuaded, is the mark at which we should be continually aiming, nor rest satisfied until we attain that to which we aspire. I am really ashamed of myself, when, on the one hand, I review the time that has elapsed since I first assumed the Christian name, with the opportunities of improvement in godliness which have crowded on my moments since that period; and when, on the other, I *feel* the little advance I have made! More *light*, to be sure, I have; but *light without heat* leaves the Christian half dissatisfied. Yesterday, I preached on the duty of engagedness in God's service, from Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord' (a text for which I am indebted to our last journey). While urging the necessity of *heart* religion, including sincerity and ardour, I found myself much assisted by reflecting on the ardour which our dear Redeemer discovered in the cause of sinners. 'Ah,' I could not help saying, 'if our Saviour had measured his intuseness in his engagements for us, by our fervency in fulfilling our engagements to him,—we should have been now further from hope than we are from perfection.'

'Dear Lord, the ardour of *thy* love
Repoves my cold returns.'

"Two things are causes of daily astonishment to me:—The readiness of Christ to come from earth to heaven for me; and my backwardness to rise from earth to heaven with him. But, oh, how animating the prospect! A time approaches when we shall rise to sink no more; to 'be for ever with the Lord.' To be with *the Lord* for a week, for a day, for an hour; how sweetly must the moments pass! But to be *for ever* with the Lord,—that enstamps salvation with perfection; that gives an energy to our hopes, and a dignity to our joy, so as to render it *unspeakable and full of glory*! I have had a few realizing moments since we parted, and the effect has been, I trust, a broken heart. O my brother, it is desirable to have a broken heart, were it only for the sake of the pleasure it feels in being helped and healed

by Jesus! Heart-affecting views of the cursed effects of sin are highly salutary to a Christian's growth in humility, confidence, and gratitude. At once how abasing and exalting is the comparison of our loathsome hearts with that of the lovely Saviour! In Him we see all that can charm an angel's heart; in *ourselves* all that can gratify a devil's. And yet we may rest perfectly assured that these nests of iniquity shall, ere long, be transformed into the temples of God; and these sighs of sorrow be exchanged for songs of praise.

"Last Lord's day I spent the most profitable sabbath to myself that I ever remember since I have been in the ministry; and to this hour I feel the sweet solemnities of that day delightfully protracted. Ah! my brother, were it not for past experience I should say,

'My heart presumes I cannot lose
The relish all my days.'

But now I rejoice with trembling, desiring to 'hold fast what I have, that no man take my crown.' Yet fearing that I shall find how,

—'Ere one fleeting hour is past,
The flattering world employs
Some sensual bait to seize my taste,
And to pollute my joys.'"

In April, 1794, dropping a few lines to the compiler of these Memoirs, on a Lord's day evening, he thus concludes:—"We have had a good day. I find, as a dear friend once said, *it is pleasant speaking for God when we walk with him*. Oh for much of Enoch's spirit! The Head of the church grant it to my dear brother, and his affectionate friend—S. P."

In another letter to Mr. Summers, dated June 24, 1794, he thus writes:—"We, my friend, have entered on a correspondence of heart with heart; and must not lose sight of that avowed object. I thank you sincerely for continuing the remembrance of so unworthy a creature in your intercourse with Heaven; and I thank that sacred Spirit whose quickening influences, you say, you enjoy in the exercise. Yes, my brother, I have reaped the fruits of your supplications. I have been indulged with some seasons of unusual joy, tranquil as solitude, and solid as the Rock on which our hopes are built. In public exercises, peculiar assistance has been afforded; especially in these three things:—The exaltation of the Redeemer's glory—the detection of the crooked ways, false refuges, and self-delusions of the human heart—and the stirring up of the saints to press onward, making God's cause their own, and considering themselves as living not for themselves, but for *Him* alone.

"Nor hath the word been without its effect: above fifty have been added to our church this year, most of whom I rejoice in as the seals of my ministry in the Lord. Indeed, I am surrounded with goodness; and scarcely a day passes over my head but I say, Were it not for an *ungrateful heart*, I should be the happiest man alive; and *that* excepted, I neither expect nor wish to be happier in this world. My wife, my children, and myself, are uninterruptedly healthy; my friends kind; my soul at rest; my labours successful, &c. Who should be content and thankful if I should not? O my brother, help me to praise!"

In a letter to Mrs. Pearce, from Plymouth, dated Sept. 2, 1794, the dark side of the cloud seems towards him:—"I have felt much barrenness," says he, "as to spiritual things, since I have been here, compared with my usual frame at home; and it is a poor exchange to enjoy the creature at the expense of the Creator's presence! A few seasons of spirituality I have enjoyed; but my heart, my inconstant heart, is too prone to rove from its

proper centre. Pray for me, my dear, my dearest friend: I do for you daily. O wrestle for me, that I may have more of Enoch's spirit! I am fully persuaded that a Christian is no longer really happy, and inwardly satisfied, than whilst he walks with God; and I would this moment rejoice to abandon every pleasure here for a closer walk with him. I cannot, amidst all the round of social pleasure, amidst the most inviting scenes of nature, *feel* that peace with God which passeth understanding. My thirst for preaching Christ, I fear, abates, and a detestable vanity for the reputation of a 'good preacher' (as the world terms it) has already cost me many conflicts. Daily I feel convinced of the propriety of a remark which my friend Summers made on his journey to Wales, that 'it is easier for a Christian to walk habitually near to God than to be irregular in our walk with him.' But I want resolution; I want a contempt for the world; I want more heavenly-mindedness; I want more humility; I want much, very much, of that which God alone can bestow. Lord, help the weakest Lamb in all thy flock!

"I preached this evening from Cant. ii. 3, 'I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.' But how little love for my Saviour did I feel! With what little affection and zeal did I speak! I am by some praised. I am followed by many. I am respected by most of my acquaintance. But all this is nothing, yea, less than nothing, compared with possessing this testimony, *that I please God*. O thou Friend of sinners, humble me by repentance, and melt me down with love!

"To-morrow morning I set off for Launceston. I write to-night, lest my stay in Cornwall might make my delay appear tedious to the dear and deserving object of my most undissembled love. O my Sarah, had I as much proof that I love *Jesus Christ* as I have of my love to *you*, I should prize it more than rubies! As often as you can find an hour for correspondence, think of your more than ever affectionate—S. P."

On the same subject, and the same occasion, about three weeks afterwards, (Sept. 23, 1794,) he wrote to Mr. Summers. His dissatisfaction with himself while spending his time in visits, and his satisfaction when engaged in his proper work, are well worthy of attention. "I was pretty much engaged in preaching," says he, "and often felt enlarged in public work; but, in private, my almost daily cry was, 'My leanness, my leanness!' Indeed it was a barren visit, as to the inward exercises of grace. Now and then I felt a brokenness of spirit, and a panting after God; but in general my mind was in a dissipated state. After so long an absence from so large an acquaintance, I was always crowded with company, some of whom, though amiable, were very gay. Their politeness and cheerfulness, joined with a high degree of indulgence, were too fascinating for my volatile mind. I admired, and was too much conformed to their spirit. I did indeed often struggle with myself, and watched for occasions of dropping some improving hint; but, either through want of opportunity or of fortitude, the hint seldom produced a long conversation, or a permanent effect. New visits, or excursions, were every day proposed, and my heart was continually divided between painful recollection and flattering hopes. One lesson, indeed, I have thoroughly learned—that real, solid satisfaction is to be found in nothing but God. May I have grace to improve it throughout my future life.

"The last week I have known more of the power of inward religion than all the four which I have spent from home. I devoted the week to my Lord's service entirely, and I found in keeping his commandments great reward."

In another letter to Mr. Summers, dated Nov. 10, 1794, he says—"I suppose I shall visit London in the spring: prepare my way by communion both with God and man. I hope your soul prospers. I have enjoyed more of

God within this month than ever since the day of my espousals with him. O my brother, help me to praise! I cannot say that I am quite so exalted in my frame to-day; yet still I acknowledge what I have lived upon for weeks—that were there no being or thing in the universe beside God and me, I should be at no loss for happiness. Oh,

“’Tis heaven to rest in his embrace,
And no where else but there.”

CHAPTER II.

HIS LABORIOUS EXERTIONS IN PROMOTING MISSIONS TO THE HEATHEN, AND HIS OFFERING HIMSELF TO BECOME A MISSIONARY.

MR. PEARCE was uniformly the spiritual and the active servant of Christ; but neither his spirituality nor his activity would have appeared in the manner they have, but for his engagement in the *introduction of the gospel among the heathen*.

It was not long after his settlement at Birmingham that he became acquainted with Mr. CAREY, in whom he found a soul nearly akin to his own. When the brethren in the counties of Northampton and Leicester formed themselves into a missionary society at Kettering, in October, 1792, he was there, and entered into the business with all his heart. On his return to Birmingham, he communicated the subject to his congregation with so much effect, that, in addition to the small sum of £13 2s. 6d., with which the subscription was begun, £70 were collected, and transmitted to the treasurer; and the leading members of the church formed themselves into an assistant society. Early in the following spring, when it was resolved that our brethren, Thomas and Carey, should go on a mission to the Hindoos, and a considerable sum of money was wanted for the purpose, he laboured with increasing ardour in various parts of the kingdom; and when the object was accomplished, he rejoiced in all his labour, smiling in every company, and blessing God.

During his labours and journeys on this important object he wrote several letters to his friends, an extract or two from which will discover the state of his mind at this period, as well as the encouragements that he met with in his work at home:—

TO MR. STEADMAN.*

“MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,

Birmingham, Feb. 8, 1793.

“Union of sentiment often creates friendship among carnal men, and similarity of feeling never fails to produce affection among pious men, as far as that similarity is known. I have loved you ever since I knew you. We saw, we felt alike, in the interesting concerns of personal religion. We formed a reciprocal attachment. We expressed it by words. We agreed to do so by correspondence; and we have not altogether been wanting to our engagements. But our correspondence has been interrupted, not, I believe, through any diminution of regard on either side; I am persuaded not on

* This excellent man lived to a good old age; for many years before his death he was the beloved and eminently successful pastor of the first Baptist church at Bradford, Yorkshire, and the not less excellent president of the Baptist College near that town. Not a few of his students in England, in these states, and in the missionary field, bless his memory, and refer with delight to the man whom good Dr. Ryland, in his own peculiar manner and voice, used to call “that great lump of goodness, Dr. Steadman.”—B.

mine. I rather condemn myself as the first aggressor; but I excuse while I condemn, and so would you, did you know half the concerns which devolve upon me in my present situation. Birmingham is a central place; the inhabitants are numerous; our members are between three and four hundred. The word preached has lately been remarkably blessed. In less than five months I baptized nearly forty persons, almost all newly awakened. Next Lord's day week I expect to add to their number. These persons came to my house to propose the most important of all inquiries—"What must we do to be saved?" I have been thus engaged some weeks, during the greatest part of most days. This, with four sermons a week, will account for my neglect. But your letter, received this evening, calls forth every latent affection of my heart for you. We are, my dear brother, not only united in the common object of pursuit—salvation; not only rest our hopes on the same foundation—Jesus Christ; but we feel alike respecting the poor heathens. Oh how Christianity expands the mind! What tenderness for our poor fellow sinners! What sympathy for their moral misery! What desires to do them everlasting good doth it provoke! How satisfying to our judgments is this evidence of grace! How gratifying to our present taste are these benevolent breathings! Oh how I love that man whose soul is deeply affected with the importance of the precious gospel to idolatrous heathens! Excellently, my dear brother, you observe, that, great as its blessings are in the estimation of a sinner called in a Christian country, inexpressibly greater must they shine on the newly illuminated mind of a converted pagan.

"We shall be glad of all your assistance in a pecuniary way, as the expense will be heavy. Dear brother Carey has paid us a visit of love this week. He preached excellently to-night. I expect brother Thomas next week, or the week after. I wish you would meet him here. I have a house at your command, and a heart greatly attached to you."

TO MR. FULLER.

"Feb. 23, 1793.

"I am willing to go any where, and do any thing in my power, but I hope no plan will be suffered to interfere with the affecting—hoped for—dreaded day, March 13 (the day of our brethren Carey and Thomas's solemn designation at Leicester). Oh how the anticipation of it at once rejoices and afflicts me! Our hearts become steeling to part with our much-loved brethren, who are about to venture their all for the name of the Lord Jesus. I feel my soul melting within me when I read the 20th chapter of the Acts, and especially verses 36–38. But why grieve? We shall see them again. Oh yes; them and the children whom the Lord will give them;—we and the children whom the Lord hath given us. We shall meet again, not to weep and pray, but to smile and praise."

From the day of the departure of the missionaries, no one was more importunate in prayer than Mr. Pearce; and on the news of their safe arrival, no one was more filled with joy and thankfulness.

Hitherto we had witnessed his zeal in promoting this important undertaking at home; but this did not satisfy him. In October, 1794, we were given to understand that he had for some time had it in serious contemplation to go himself, and to cast in his lot with his brethren in India. When his designs were first discovered, his friends and connexions were much concerned, and endeavoured to persuade him that he was already in a sphere of usefulness too important to be relinquished. But his answer was, that they were too interested in the affair to be competent judges. And nothing would satisfy him short of his making a formal offer of his services to the

committee: nor could he be happy for them to decide upon it without their appointing a day of solemn prayer for the purpose, and, when assembled, hearing an account of the principal exercises of his mind upon the subject, with the reasons which induced him to make the proposal, as well as the reasons alleged by his connexions against it.

On October 4, 1794, he wrote to an intimate friend, of whom he entertained a hope that he might accompany him, as follows:—

“Last Wednesday I rode to Northampton, where a ministers’ meeting was held on the following day. We talked much about the mission. We read some fresh and very encouraging accounts. We lamented that we could obtain no suitable persons to send out to the assistance of our brethren. Now what do you think was said at this meeting? My dear brother, do not be surprised that *all* present united in opinion that in all our connexion there was no man known to us so suitable as *you*, provided you were disposed for it, and things could be brought to bear. I thought it right to mention this circumstance; and one thing more I cannot refrain from saying, that, were it manifestly the will of God, I should call that the happiest hour of my life which witnessed our *both* embarking with our families on board one ship, as helpers of the servants of Jesus Christ already in Hindostan. Yes, I could unreluctantly leave Europe and all its contents for the pleasures and perils of this glorious service. Often my heart in the sincerest ardours thus breathes forth its desires unto God,—‘Here am I, send me.’ But I am ignorant whether you from experience can realize my feelings. Perhaps you have friendship enough for me to lay open your meditations on this subject in your next. If you have had half the exercises that I have, it will be a relief to your labouring mind; or if you think I have made too free with you, reprove me, and I will love you still. Oh if I could find a heart that had been tortured and ravished like my own in this respect, I should form a new kind of alliance, and feel a friendship of a novel species. With eagerness should I communicate all the vicissitudes of my sensations, and with eagerness listen to a recital of kindred feelings. With impatience I should seek, and with gratitude receive, direction and support, and I hope feel a new occasion of thankfulness when I bow my knee to the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. Whence is it that I thus write to *you*, as I have never written to any one before? Is there a fellowship of the spirit; or is it the confidence that I have in your friendship that thus directs my pen? Tell me, dear ——! Tell me how you felt, and how you still feel, on this interesting subject, and do not long delay the gratification to your very affectionate friend and brother—S. P.”

About a month preceding the decision of this affair, he drew up a *narrative* of his experience respecting it; resolving at the same time to set apart one day in every week for secret fasting and prayer to God for direction; and to keep a *diary* of the exercises of his mind during the month.

When the committee were met at Northampton, according to his desire, he presented to them the narrative, which was as follows:—

“October 8, 1794. Having had some peculiar exercises of mind relative to my personally attempting to labour for the dear Redeemer amongst the *heathen*, and being at a loss to know what is the will of the Lord in this matter respecting me, I have thought that I might gain some satisfaction by adopting these two resolutions:—First, That I will, in the presence of God, faithfully endeavour to recollect the various workings of my mind on this subject, from the first period of my feeling any desire of this nature until now, and commit them to writing; together with what considerations do now, on the one hand, impel me to the work, and, on the other, what pre-

vent me from immediately resolving to enter upon it. Secondly, That I will from this day keep a regular journal, with special relation to this matter.

"This account and journal will, I hope, furnish me with much assistance in forming a future opinion of the path of duty; as well as help any friends whom I may hereafter think proper to consult to give me suitable advice in the business. Lord, help me!

"It is very common for young converts to feel strong desires for the conversion of others. These desires immediately followed the evidences of my own religion; and I remember well they were particularly fixed upon the poor heathen. I believe the first week that I knew the grace of God in truth I put up many fervent cries to heaven in their behalf, and at the same time felt a strong desire to be employed in promoting their salvation. It was not long after that the first settlers sailed for Botany Bay. I longed to go with them, although in company with the convicts, in hopes of making known the blessings of the great salvation in New Zealand. I actually had thought of making an effort to go out unknown to my friends; but, ignorant how to proceed, I abandoned my purpose. Nevertheless I could not help talking about it; and at one time a report was circulated that I was really going, and a neighbouring minister very seriously conversed with me upon the subject.

"While I was at the Bristol academy, the desire remained; but not with that energy as at first, except on one or two occasions. Being sent by my tutor to preach two sabbaths at Coleford, I felt particular sweetness in devoting the evenings of the week to going from house to house among the colliers, who dwelt in the Forest of Dean, adjoining the town, conversing and praying with them, and preaching to them. In these exercises I found the most solid satisfaction that I have ever known in discharging the duties of my calling. In a poor hut, with a stone to stand upon, and a three-legged stool for my desk, surrounded with thirty or forty of the smutty neighbours, I have felt such an unction from above that my whole auditory have been melted into tears, whilst directed to "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" and I, weeping among them, could scarcely speak, or they hear, for interrupting sighs and sobs. Many a time did I then think, thus it was with the apostles of our Lord, when they went from house to house among the poor heathen. In work like this I could live and die. Indeed, had I at that time been at liberty to settle, I should have preferred that situation to any in the kingdom with which I was then acquainted.

"But the Lord placed me in a situation very different. He brought me to Birmingham; and here, amongst the novelties, cares, and duties of my station, I do not remember any wish for foreign service, till, after a residence of some months, I heard Dr. Coke preach at one of Mr. Wesley's chapels, from Psal. lxxiii. 31, 'Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.' Then it was that, in Mr. Horne's phrase, 'I felt a passion for missions.' Then I felt an interest in the state of the heathen world far more deep and permanent than before, and seriously thought how I could best promote their obtaining the knowledge of the crucified Jesus.

"As no way at that time was open, I cannot say that I thought of taking a part of the good work among the heathen abroad; but resolved that I would render them all the assistance I could at home. My mind was employed during the residue of that week in meditating on Psal. lxxvii. 3, 'Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God!'—and the next sabbath morning I spoke from those words, on the promised increase of the church of God. I had observed that our monthly meetings for prayer had been better attended than the other prayer-meetings, from the time that I first knew the people in Cannon Street; but I thought a more general attention to them was desirable.

I therefore preached on the sabbath day evening preceding the next monthly prayer-meeting from Matt. vi. 10—"Thy kingdom come;" and urged with ardour and affection a universal union of the serious part of the congregation in this exercise. It rejoiced me to see three times as many the next night as usual; and, for some time after that, I had nearly equal cause for joy.

"As to my own part, I continued to preach much upon the promises of God respecting the conversion of the heathen nations; and by so doing, and always communicating to my people every piece of information I could obtain respecting the present state of missions, they soon imbibed the same spirit; and from that time to this they have discovered so much concern for the more extensive spread of the gospel, that at our monthly prayer-meetings, both stated and occasional, I should be as much surprised at the case of the heathen being omitted in any prayer as at an omission of the name and merits of Jesus.

"Indeed it has been a frequent means of enkindling my languid devotion, in my private, domestic, and public engagements in prayer. When I have been barren in petitioning for myself, and other things, often have I been sweetly enlarged when I came to notice the situation of those who were perishing for lack of knowledge.

"Thus I went on praying and preaching, and conversing on the subject, till the time of brother Carey's ordination at Leicester, May 24, 1791. On the evening of that day he read to the ministers a great part of his manuscript, since published, entitled, "An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen." This added fresh fuel to my zeal. But to pray and preach on the subject was all I could then think of doing. But when I heard of a proposed meeting at Kettering, October 2, 1792, for the express purpose of considering our duty in regard to the heathen, I could not resist my inclination for going, although at that time I was not much acquainted with the ministers of the Northamptonshire association. There I got my judgment informed, and my heart increasingly interested. I returned home resolved to lay myself out in the cause. The public steps I have taken are too well known to need repeating; but my mind became now inclined to go among the heathen myself. Yet a consideration of my connexions with the dear people of God in Birmingham restrained my desires, and kept me from naming my wishes to any body, (as I remember,) except to brother Carey. With him I was pretty free. We had an interesting conversation about it just before he left Europe. I shall never forget the *manner* of his saying, 'Well, you will come after us.' My heart said, Amen! and my eagerness for the work increased; though I never talked freely about it, except to my wife, and we then both thought that my relation to the church in Cannon Street, and usefulness there, forbade any such an attempt. However, I have made it a constant matter of prayer, often begging of God, as I did when first I was disposed for the work of the ministry, either that he would take away the desire, or open a door for its fulfilment. And the result has uniformly been, that the more spiritual I have been in the frame of my mind, the more love I have felt for God; and the more communion I have enjoyed with him, so much the more disposed have I been to engage as a missionary among the heathen.

"Until the accounts came of our brethren's entrance on the work in India, my connexions in Europe pretty nearly balanced my desire for going abroad; and though I felt quite devoted to the Lord's will and work, yet I thought the scale rather preponderated on the side of my abiding in my present situation.

"But since our brethren's letters have informed us that there are such prospects of usefulness in Hindostan, and that preachers are a thousand

times more wanted than people to preach to, my heart has been more deeply affected than ever with their condition; and my desires for a participation of the toils and pleasures, crosses and comforts, of which they are the subjects, are advanced to an anxiety which nothing can remove, and time seems to increase.

"It has pleased God also lately to teach me, more than ever, that HIMSELF is the *fountain* of happiness; that likeness to him, friendship for him, and communion with him, form the basis of all true enjoyment; and that this can be attained as well in an Eastern jungle, amongst Hindoos and Moors, as in the most polished parts of Europe. The very *disposition* which, blessed be my dear Redeemer! he has given me, to be any thing, do any thing, or endure any thing, so that his name might be glorified,—I say, the *disposition* itself is heaven begun below! I do feel a daily panting after more devotedness to his service, and I can never think of my suffering Lord without dissolving into love—love which constrains me to glorify him with my body and spirit, which are his.

"I do often represent to myself all the possible hardships of a mission, arising from my own heart, the nature of the country, domestic connexions, disappointment in my hopes, &c. &c.; and then I set over against them all these two thoughts,—*I am God's servant; and God is my friend.* In this I anticipate happiness in the midst of suffering, light in darkness, and life in death. Yea, I do not count my life dear unto myself, so that I may win some poor heathen unto Christ; and I am willing to be offered as a sacrifice on the service of the faith of the gospel.

"Mr. Horne justly observes, 'that, in order to justify a man's undertaking the work of a missionary, he should be qualified for it, disposed heartily to enter upon it, and free from such ties as exclude an engagement.'—As to the first, others must judge for me; but they must not be men who have an interest in keeping me at home. I shall rejoice in opportunities of attaining to an acquaintance with the ideas of judicious and *impartial* men in this matter, and with them I must leave it. A willingness to embark in this cause I do possess; and I can hardly persuade myself that God has for ten years inclined my heart to this work without having any thing for me to do in it. But the third thing requires more consideration; and here alone I hesitate."—Here he goes on to state all the objections from this quarter, with his answers to them, leaving it with his brethren to decide, when they had heard the whole.

The committee, after the most serious and mature deliberation, though they were fully satisfied as to brother Pearce's qualifications, and greatly approved of his spirit, yet were unanimously of opinion *that he ought not to go*; and that not merely on account of his connexions at home, which might have been pleaded in the case of brother Carey, but on account of the mission itself, which required his assistance in the station which he already occupied.

In this opinion brother Carey himself, with singular disinterestedness of mind, afterwards concurred; and wrote to brother Pearce to the same effect.*

On receiving the opinion of the committee, he immediately wrote to Mrs. P. as follows:—

"MY DEAR SARAH,

Northampton, Nov. 13, 1794.

"I am disappointed, but not dismayed. I ever wish to make my Saviour's will my own. I am more satisfied than ever I expected I should be with a negative upon my earnest desires, because the business has been so conducted that I think (if by any means such an issue could be insured) the

* See Periodical Accounts, Vol. I. 374.

mind of Christ has been obtained. My dear brethren here have treated the affair with as much seriousness and affection as I could possibly desire, and I think more than so insignificant a worm could expect. After we had spent the former part of this day in fasting and prayer, with conversation on the subject, till nearly two'clock, brother Potts, King, and I retired. We prayed, while the committee consulted. The case seemed difficult, and I suppose they were nearly two hours in deciding it. At last, *time* forced them to a point, and their answer I enclose for your satisfaction. Pray take care of it; it will serve for me to refer to when my mind may labour beneath a burden of guilt another day. I am my dear Sarah's own—S. P."

The decision of the committee, though it rendered him much more reconciled to abide in his native country than he could have been without it, yet did not in the least abate his zeal for the object. As he could not promote it abroad, he seemed resolved to lay himself out more for it at home. In March, 1795, after a dangerous illness, he says, in a letter to Mr. Fuller—"Through mercy I am almost in a state of convalescence. May my spared life be wholly devoted to the service of my dear Redeemer: I do not care where I am, whether in England or in India, so I am employed as he would have me; but surely we need pray hard that God would send some more help to Hindostan."

In January, 1796, when he was first informed by the secretary of a young man (Mr. Fountain) being desirous of going, of the character that was given of him by our friend Mr Savage of London, and of a committee-meeting being in contemplation, he wrote thus in answer:—"Your letter, just arrived, put—I was going to say—another soul into my little body; at least it has added new life to the soul I have. I cannot be contented with the thought of being absent from your proposed meeting. No, no; I must be there, (for my own sake I mean,) and try to sing with you, 'O'er the gloomy hills of darkness.' "*"

In August, the same year, having received a letter from India, he wrote to Mr. Fuller as follows:—"Brother Carey speaks in such a manner of the effects of the gospel in his neighbourhood as in my view promises a fair illustration of our Lord's parable, when he compared the kingdom of heaven to a little leaven, hid in three measures of meal, which insinuated itself so effectually as to leaven the lump at last. Blessed be God, the leaven is already in the meal; the fermentation is begun; and my hopes were never half so strong as they are now that the whole shall be effectually leavened. OH THAT I WERE THERE TO WITNESS THE DELIGHTFUL PROCESS! But whether am I running? I LONG TO WRITE YOU FROM HINDOSTAN!"

On receiving other letters from India, in January, 1797, he thus writes:—"Perhaps you are now rejoicing in spirit with me over fresh intelligence from Bengal. This moment have I concluded reading two letters from brother Thomas: one to the Society, and the other to myself.† He speaks of others from brother Carey. I hope they are already in your possession. If his correspondence has produced the same effects on your heart as brother Thomas's has on mine, you are filled with gladness and hope. I am grieved that I cannot convey them to you immediately. I long to witness the pleasure their contents will impart to all whose hearts are with us. Oh that I were accounted worthy of the Lord to preach the gospel to the Booteas!"

Being detained from one of our mission-meetings by preparing the Periodical Accounts for the press, he soon after wrote as follows: "We shall now get out No. IV. very soon. I hope it will go to the press in a very few days. Did

* The 428th hymn of Dr. Rippon's Selection, frequently sung at our committee-meetings.

† See these Letters printed in Periodical Accounts, Vol. I. pp. 294, 301.

you notice that the very day on which we invited all our friends to a day of prayer on behalf of the mission (December 28, 1796) was the same in which brother Carey sent his best and most interesting accounts to the Society? I hope you had solemn and sweet seasons at Northampton. On many accounts I should have rejoiced to have been with you; yet I am satisfied that on the whole I was doing best at home.'

It has been already observed, that, for a month preceding the decision of the committee, he resolved to devote one day in every week to secret prayer and fasting, and to keep a *diary* of the exercises of his mind during the whole of that period. This diary was not shown to the committee at the time, but merely the preceding *narrative*. Since his death a few of them have perused it, and have been almost ready to think, that if they had seen it before, they would not have dared to oppose his going. But the Lord hath taken him to himself. It no longer remains a question now whether he shall labour in England, or in India. A few passages, however, from this transcript of his heart, while contemplating a great and disinterested undertaking, will furnish a better idea of his character than could be given by any other hand, and with these we shall close the present chapter.

"Oct. 8, 1794.—Had some remarkable freedom and affection this morning, both in family and secret prayer. With many tears I dedicated myself, body and soul, to the service of Jesus; and earnestly implored full satisfaction respecting the path of duty.—I feel an increasing deadness for all earthly comforts; and derive my happiness immediately from God himself. May I still endure, as Moses did, by seeing him who is invisible.

"10.—Enjoyed much freedom to-day in the family. Whilst noticing in prayer the state of the millions of heathen who know not God, I felt the aggregate value of their immortal souls with peculiar energy.

"Afterwards was much struck whilst (on my knees before God in secret) I read the fourth chapter of Micah. The ninth verse I fancied very applicable to the church in Cannon Street; but what reason is there for such a cry about so insignificant a worm as I am? The third chapter of Habakkuk too well expresses that mixture of *solemnity* and *confidence* with which I contemplate the work of the mission.

"Whilst at prayer-meeting to-night, I learned more of the meaning of some passages of Scripture than ever before. Suitable frames of soul are like good lights, in which a painting appears to its full advantage. I had often meditated on Phil. iii. 7, 8, and Gal. vi. 14, but never *felt* crucifixion to the world, and disesteem for all that it contains, as at that time. All prospects of pecuniary independence, and growing reputation, with which in unworthier moments I had amused myself, were now chased from my mind; and the desire of living *wholly* to Christ swallowed up every other thought. Frowns and smiles, fulness and want, honour and reproach, were now equally indifferent; and when I concluded the meeting, my whole soul felt, as it were, going after the lost sheep of Christ among the heathen.

"I do feel a growing satisfaction in the proposal of spending my whole life in something nobler than the locality of this island will admit. I long to raise my Master's banner in climes where the sound of his fame hath but scarcely reached. He hath said, for my encouragement, that '*all nations shall flow unto it.*'

"The conduct and success of Stach, Boonish, and other Moravian missionaries in Greenland, both confound and stimulate me. O Lord, forgive my past indolence in thy service, and help me to redeem the residue of my days for exertions more worthy a friend of mankind and a servant of God.

"13.—Being taken up with visitors the former part of the day, I spent the after part in application to the Bengal language, and found the difficulties I

apprehended vanish as fast as I encountered them. I read and prayed, prayed and read, and made no small advances. Blessed be God!

"15.—There are in Birmingham 50,000 inhabitants; and, exclusive of the vicinity, ten ministers who preach the fundamental truths of the gospel. In Hindostan there are twice as many millions of inhabitants; and not so many gospel preachers. Now Jesus Christ hath commanded his ministers to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: why should we be so disproportionate in our labours? Peculiar circumstances must not be urged against positive commands: I am therefore bound, if others do not go, to make the means more proportionate to the multitude.

"To-night, reading some letters from brother Carey, in which he speaks of his wife's illness when she first came into the country, I endeavoured to realize myself not only with a sick, but a *dead* wife. The thought was like a cold dagger to my heart at first; but on recollection I considered the same God ruled in India as in Europe; and that he could either preserve her, or support me, as well there as here. My business is only to be where he would have me. Other things I leave to him. O Lord, though with timidity, yet I hope not without satisfaction, I look every possible evil in the face, and say, '*Thy will be done!*'

"17.—This is the *first* day I have set apart for extraordinary devotion in relation to my present exercise of mind. Rose earlier than usual, and began the day in prayer that God would be with me in every part of it, and grant the end I have in view may be clearly ascertained—the knowledge of his will.

"Considering the importance of the work before me, I began at the foundation of all religion, and reviewed the grounds on which I stood,—The being of a God, the relation of mankind to him, with the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures—and the review afforded me great satisfaction.* I also compared the different religions which claimed Divine origin, and found little difficulty in determining which had most internal evidence of its Divinity. I attentively read and seriously considered Doddridge's three excellent Sermons on the Evidences of the Christian Religion; which was followed by such conviction that I had hardly patience to conclude the book before I fell on my knees before God, to bless him for such a religion, established on such a basis; and I have received more *solid* satisfaction this day upon the subject than ever I did before.

"I also considered, since the gospel is true, since Christ is the Head of the church, and his will is the law of all his followers, what are the obligations of his servants in respect of the enlargement of his kingdom. I here referred to our Lord's commission, which I could not but consider as universal in its object and permanent in its obligations. I read brother Carey's remarks upon it; and as the command has never been repealed—as there are millions of beings in the world on whom the command may be exercised—as I can produce no counter-revelation—and as I lie under no natural impossibilities of performing it—I concluded that I, as a servant of Christ, was bound by this law.

"I took the narrative of my experience, and statement of my views on this subject, in my hand, and, bowing down before God, I earnestly besought an impartial and enlightened spirit. I then perused that paper; and can now say that I have (allowing for my own fallibility) not one doubt upon

* There is a wide difference between admitting these principles in theory, and *making use of them*. David might have worn Saul's accoutrements at a parade; but, in meeting Goliath, he must go forth in an armour that had been *tried*. A mariner may sit in his cabin at his ease, while the ship is in harbour; but, ere he undertakes a voyage, he must examine its soundness, and inquire whether it will endure the storms which may overtake him.

the subject. I therefore resolved to close this solemn season with reading a portion of both Testaments, and earnest prayer to God for my family, my people, the heathen world, the Society, and particularly for the success of our dear brethren Thomas and Carey, and his blessing, presence, and grace to be ever my guide and glory. Accordingly I read the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah; and with what sweetness! I never read a chapter in private with such feeling since I have been in the ministry. The eighth, ninth, tenth, twentieth, and twenty-first verses, I thought remarkably suitable.

"Read also part of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and the first chapter to the Philippians. Oh that for *me* to live may be *Christ* alone! Blessed be my dear Saviour! in prayer I have had such fellowship with him as would warm me in Greenland, comfort me in New Zealand, and rejoice me in the valley of the shadow of death!

"18.—I dreamed that I saw one of the Christian Hindoos. Oh how I loved him! I long to realize my dream. How pleasant will it be to sit down at the Lord's table with our swarthy brethren, and hear Jesus preached in their language! Surely then will come to pass the saying that is written, In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, all are ONE in him.

"Have been happy to-day in completing the manuscript of Periodical Accounts, No. I. Any thing relative to the salvation of the heathen brings a certain pleasure with it. I find I cannot pray, nor converse, nor read, nor study, nor preach with satisfaction, without reference to this subject."

"20.—Was a little discouraged on reading Mr. Zeigenbald's conferences with the Malabarians, till I recollected, what ought to be ever present to my mind, in brother Carey's words,—*'The work is God's.'*

"In the evening I found some little difficulty with the language; but, considering how merchants and captains overcome this difficulty for the sake of wealth, I sat confounded before the Lord that I should ever have indulged such a thought; and, looking up to him, I set about it with cheerfulness, and found that I was making a sensible advance, although I can never apply till eleven o'clock at night on account of my other duties.*

"Preached from 2 Kings iv. 26, 'It is well;' was much enlarged both in thought and expression. Whilst speaking of the satisfaction enjoyed by a truly pious mind when it feels itself in all circumstances and times in the hand of *a good God*, I felt that were the universe destroyed, and I the only being in it beside God, HE is fully adequate to my complete happiness; and had I been in an African wood, surrounded with venomous serpents, devouring beasts, and savage men, in such a frame I should be the subject of perfect peace and exalted joy. Yes, O my God, thou hast taught me that THOU ALONE art worthy of my confidence; and, with this sentiment fixed in my heart, I am free from all solicitude about any temporal prospects or concerns. If *thy* presence be enjoyed, poverty shall be riches, darkness light, affliction prosperity, reproach my honour, and fatigue my rest; and thou hast said, 'My presence shall go with thee.' Enough, Lord! I ask for nothing, nothing more:

"But how sad the proofs of our depravity; and how insecure the best frames we enjoy! Returning home, a wicked expression from a person who passed me caught my ear, and recurred so often to my thoughts for some

* Night studies, often continued till two or three o'clock in the morning, it is to be feared, were the first occasion of impairing Mr. Pearce's health, and brought on that train of nervous sensations with which he was afterwards afflicted. Though not much accustomed to converse on the subject, he once acknowledged to a brother in the ministry, that, owing to his enervated state, he sometimes dreaded the approach of public services to such a degree that he would rather have submitted to stripes than engage in them; and that while in the pulpit he was frequently distressed with the apprehension of falling over it.

minutes as to bring guilt upon my mind, and overwhelm me with shame before God. But I appealed to God for my hatred of all such things, secretly confessed the sin of my heart, and again ventured to the mercy-seat. On such occasions how precious a Mediator is to the soul!

"22.—I did not on the former part of the day feel my wonted ardour for the work of a missionary, but rather an inclination to consult flesh and blood, and look at the worst side of things. I did so; but when on my knees before God in prayer about it, I first considered that my judgment was still equally satisfied, and my conscience so convinced that I durst not relinquish the work for a thousand worlds! And then I thought that this dull frame had not been without its use, as I was now fully convinced that my desire to go did not arise from any fluctuation of inconstant passions, but the settled convictions of my judgment. I therefore renewed my vows unto the Lord, that, let what difficulties soever be in the way, I would, provided the Society approved, surmount them all. I felt a kind of unutterable satisfaction of mind in my resolution of leaving the decision in the hands of my brethren. May God rightly dispose their hearts. I have no doubt but he will.

"23.—Have found a little time to apply to the Bengalee language. How pleasant it is to work for God! Love transforms thorns to roses, and makes pain itself a pleasure. I never sat down to any study with such peculiar and continued satisfaction. The thought of exalting the Redeemer in this language is a spur to my application paramount to every discouragement for want of a living tutor. I have passed this day with an abiding satisfaction respecting my present views.

"24.—Oh for the enlightening, enlivening, and sanctifying presence of God to-day! It is the *second* of those days of extraordinary devotion which I have set apart for seeking God in relation to the mission. How shall I spend it? I will devote the morning to prayer, reading, and meditation; and the afternoon to visiting the wretched, and relieving the needy. May God accept my services, guide me by his counsel, and employ me for his praise!

"Having besought the Lord that he would not suffer me to deceive myself in so important a matter as that which I had now retired to consider, and exercised some confidence that he would be the rewarder of those who diligently seek him, I read the 119th Psalm at the conclusion of my prayer, and felt and wondered at the congruity of so many of the verses to the breathings of my own heart. Often with holy admiration I paused, and read, and thought, and prayed over the verse again, especially verses 20, 31, 59, 60, 112, 145, 146. 'My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.'—'I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.'

"Most of the morning I spent in seriously reading Mr. Horne's 'Letters on Missions,' having first begged of the Lord to make the perusal profitable to my instruction in the path of duty. To the interrogation, 'Which of you will forsake all, deny himself, take up his cross, and, if God pleases, die for his religion?' I replied spontaneously, Blessed be God, I am willing! Lord, help me to accomplish it!

"Closed this season with reading the 61st and 62nd chapters of Isaiah, and prayer for the church of God at large, my own congregation, the heathen, the Society, brethren Thomas and Carey, all missionaries whom God hath sent of every denomination, my own case, my wife and family, and for assistance in my work.

"The after-part of this day has been gloomy indeed. All the painful circumstances which can attend my going have met upon my heart, and formed a load almost insupportable. A number of things which have been some

time accumulating have united their pressure, and made me groan being burdened. Whilst at a prayer-meeting I looked round on my Christian friends, and said to myself, A few months more, and probably I shall leave you all! But in the deepest of my gloom I resolved, though faint, yet to pursue; not doubting but my Lord would give me strength equal to the day.

"I had scarcely formed this resolution before it occurred, my Lord and Master was a man of sorrows. Oppressed and covered with blood, he cried, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' Yet in the depth of his agonies he added, 'Thy will be done.' This thought was to me what the sight of the cross was to Bunyan's pilgrim; I lost my burden. Spent the remainder of the meeting in sweet communion with God.

"But, on coming home, the sight of Mrs. P. replaced my load. She had for some time been much discouraged at the thoughts of going. I therefore felt reluctant to say any thing on this subject, thinking it would be unpleasant to her; but though I strove to conceal it, an involuntary sigh betrayed my uneasiness. She kindly required the cause. I avoided at first an explanation, till she, guessing the reason, said to this effect:—'I hope you will be no more uneasy on *my* account. For the last two or three days I have been more comfortable than ever in the thought of going. I have considered the steps you are pursuing to know the mind of God, and I think you cannot take more proper ones. When you consult the ministers, you should represent your obstacles as strongly as your inducements; and then, if they advise your going, though the parting from my friends will be almost insupportable, yet I will make myself as happy as I can, and God can make me happy any where.'

"Should this little diary fall into the hands of a man having the soul of a missionary, circumstanced as I am, he will be the only man capable of sharing my peace, my joy, my gratitude, my rapture of soul. Thus at evening tide it is light; thus God brings his people through fire and through water into a wealthy place; thus those who ask do receive, and their joy is full. 'O love the Lord, ye his saints: there is no want to them that fear him!'

"26. Had much enlargement this morning whilst speaking on the nature, extent, and influence of Divine love; what designs it formed—with what energy it acted—with what perseverance it pursued its object—what obstacles it surmounted—what difficulties it conquered—and what sweetness it imparted under the heaviest loads and severest trials. Almost through the day I enjoyed a very desirable frame; and, on coming home, my wife and I had some conversation on the subject of my going. She said, 'Though in general the thought was painful, yet there were some seasons when she had no preference, but felt herself disposed to go or stay, as the Lord should direct.'

"This day wrote to brother Fuller, briefly stating my desires, requesting his advice, and proposing a meeting of the committee on the business. I feel great satisfaction arising from my leaving the matter to the determination of my honoured brethren, and *to God* through them.

"27.—To-day I sent a packet to our brethren in India. I could not forbear telling brother Carey all my feelings, views, and expectations; but without saying I should be entirely governed by the opinion of the Society.

"28.—Still panting to preach Jesus among my fellow sinners to whom he is yet unknown. Wrote to Dr. Rogers of Philadelphia, to-day, upon the subject with freedom and warmth, and inquired whether, whilst the people of the United States were forming societies to encourage arts, liberty, and emigration, there could not a few be found among them who would form a society for the transmission of the word of life to the benighted heathen; or, in case that could not be, whether they might not strengthen our hands in Europe, by some benevolent proof of concurring with us in a design which

they speak of with such approbation. With this I sent Horne's Letters. I will follow both with my prayers; and who can tell?

"29.—Looked over the Code of Hindoo Laws to-day. How much is there to admire in it, founded on the principles of justice! The most salutary regulations are adopted in many circumstances. But what a pity that so much excellence should be debased by laws to establish or countenance idolatry, magic, prostitution, prayers for the dead, false-witnessing, theft, and suicide. How perfect is the morality of the gospel of Jesus; and how desirable that they should embrace it! Ought not means to be used? Can we assist them too soon? There is reason to think that their shasters were penned about the beginning of the Kollee Jogue, which must be soon after the deluge: and are not 4000 years long enough for 100,000,000 of men to be under the empire of the devil?

"31.—I am encouraged to enter upon this day (which I set apart for supplicating God) by a recollection of his promises to those who seek him. If the sacred word be true, the servants of God can never seek his face in vain; and as I am conscious of my sincerity and earnest desire only to know his pleasure that I may perform it, I find a degree of confidence that I shall realize the fulfilment of the word on which he causeth me to hope.

"Began the day with solemn prayer for the assistance of the Holy Spirit in my present exercise, that so I might enjoy the spirit and power of prayer, and have my personal religion improved, as well as my public steps directed. In this duty I found a little quickening.

"I then read over the narrative of my experience, and my journal. I find my views are still the same; but my heart is much more established than when I began to write.

"Was much struck in reading Paul's words in 2 Cor. i. 17, when, after speaking of his purpose to travel for the preaching of the gospel, he saith, 'Did I then use lightness when I was thus minded? Or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea, yea, nay, nay?' The *piety* of the apostle in not purposing after the flesh, the *seriousness* of spirit with which he formed his designs, and his *steadfast* adherence to them, were in my view worthy of the highest admiration and strictest imitation.

"Thinking that I might get some assistance from David Brainerd's experience, I read his life to the time of his being appointed a missionary among the Indians. The exalted devotion of that dear man almost made me question mine. Yet, at some seasons, he speaks of sinking as well as rising. His singular piety excepted, his feelings, prayers, desires, comforts, hopes, and sorrows are my own; and if I could follow him in nothing else, I knew I had been enabled to say this with him, 'I feel exceedingly calm, and quite resigned to God respecting my future improvement (or station) *when* and *where* he pleased. My faith lifted me above the world, and removed all those mountains which I could not look over of late. I thought I wanted not the favour of man to lean upon; for I knew God's favour was infinitely better, and that it was no matter *where*, or *when*, or *how* Christ should send me, nor with what trials he should still exercise me, if I might be prepared for his work and will.'

"Read the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Felt a kind of placidity, but not much joy. On beginning the concluding prayer I had no strength to wrestle, nor power with God at all. I seemed as one desolate and forsaken. I prayed for myself, the Society, the missionaries, the converted Hindoos, the church in Cannon Street, my family, and ministry; but yet all was dulness, and I feared I had offended the Lord. I felt but little zeal for the mission, and was

about to conclude with a lamentation over the hardness of my heart, when on a sudden it pleased God to smite the rock with the rod of his Spirit, and immediately the waters began to flow. Oh what a heavenly, glorious, melting power was it! My eyes, almost closed with weeping, hardly suffer me to write. I feel it over again. Oh what a view of the love of a crucified Redeemer did I enjoy! the attractions of his cross, how powerful! I was as a giant refreshed with new wine, as to my animation: like Mary at the Master's feet, weeping for tenderness of soul; like a little child, for submission to my heavenly Father's will; and like Paul, for a victory over all self-love, and creature love, and fear of man, when these things stand in the way of my duty. The interest that Christ took in the redemption of the heathen, the situation of our brethren in Bengal, the worth of the soul, and the plain command of Jesus Christ, together with an irresistible drawing of soul, which by far exceeded any thing I ever felt before, and is impossible to be described to or conceived of by those who have never experienced it—all compelled me to *vow* that I would, by his leave, serve him among the heathen. The Bible lying open before me, (upon my knees,) many passages caught my eye, and confirmed the purposes of my heart. If ever in my life I knew any thing of the influence of the Holy Spirit, I did at this time. I was swallowed up in God. Hunger, fulness, cold, heat, friends, and enemies, all seemed nothing before God. I was in a new world. All was delightful; for Christ was all, and in all. Many times I concluded prayer, but, when rising from my knees, communion with God was so desirable that I was sweetly drawn to it again, till my animal strength was almost exhausted. Then I thought it would be pleasure to *burn* for God!

"And now while I write such a heavenly sweetness fills my soul that no exterior circumstances can remove it; and I do uniformly feel that the more I am thus, the more I pant for the service of my blessed Jesus among the heathen. Yes, my dear, my dying Lord, I am thine, thy servant; and if I neglect the service of so good a Master, I may well expect a guilty conscience in life, and a death awful as that of Judas or of Spira!

"This evening I had a meeting with my friends. Returned much dejected. Received a letter from brother Fuller, which, though he says he has many objections to my going, yet is so affectionately expressed as to yield me a gratification.

"Nov. 3.—This evening received a letter from brother Ryland, containing many objections; but contradiction itself is pleasant when it is the voice of judgment mingled with affection. I wish to remember that *I may be mistaken*, though I cannot say I am at present convinced that it is so. I am happy to find that brother Ryland approves of my referring it to the committee. I have much confidence in the judgment of my brethren, and hope I shall be perfectly satisfied with their advice. I do think, however, if they knew how earnestly I pant for the work, it would be impossible for them to withhold their ready acquiescence. O Lord, thou knowest my sincerity; and that if I go not to the work, it will not be owing to any reluctance on my part! If I stay in England, I fear I shall be a poor useless drone; or if a sense of duty prompt me to activity, I doubt whether I shall ever know inward peace and joy again. O Lord, I am, thou knowest I am *oppressed*, undertake for me!

"5.—At times to-day I have been reconciled to the thought of staying, if my brethren should advise; but at other times I seem to think I could not. I look at brother Carey's portrait as it hangs in my study: I love him in the bowels of Jesus Christ, and long to join his labours: every look calls up a hundred thoughts, all of which inflame my desire to be a fellow labourer with him in the work of the Lord. One thing, however, I have resolved

upon, that, the Lord helping me, if I cannot go abroad, I will do all I can to serve the mission at home.

"7.—This is the last day of peculiar devotion before the deciding meeting. May I have strength to wrestle with God to-day for his wisdom to preside in the committee, and by faith to leave the issue to their determination!

"I did not enjoy much enlargement in prayer to-day. My mind seems at present incapable of those sensations of joy with which I have lately been much indulged, through its strugglings in relation to my going or staying; yet I have been enabled to commit the issue into the hands of God, as he may direct my brethren, hoping that their advice will be agreeable to his will."

The result of the committee-meeting has already been related; together with the state of his mind, as far as could be collected from his letters, for some time after it. The termination of these tender and interesting exercises, and of all his other labours, in so speedy a removal from the present scene of action, may teach us not to draw any certain conclusion, as to the designs of God concerning our future labours, from the ardour or sincerity of our feelings. He may take it well that "it was in our hearts to build him a house," though he should for wise reasons have determined not to gratify us. Suffice it that in matters of EVERLASTING MOMENT he has engaged to "perfect that which concerns us." In this he hath condescended to bind himself, as by an oath, for our consolation; here, therefore, we may safely consider our spiritual desires as indicative of his designs; but it is otherwise in various instances with regard to present duty.*

CHAPTER III.

HIS EXERCISES AND LABOURS, FROM THE TIME OF HIS GIVING UP THE IDEA OF GOING ABROAD TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF HIS LAST AFFLICTION.

HAD the multiplied labours of this excellent man permitted his keeping a regular diary, we may see, by the foregoing specimen of a single month, what a rich store of truly Christian experience would have pervaded these Memoirs. We should then have been better able to trace the gradual openings of his holy mind, and the springs of that extraordinary unction of spirit, and energy of action, by which his life was distinguished. As it is, we can only collect the gleanings of the harvest, partly from memory, and partly from letters communicated by his friends.

This chapter will include a period of about four years, during which he went twice to London, to collect for the *Baptist Mission*, and once he visited Dublin, at the invitation of the *Evangelical Society* in that city.

There appears throughout the general tenor of his life a singular submissiveness to the will of God; and, what is worthy of notice, this disposition was generally most conspicuous when his own will was most counteracted. The justness of this remark is sufficiently apparent from his letter to Mrs. Pearce, of November 13, 1794, after the decision of the committee; and the

* I am aware that it becomes us to be extremely cautious in interpreting the conduct of Divine Providence; it is, however, worthy of remark, that the church at Birmingham were unwilling to part with their pastor to labour in the missionary field, and they were called to witness his affliction and to surrender him to death: while the church at Leicester cheerfully gave up their beloved Carey to the work, and in a few years after were blest with the labours of Robert Hall.—B.

same spirit was carried into the common concerns of life. Thus, about a month afterwards, when his dear Louisa was ill of a fever, he thus writes from Northampton to Mrs. Pearce:—

“MY DEAR SARAH,

Northampton, Dec. 13, 1794.

“I am just brought on the wings of celestial mercy safe to my sabbath’s station. I am well; and my dear friends here seem healthy and happy: but I feel for *you*. I long to know how our dear Louisa’s pulse beats: I fear still feverish. We must not, however, suffer ourselves to be infected with a mental fever on this account. Is she ill? It is right. Is she very ill . . . dying? It is still right. Is she gone to join the heavenly choristers? It is all right, notwithstanding our repinings . . . Repinings! No; we will not repine. It is best she should go. It is best for *her*: this we must allow. It is best for *us*: Do we expect it? Oh what poor, ungrateful, short-sighted worms are we! Let us submit, my Sarah, till we come to heaven: if we do not *then* see that it is best, let us then complain. But why do I attempt to console? Perhaps an indulgent providence has ere now dissipated your fears: or if that same *kind providence* has removed our babe, you have consolation enough in Him who suffered more than we; and more than enough to quiet all our passions in that astonishing consideration,—“*God* so loved the world, that he *spared not* his own Son.” Did God cheerfully give the holy child Jesus for us; and shall we refuse our child to him? He gave his Son to *suffer*: he takes our children to *enjoy*. Yes; to enjoy *Himself*. Yours with the tenderest regard,—S. P.”

In June, 1795, he attended the association at Kettering, partly on account of some missionary business there to be transacted. That was a season of great joy to many, especially the last forenoon previous to parting. Thence he wrote to Mrs. Pearce as follows:—

“From a pew in the house of God at Kettering, with my cup of joy running over, I address you by the hands of brother Simmons. Had it pleased Divine Providence to have permitted your accompanying me, my pleasures would have received no small addition, because I should have hoped that you would have been filled with similar consolation, and have received equal edification by the precious means of grace on which I have attended. Indeed, I never remember to have enjoyed a public meeting to such a high degree since I have been in the habit of attending upon them. Oh that I may return to you, and the dear church of God, in the *fulness* of the blessing of the gospel of Christ! I hope, my beloved, that you are not without the enjoyment of the sweetness and the supports of the blessed gospel. Oh that you may get and keep near to God, and in *Him* find infinitely more than you can possibly lose by your husband’s absence!

“Mr. Hall preached, last evening, from 1 Pet. i. 8. A most evangelical and experimental season! I was charmed and warmed. Oh that Jesus may go on to reveal himself to him as altogether lovely! I am unable to write more now. To-day I set off for Northampton, and preach there to-night. The Lord bless you!”

In July, 1795, he received a pressing invitation from the *General Evangelical Society* in Dublin to pay them a visit, and to assist in diffusing the gospel of the grace of God in that kingdom. To this invitation he replied in the following letter, addressed to Dr. M'Dowal:—

“REV. AND DEAR SIR,

Birmingham, Aug. 3, 1795.

“I received your favour of the 22nd ult., and, for the interesting reason you assign, transmit a ‘speedy answer.’ The Society, on whose behalf you wrote, I have ever considered with the respect due to the real friends of the

best of causes—the cause of God and of his Christ—a cause which embraces the most important and durable interests of our fellow men; and your name, dear sir, I have been taught to hold in more than common esteem by my dear brother and father, Messrs. Birt and Francis. The benevolent institution which you are engaged in supporting, I am persuaded, deserves more than the good wishes or prayers of your brethren in the kingdom and patience of Jesus, on this side the Channel; and it will yield me substantial pleasure to afford personal assistance in your pious labours. But for the present, I am sorry to say, I must decline your proposal, being engaged to spend a month in London this autumn on the business of our *mission society*, of which you have probably heard.

“When I formed my present connexions with the church in Birmingham, I proposed an annual freedom for six weeks from my pastoral duties; and should the ‘Evangelical Society’ express a wish for my services the ensuing year, I am perfectly inclined, God willing, to spend that time beneath their direction, and at what part of the year they conceive a visit would be most serviceable to the good design. I only request that, should this be their desire, I may receive the information as soon as they can conveniently decide, that I may withhold myself from other engagements, which may interfere with the time they may appoint. I entreat you to make my Christian respects acceptable to the gentlemen who compose the Society; and assure yourself that I am, dear sir, respectfully and affectionately, your brother, in our Lord Jesus,—S. P.”

The invitation was repeated, and he complied with their request, engaging to go over in the month of June, 1796.

A little before this journey, it occurred to Dr. Ryland that an itinerating mission into Cornwall might be of use to the cause of true religion, and that two acceptable ministers might be induced to undertake it; and that, if executed during the vacation at the Bristol academy, two of the students might supply their place. He communicated his thoughts to Mr. Pearce, who wrote thus in answer:—

“MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,

May 30, 1796.

“I thank you a thousand times for your last letter. Blessed be God, who hath put it into your heart to propose such a plan for increasing the boundaries of Zion! I have read your letter to our wisest friends here, and they heard it with great joy. The plan, the place, the mode, the persons,—all, *all* meet our most affectionate wishes. How did such a scheme never enter our minds before? Alas! we have nothing in our hearts that is worth having, save what God puts there. Do write to me when at Dublin, and tell me whether it be resolved on, when they set out, &c. I hope, ere long, to hear that as many disciples are employed in Great Britain, as the Saviour employed in Judea. When he gives the word, great will be the company of the preachers.*

“O my dear brother, let us go on still praying, contriving, labouring, defending, until the little leaven leaven the whole lump, and the small stone from the mountain fill the whole earth.

“What pleasure do those lose who have no interest in God’s gracious and holy cause! How thankful should we be that we are not strangers to the joy which the friends of Zion feel, when the Lord turneth again Zion’s captivity! I am, beyond expression, your affectionate brother in Christ,—S. P.”

* This plan was carried out by the committee of the foreign mission, and was successful. As it was felt, however, to be a departure from the constitution of the society, they originated, in 1797, a new institution,—*The Baptist Home Missionary Society*.—B.

On May 31 he set off for Dublin, and "the Lord prospered his way," so that he arrived at the time appointed; and from every account it appears that he was not only sent *in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of peace*, but that the Lord himself went with him. His preaching was not only highly acceptable to every class of hearers, but the word came from him with power; and there is abundant reason to believe that many will, through eternity, praise God for sending his message to them by this dear ambassador of Christ. His memory lives in their hearts, and they join with the other churches of Christ in deploring the loss they have sustained by his death.

He was earnestly solicited by the *Evangelical Society* to renew his visit to that kingdom in 1793. Ready to embrace every call of duty, he had signified his compliance; and the time was fixed: but the breaking out of the late rebellion prevented him from realizing his intention. This was a painful disappointment to many, who wished once more to see his face, and to have heard the glad tidings from his lips.

Such is the brief account of his visit to Dublin given by Dr. M'Dowal. The following letter was written to Mrs. Pearce, when he had been there little more than a week:—

"MY DEAR SARAH,

Dublin, June 30, 1796.

"I long to know how you do, and you will be as much concerned to know how I go on at this distance from you. I haste to satisfy your inquiries.

"I am in perfect health; am delightfully disappointed with the place and its inhabitants. I am very thankful that I came over. I have found much more religion here already than I expected to meet with during the whole of my stay. The prospect of usefulness is flattering. I have already many more friends (I hope *Christian* friends) than I can gratify by visits. Many doors are open for preaching the gospel in the city; and my country excursions will probably be few. Thus much for outline.

"But you will like to know how I spend my time, &c. Well, then, I am at the house of a Mr. Hutton, late high sheriff for the city, a gentleman of opulence, respectability, and evangelical piety. He is by profession a Calvinistic Presbyterian, an elder of Dr. M'Dowal's church; has a most amiable wife, and four children. I am very thankful for being placed here during my stay. I am quite at home—I mean as to ease and familiarity; for as to *style* of living, I neither do nor desire to equal it. Yet, in my present situation, it is convenient. It would, however, be sickening and dull, had I not a God to go to, to converse with, to enjoy, and to call *my own*. Oh it is this, *it is this*, my dearest Sarah, which gives a point to every enjoyment, and sweetens all the cup of life.

"The Lord's day after I wrote to you last, I preached for Dr. M'Dowal in the morning, at half past eleven; heard a Mr. Kilburne at five; and preached again at Plunket Street at seven. On Tuesday evening I preached at an hospital; and on Thursday evening at Plunket Street again. Yesterday for the Baptists, in the morning; Dr. M'Dowal at five; and at Plunket Street at seven.

"The hours of worship will appear singular to you: they depend on the usual *meal times*. We breakfast at ten; dine between four and five, sometimes between five and six; take tea from seven to nine; and sup from ten to twelve.

"I thank God that I possess an abiding determination to aim at the *consciences* of the people in every discourse. I have borne the most positive testimony against the prevailing evils of professors here; as sensuality, gaiety, vain amusements, neglect of the sabbath, &c.; and last night told an im-

mense crowd of professors of the first rank, 'that if they made custom and fashion their plea, they were awfully deluding their souls; for it had always been the fashion to insult God, to dissipate time, and to pursue the broad road to hell: but it would not lessen their torments there that the way to damnation was the fashion.'

"I feared my faithfulness would have given them offence: but, I am persuaded, it was the way to please the Lord; and those who I expected would be enemies are not only at peace with me, but even renounce their sensual indulgences to attend on my ministry. I do assuredly believe that God hath sent me hither for good. The five o'clock meetings are miserably attended in general. In a house that will hold one thousand five hundred or two thousand people, you will hardly see above fifty! Yesterday morning I preached on the subject of *public worship*, from Psal. v. 7, and seriously warned them against preferring their bellies to God, and their own houses to his. I was delighted and surprised, at the five o'clock meeting, to see the place nearly full. Surely this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in my eyes. Never, never did I more feel how weak I am in myself—a mere nothing; and how strong I am in the omnipotence of God. I feel a superiority to all fear, and possess a conscious dignity in being the ambassador of Christ. O help me to praise! for it is he alone who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: and still pray for me; for if he withdraw for a moment, I become as weak and unprofitable as the briars of the wilderness.

"You cannot think how much I am supported by the assurance that I have left a *praying people* at Birmingham; and I believe that, in answer to their prayers, I have hitherto been wonderfully assisted in the public work, as well as enjoyed much in private devotion.

"I have formed a most pleasing acquaintance with several serious young men in the university here, and with two of the fellows of the college—most pious gentlemen indeed, who have undergone a world of reproach for Christ and his gospel, and have been forbidden to preach in the churches by the archbishop; but God has raised another house for them here, where they preach with much success, and have begun a meeting in the college, which promises fresh prosperity to the cause of Jesus."

The following particulars, in addition to the above, are taken partly from some notes in his own hand-writing, and partly from the account given by his friend Mr. Summers, who accompanied him during the latter part of his visits.

At his first arrival, the congregations were but thinly attended, and the Baptist congregation in particular, amongst whom he delivered several discourses. It much affected him to see the whole city given to sensuality and worldly conformity; and especially to find those of his own denomination amongst the lowest and least affected with their condition. But the longer he continued, the more the congregations increased, and every opportunity became increasingly interesting, both to him and them. His faithful remonstrances, and earnest recommendations of prayer-meetings to his Baptist friends, though at first apparently ill received, were well taken in the end; and he had the happiness to see in them some hopeful appearances of a return to God. On June the 20th he wrote to his friend Mr. Summers as follows:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"If you mean to abide by my opinion, I say, Come to Dublin, and come directly! I have been most delightfully disappointed. I expected darkness, and behold light; sorrow, and I have had cause for abundant joy. I thank

God that I came hither, and hope that many, as well as myself, will have cause to praise him. Never have I been more deeply taught my own nothingness—never hath the power of God more evidently rested upon me. The harvest here is great indeed; and the Lord of the harvest hath enabled me to labour in it with delight.

‘I praise him for all that is past;
I trust him for all that’s to come.’

“The Lord hath of late been doing great things for Dublin. Several of the young men in the college have been awakened; and two of the *fellows* are sweet evangelical preachers. One of them is of a spirit serene as the summer’s evening, and sweet as the breath of May. I am already intimate with them, and have spent several mornings in college with various students who bid fair to be faithful watchmen on Jerusalem’s walls. But I hope you will come, and then you will see for yourself. If not, I will give you some pleasant details when we meet in England.”

Mr. Summers complied with this invitation; and of the last seven or eight days of Mr. Pearce’s continuance at Dublin, he himself thus writes:—

“Monday, July 4.—At three in the afternoon I went with my friend, Mr. Summers, to Mr. K.’s. Spent a very agreeable day. Miss A. K. remarked two wonders in Dublin:—A praying society composed of students at college, and another of lawyers.—The family were called together. We sung: I read, and expounded the twelfth chapter of Isaiah; and prayed.—At seven we went to a prayer-meeting at Plunket Street—there was a very large attendance. Mr. R. and Mr. S. prayed; and I spoke from Rom. x. 12, 13, “There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”—Many seemed affected.—After I had closed the opportunity, I told them some of my own experience, and requested that, if any present wished for conversation, they would come to me, either that evening or on Thursday evening, in the vestry. Five persons came in: one had been long impressed with religion, but could never summon courage enough to open her heart before. Another, a Miss W., attributed her first impressions, under God, to my ministry; and told me that her father had regularly attended of late, and that her mother was so much alarmed as to be almost in despair. Poor girl! she seemed truly in earnest about her own soul, and as much concerned for her parents.—The next had possessed a serious concern for some time, and of late had been much revived.—One young lady, a Miss H., staid in the meeting-house, exceedingly affected indeed. Mr. K. spoke to her.—She said she would speak to me on Thursday.

“Tuesday, 5th.—Went to Leislip. At seven preached to a large and affected auditory.

“Wednesday, 6th.—Mr. H. and myself went to Mrs. M’G., to inquire about the young lady who was so much affected at the meeting. Mrs. M’G. said her mother and sister were pious; that she had been very giddy; but that last Lord’s day she was seriously awakened to a sense of sin; had expressed her delight in religion, and fled for refuge to the blood of Jesus.—Her sister was introduced to me; a sweetly pious lady.—I agreed to wait for an interview with the young lady at Mr. H.’s., in Eccles Street, to-morrow.

“Thursday, 7th.—Miss H., her sister, and Mrs. M’G. came to Eccles Street.—A most delightful interview. Seldom have I seen such proficiency in so short a time.—That day week, at Plunket Street, she received her first serious impressions. Her concern deepened at Mass Lane, on Lord’s day

morning—more so in the evening at Plunket Street—but most of all on Monday night. I exhorted them to begin a prayer and experience meeting; and they agreed. Blessed be God! this strengthens my hands greatly.—At seven o'clock preached at Plunket Street, from Jer. l. 4, 5, 'Going and weeping—they shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.' A full house; and an impressive season. Tarried after the public services were ended, to converse on religion. The most pleasing case was that of a young man of Mr. D.'s.

"Saturday, 9th.—Went with my friend, Mr. S., to call on Miss H.—Found her at her mother's.—We first passed the door.—She ran out after us.—Seemed happy; but agitated. Ran, and called her mother.—Soon we saw the door of the parlour open, and a majestic lady appeared; who, as she entered the room, thus accosted me:—'Who art thou, O blessed of the Lord? Welcome to the widow's house! Accept the widow's thanks for coming after the child whom thou hast begotten in the gospel!'—I was too much overcome to do more than take by the hand the aged saint. A solemn silence ensued for a minute or two; when the old lady, recovering, expressed the fulness of her satisfaction respecting the reality of the change effected in her daughter, and her gratitude for great refreshment of her own soul, by means of my poor labours. She said she had known the Lord during forty years, being called under the ministry of John Fisher, in the open air, when on a visit to an officer, who was her brother-in-law. She told us much of her experience, and promised to encourage the prayer-meeting which I proposed to be held in her house every Lord's day evening. They are to begin to-morrow, after preaching.—It was a pleasant meeting; and we returned with pleasure to Eccles Street. After we rose up to come away, the old lady affectionately said, 'May the good-will of Him who dwelt in the bush attend you wherever you go, for ever and ever.'"

The young lady, some months after, wrote to Mr. S., and says, amongst other things, "I have great reason to be thankful for the many blessings the Lord has been pleased to bestow upon me, and in particular for his sending Mr. Pearce to this city; and that through his means I have been convinced of sin. I am happy to inform you that, through grace, I am enabled to walk in the narrow path. The Lord has taken away all desire for worldly company; all my desires, now, are to attend on the means of grace. Blessed be his name! I often find him present in them. My mother and I often remember the happy time we spent in your company at our house. She often speaks of it with great pleasure, and blesses the Lord for the change which grace has wrought in me."

"Lord's day, 10th (the last sabbath)—Preached in the morning at Mary's Abbey, from Job xxxiii. 27, 28, 'He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.'—A happy season.—In the afternoon, having dined with Mr. W., he took me to Swift's Alley, the Baptist place of worship, where I gave an exhortation on brotherly love, and administered the Lord's supper. At Mr. W.'s motion, the church requested me to look out a suitable minister for them. In the evening I preached at Plunket Street, from 2 Tim. i. 18, 'The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day!'—A very solemn season.

"Monday, 11th.—Met the dear Christian friends, for the last time, at a prayer-meeting in Plunket Street.—The Lord was there!—Several friends spent the evening with us afterwards at Mr. H.'s.

"Tuesday, 12th.—Went on board at four; arrived at Liverpool on Thursday, and safely at home on Friday, July 15th, 1796. Blessed be the Pre-

server of men, the Saviour of sinners, and the help of his servants, for evermore. Amen, amen."

Some time after, writing to his friend who accompanied him, he says, "I have received several letters from Dublin: two from Master B., one from Miss H., one from M., three or four from our Baptist friends, and some from others whom I cannot recollect.—Mr. K. lately called on me, in his way from Bath to Holyhead. We talked of you, and of our Lord, and did not part till we had presented ourselves before the throne."

During his labours in Dublin, he was strongly solicited to settle in a very flattering situation in the neighbourhood;* and a very liberal salary was offered him. On his positively declining it, mention was made of only *six months* of the year. When that was declined, *three months* were proposed; and when he was about to answer this in the negative, the party refused to receive his answer, desiring him to take time to consider of it. He did so; and though he entertained a very grateful sense of the kindness and generosity expressed by the proposal, yet, after the maturest deliberation, he thought it his duty to decline it. Mr. Pearce's modesty prevented his talking on such a subject; but it was known at the time by his friend who accompanied him, and, since his death, has been frequently mentioned as an instance of his disinterested spirit.

His friends at Birmingham were ready to think it hard that he should be so willing to leave them to go on a mission among the heathen; but they could not well complain, and much less think ill of him, when they saw that such a willingness was more than could be effected by the most flattering prospects of a worldly nature, accompanied, too, with promising appearances of religious usefulness.

About a month after his return from Dublin, Mr. Pearce addressed a letter to Mr. Carey, in which he gives some further account of Ireland, as well as of some other interesting matters:—

"Birmingham, Aug. 12, 1796.

"O my dear brother, did you but know with what feelings I resume my pen, freely to correspond with you after receiving your very affectionate letter to myself, and perusing that which you sent by the same conveyance to the Society, I am sure you would persuade yourself that I have no common friendship for you, and that your regards are at least returned with equal ardour.

"I fear (I had almost said) that I shall never see your face in the flesh; but if any thing can add to the joy which the presence of Christ, and conformity, perfect conformity to him, will afford in heaven, surely the certain prospect of meeting with my dear brother Carey there is one of *the greatest*. Thrice happy should I be if the providence of God would open a way for my partaking of your labours, your sufferings, and your pleasures, on this side the eternal world; but all my brethren here are of opinion that I shall be more useful at home than abroad; and I, though reluctantly, submit. Yet I am truly with you in spirit. My heart is at Mudnabatty, and at times I even hope to find my body there: but with the Lord I leave it; *He* knows my wishes, my motives, my regret; *He* knows all my soul; and, depraved as it is, I feel an inexpressible satisfaction that he does know it. However, it is a humbling thought to me that he sees I am unfit for such a station, and unworthy of such an honour as to bear his name among the heathen. But I must be thankful still, that though he appoints me not to a post in foreign service, he will allow me to stand sentinel at home. In this situation may I have grace to be faithful unto death!

* At the *Black Rock*, the residence of some of the most genteel families in the vicinity of Dublin.

"I hardly wonder at your being pained on account of the effects produced in the minds of your European friends, by the news of your engagement in the indigo business, because I imagine you are ignorant of the process of that matter among us. When I received the news, I glorified God in sincerity on account of it, and gave most hearty thanks to him for his most gracious appearance on your behalf: but at the same time I feared lest, through that undertaking, the work of the mission might in some way or other be impeded. The same impression was made on the minds of many others; yet no blame was attached, in our view, to you. Our minds were only alarmed for the future—not disposed to censure for the past. Had you seen a faithful copy of the prayers, the praises, and the conversation of the day in which your letters were read, I know you would not have entertained one unkind thought of the Society towards you. Oh, no, my dear brother, far be it from us to lay an atom upon your spirits of a painful nature. Need I say, we do love you, we do respect you, we do confide too much in you, to *design* the smallest occasion of distress to your heart. But I close this subject. In future we will atone for an expression that might bear a harsh construction. We will strengthen, we will support, we will comfort, we will encourage you in your arduous work; all, *all* shall be love and kindness; glory to God, and good will to men. If I have done aught that is wrong, as an individual, pardon me; if we have said aught amiss, as a society, pardon us. Let us forbear one another in love, 'forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.'

"By the time this reaches you, I hope you will have received Nos. I. and II. of Periodical Accounts. Should you find any thing in them which you think had better be omitted, pray be free in mentioning it, and in future your instructions shall be fully attended to. We have taken all the pains, and used all the caution, in our power to render them unexceptionable; but you can better judge in some respects than we. If you should not approve of all, (though we are not conscious of any thing that you will disapprove,) you will not be offended, but believe we have done our best, and, with your remarks, hope to do better still.

"With pleasure, approaching to rapture, I read the last accounts you sent us. I never expected immediate success; the prospect is truly greater than my most sanguine hopes. 'The kingdom of heaven is like to a *little* leaven hid in three measures of meal, till the *whole* is leavened. Blessed be God! the leaven is in the meal, and its influence is already discoverable. A great God is doing great things by you. Go on, my dearest brother, go on; God will do greater things than these. Jesus is worthy of a *world* of praise: and shall *Hindustan* not praise him? Surely he shall see of the travail of his soul *there*, and the sower and the reaper shall rejoice together. Already the empire of darkness totters, and soon it shall doubtless fall. Blessed be the labourers in this important work; and blessed be *He* who giveth them hearts and strength to labour, and promises that they shall not labour in vain!

"Do not fear the want of money. *God* is for us, and the silver and the gold are his; and so are the hearts of those who possess the most of it; I will travel from the Land's End to the Orkneys but we will get money enough for all the demands of the mission. I have never had a fear on that head; a little exertion will do wonders; and past experience justifies every confidence. *Men* we only want; and God shall find them for us in due time.

"Is brother Fountain arrived? We hope he will be an acceptable remittance, and *viva voce*, compensate for the lack of epistolary communications.

"I rejoice in contemplating a church of our Lord Jesus Christ in Bengal,

formed upon his own plan. Why do not the Hindoo converts join it? Lord, help their unbelief! But perhaps the drop is now withheld that you may by and by have the shower, and lift up your eyes and say, 'These, whence came they? They fly as clouds, or as doves to their windows.' For three years we read of few baptized by the first disciples of our Lord; but, on the fourth, three thousand, and five thousand, openly avowed him. The Lord send *you* such another Pentecost!

"I intend to write my dear brother a long letter. It will prove my *desire* to gratify him, if it do no more. I wish that I knew in what communications your other correspondents will be most deficient; then I would try to supply their omissions.

"I will begin with myself: but I have nothing good to say. I think I am the most vile, ungrateful servant that ever Jesus Christ employed in his church. At some times, I question whether I ever knew the grace of God in truth; and at others I hesitate on the most important points of Christian faith. I have lately had peculiar struggles of this kind with my own heart, and have often half concluded to speak no more in the name of the Lord. When I am preparing for the pulpit, I fear I am going to avow fables for facts, and doctrines of men for the truths of God. In conversation I am obliged to be silent, lest my tongue should belie my heart. In prayer I know not what to say, and at times think prayer altogether useless. Yet I cannot wholly surrender my hope, or my profession.—Three things I find, above all others, tend to my preservation:—First, A recollection of a time when, *at once*, I was brought to abandon the practice of sins which the fear of damnation could never bring me to relinquish before. Surely, I say, this must be the finger of God, according to the Scripture doctrine of regeneration:—Secondly, I feel such a consciousness of guilt, that nothing but the gospel scheme can satisfy my mind respecting the hope of salvation.—Thirdly, I see that what true devotion does appear in the world seems only to be found among those to whom Christ is precious.

"But I frequently find a backwardness to secret prayer, and much deadness in it; and it puzzles me to see how this can be consistent with a life of grace. However, I resolve, that, let what will become of me, I will do all I can for God while I live, and leave the rest to him; and this I usually experience to be the best way to be at peace.

"I believe, that if I were more fully given up to God, I should be free from these distressing workings of mind; and then I long to be a missionary, where I should have temptations to nothing but to abound in the work of the Lord, and lay myself entirely out for him. In such a situation, I think, pride would have but little food, and faith more occasion for exercise; so that the spiritual life and inward religion would thrive better than they do now.

"At times, indeed, I do feel, I trust, genuine contrition, and sincerely lament my short-comings before God. Oh the sweets that accompany true repentance! Yes, I love to be abased before God. 'There it is I find my blessing.' May the Lord daily and hourly bring me low, and keep me so.

"As to my public work, I find, whilst engaged in it, little cause to complain for want either of matter or words. My labours are acceptable and not altogether unprofitable to the hearers; but what is this to me, if my own soul starve whilst others are fed by me? O my brother, I need your prayers; and I feel a great satisfaction in the hope that you do not forget me. Oh that I may be kept faithful unto death! Indeed, in the midst of my struggles, a gleam of hope that I shall at last awake in the likeness of God affords me greater joy than words can express. To be with Christ is far better than to continue sinning here; but if the Lord hath any thing to do by me, His will be done.

"I have never so fully opened my case to any one before. Your freedom on similar topics encourages me to make my complaint to you, and I think if you were near me I should feel great relief in revealing to you all my heart. But I shall fatigue you with my moanings, so I will have done on this subject.

"It is not long since I returned from a kind of mission to Ireland. A society is established in Dublin for the purpose of inviting from England ministers of various denominations to assist in promoting the interest of the kingdom of Christ there. Some of our Baptist brethren had been there before me, as Rippon, Langdon, Francis, and Birt; and I think the plan is calculated for usefulness. I have, at Dr. Rippon's request, sent him some remarks on my visit for the Register, but as it is probable you will receive this before that comes to hand, I will say something of my excursion here.

"Having engaged to spend six Lord's days in that kingdom, I arrived there the day before the first sabbath in June. I first made myself acquainted with the general state of religion in Dublin. I found there were four Presbyterian congregations; two of these belong to the southern presbytery, and are Arians or Socinians; the other two are connected with the northern presbytery, and retain the Westminster confession of faith. One of these latter congregations is very small, and the minister, though orthodox, appears to have but little success. The other is large and flourishing; the place of worship is ninety feet by seventy, and in a morning well filled. Their times of public service are at half-past eleven and five. In the afternoon the stated congregations are small indeed; for five o'clock is the usual dining-hour in Dublin, and few of the hearers would leave their dinners for the gospel. Dr. McDowal is the senior pastor of this church—a very affectionate, spiritual man. The junior is Mr. Horner. The Doctor is a warm friend to the Society at whose request I went over to Ireland.

"There is one congregation of Burgher seceders, and another of Anti-burgliers. The latter will not hear any man who is not of their own cast; the former are much more liberal. I preached for them once, and they affectionately solicited a repetition of my services.

"Lady Huntingdon's connexion has one society here, the only one in the kingdom, perhaps, except at Sligo, where there is another. It is not large, and I fear rather declining. There is not one Independent church in the whole kingdom. There were ten Baptist societies in Ireland; but they are now reduced to six: and are, I fear, still on the decline.

"The inhabitants of Dublin seem to be chiefly composed of two classes; the one assumes the appearance of opulence, the other exhibits marks of the most abject poverty; and as there are no parishes in Ireland which provide for the poor, many die every year for want of the common necessities of life.

"Most of the rich are by profession protestants; the poor are nearly all papists, and strongly prejudiced against the Reformed religion. Their ignorance and superstition are scarcely inferior to your miserable Hindoos. On Midsummer day I had an affecting proof of the latter. On the public road, about a mile from Dublin, is a well, which was once included in the precincts of a priory dedicated to St. John of Jerusalem. This well is in high repute for curing a number of bodily complaints, and its virtues are said to be the most efficacious on the saint's own day. So from twelve o'clock at night, for twenty-four hours, it becomes the rendezvous for all the lame, blind, and otherwise diseased people, within a circuit of twenty miles. Here they brought old and young, and applied the 'holy water' both internally and externally; some by pouring, some by immersion, and all by drinking whilst, for the good of those who could not attend in person, their friends filled bottles with the efficacious water to use at home. Several I saw on

their knees before the well at their devotions, which were not unfrequently interrupted with a glass of whiskey. With this they were supplied from a number of dealers in that article, who kept standings all round the well.

"Near to the spot was a church-yard, where great numbers kneeled upon the tombs of their deceased relatives, and appeared earnestly engaged in praying for the repose of their souls.

"It was truly a lamentable sight. My heart ached at their delusions, whilst I felt gratitude I hope unfeigned for an acquaintance with the 'water of life, of which if a man drink he shall live for ever!'

"There are few or none of the middle class to connect the rich and the poor, so that favourable access to them is far more difficult than to the lower orders of the people in England; and their priests hold them in such bondage, that if a catholic servant only attend on family-worship in a protestant house, penance must be performed for the offence."

Mention has already been made of his having "formed a pleasing acquaintance with several serious young gentlemen of the university of Dublin." The following letter was addressed to one of them, the Rev. Mr. Matthias, a few months after his return:—

"DEAR BROTHER MATTHIAS,

"I have been employed this whole day in writing letters to Dublin; and it is the first day I have been able to redeem for that purpose. I will not consume a page in apology. Let it suffice to say that necessity, not disinclination, has detained from my Irish friends those proofs of my gratitude and esteem which in other circumstances I ought to have presented three months ago. I thought this morning of answering all their demands before I slept; but I have written so many sheets, and all full, that I find my eyes and my fingers both fail; and I believe this must close my intercourse with Dublin this day. When I shall be able to complete my purpose I do not know. To form friendships with good men is pleasant; but to maintain *all that communion* which friendship expects is in some cases very difficult. Happy should I be could I meet my Irish friends *in propria persona*, instead of sitting in solitude, and maintaining, by the tedious medium of the pen, this distant intercourse. But "the Lord he shall choose our inheritance for us." Were all the planets of our system embodied and placed in close association, the light would be greater and the object grander; but then usefulness and systematic beauty consist in their dispersion; and what are we, my brother, but so many satellites to Jesus, the great Sun of the Christian system? Some, indeed, like burning Mercuries, keep nearer the luminary, and receive more of its light and heat, whilst others, like the ringed planet, or the Georgium Sidus, preserve a greater distance, and reflect a greater portion of his light; yet if, amidst all this diversity, *they belong to the system*, two things may be affirmed of all:—all keep true to one centre, and borrow whatever light they have from one source. True it is, that the further they are from the sun, the longer are they in performing their revolutions: and is not this exemplified in us? The closer we keep to Jesus, the more brilliant are our graces; the more cheerful and active are our lives: but, alas! we are all comets; we all move in eccentric orbits: at one time glowing beneath the ray Divine, at another congealing and freezing into icicles. 'Oh what a miracle to man is man!'

"Little did I think when I begun this letter that I should thus have indulged myself in allegory: but true friendship, I believe, always dictates extempore; and my friends must never expect from me a studied epistle. They can meet with better thoughts than I can furnish them with, in any

bookseller's shop. It is not the dish, however well it may be cooked, that gives the relish, but the sweet sauce of friendship; and this I think sometimes makes even nonsense palatable.

"But I have some questions to put to you:—first, how are all my college friends, Messrs. Walker, Maturin, Hamilton, &c.? How is their health? But, chiefly, how are the interests of religion among you? Are there any praying students added to your number? Do all those you thought well of continue to justify their profession? You know what it is that interests me. Pray tell me all, whether it makes me weep or rejoice.

"I hope Mr. H—'s ministry was blessed in Dublin. Do you know any instances of it? We must sow in hope, and I trust that we shall all gather fruit to eternal life, even where the buddings have never appeared to us in this world. How is it with your own soul? I thank God, I never, I think, rejoiced habitually so much in him as I have done of late. '*God is love.*' That makes me happy. I rejoice that God reigns; that he reigns over all; that he reigns over *me*; over my crosses, my comforts, my family, my friends, my senses, my mental powers, my designs, my words, my preaching, my conduct; that he is *God over all*, blessed for ever. I am willing to live, yet I long to die, to be freed from all error and all sin. I have nothing else to trouble me; no other cross to carry. The sun shines without all day long; but I am sensible of internal darkness. Well, through grace it shall be all light by and by. Yes, you and I shall be *angels* of light; all Mercuries then; all near the Sun; always in motion; always glowing with zeal, and flaming with love. Oh for the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness!

'Oh what love and concord there,
And what sweet harmony
In heaven above, where happy souls
Adore thy majesty!
Oh how the heavenly choirs all sing
To him who sits enthroned above!
What admiring!
And aspiring!
Still desiring:
Oh how I long to taste this feast of love!

"Will you tell brother M—— that I wait an opportunity of sending a parcel to him? In that I will enclose a letter. My very affectionate respects to him and Mr. H——, and all my college friends as though named. If you be not weary of such an eccentric correspondent, pray do not be long ere you write to your unworthy but affectionate brother in Christ,—S. P."

Awhile after this, he thus writes to his friend Mr. Summers:—

"December, 1796. I rejoice that you have been supported under and brought through your late trials. I do not wonder at it; for it is no more than God has *promised*: and though we may well wonder that he promises any thing, yet his performance is no just ground of surprise: and when we find ourselves so employed, we had better turn our wonder to our own unbelief, that for one moment suspected God would not be as good as his word.

"I have been lately more than ever delighted with the thought that God *hath engaged* to do any thing for such worms as we. I never studied the deistical controversy so much, nor ever rejoiced in revelation more. Alas! what should we know if God had not condescended to teach us? Paul very justly remarks, that no one knoweth any thing of God, but the Spirit of God, and he to whom the Spirit revealeth him. Now the Spirit hath revealed God in the Bible; but to an unbeliever the Bible is a sealed book. He can know nothing from a book that he looks upon as an imposture, and yet

there is no other book in which God is revealed: so that to reject the Bible is to immerse ourselves in darkness, and, whilst professing to be wise, actually to become fools: whereas no sooner do we believe what the Spirit saith, than unto us is God revealed, and in his light do we see light."

To the above may be added a few extracts of letters which he addressed to his friends in 1797 and 1798.

TO DR. RYLAND.

"March, 1797.

"During the last three weeks I have, at times, been very poorly, with colds, &c. Am better now, and have been all along assisted in going through my public duties. Let us continue to pray for each other till death makes it a needless service. How uncertain is life, and what a blessing is death to a saint! I seem lately to feel a kind of *affection* for death. Methinks if it were visible I could embrace it. 'Welcome herald, that bids the prisoner be free; that announces the dawn of everlasting day; that bids the redeemed come to Zion with everlasting joy, to be beyond the reach of an erroneous judgment and a depraved heart.' To believe, to feel, to speak, to act *exactly* as God will have me; to be wholly absorbed and taken up with him; this, nothing short of this, can make my bliss complete. But *all this is mine*. Oh the height, the depth, the length, the breadth of redeeming love! It conquers my heart, and constrains me to yield myself a living sacrifice, acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ.—My dear brother, we have had many happy meetings on earth: the best is in reserve.

'No heart upon earth can conceive
The bliss that in heaven they share;
Then who this dark world would not leave,
And cheerfully die to be there?'

"Oh how full of love, and joy, and praise shall we be when that happy state is ours! Well, yet a little while, and He that shall come will come. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! My dear brother, forgive the hasty effusions of a heart that loves you in the bowels of Jesus, and is always happy in testifying itself to be affectionately yours,—S. P."

TO MR. CAVE.*

On the falling away of some who had promised fair in religion.

—, 1797.

"I thank you, my dear brother, for the confidence you repose in me, the affection you have for me, and the freedom with which you write to me. Assure yourself that I sincerely sympathize in the cutting events which you have lately experienced. Trying indeed! Your heart must bleed. Yet be not discouraged in your work. The more *Satan* opposes *Christ*, the more let *us* oppose *him*. He comes with great violence because his time is short. His kingdom is on the decline; his strong holds are besieged, and he knows they must soon be taken. Whilst it lasts, he is making desperate sallies on the armies of the Lamb. It is no great wonder that he fights and wounds a raw recruit now and then, who strays from the camp, and, thoughtless of the danger, keeps not close by the Captain's tent. I hope our glorious Leader will heal the wounded, and rescue the captive. He is sure to make reprisals. Christ will have ten to one. You will yet see his arm made bare.

* Mr. Cave was a young man, licensed to the ministry by Mr. Pearce's church, and became the immediate successor of Mr. Carey, at Leicester. His life was highly honourable to the cause of Jesus Christ, though he was never very popular as a preacher. For many years before his death he taught a respectable school at Birmingham, and occasionally supplied the pulpits of his brethren. In the early part of the present year [1844] he was found dead in his bed, at the age of more than seventy years.—B.

He shall go forth like a man of war. The prisoners shall be redeemed, and the old tyrant shall be cast into the bottomless pit. Be of good cheer, my fellow soldier. The cause is not ours, but God's. Let us endure hardness, and still fight the good fight of faith. At last we shall come off conquerors through him who hath loved us.

"I hope you have some causes for joy as well as grief. I trust though one, or two, or three fall, the tens and the twenties stand their ground. Oh do what you can to cheer them under the common trial. Let them not see a faint heart in *you*. Fight manfully still. Tell them to watch the more; to pray the harder; to walk the closer with God. So out of the eater shall come forth meat, and sweetness out of the strong."

TO MR. BATES AND MRS. BARNES,

Who had been burnt out of their residence.

"The many expressions of Christian friendship which I received from you, and your affectionate families, during my late visit to London, will often excite grateful recollection in future, as they have almost daily since I parted from you; and though I do not write this avowedly as a mere letter of acknowledgment, yet I wish it to assure you that I am not forgetful of my friends, nor unthankful for their kindness. May all the favour you show to the servants of our common Lord, for his sake, be amply recompensed in present peace, and future felicity, when the promise of Him who cannot lie shall be fulfilled,—'A cup of cold water given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall not lose its reward.'

"But whilst you, my dear friends, live 'in hope of the glory' that remains 'to be revealed,' I am persuaded that you expect *all* as the fruit of sovereign mercy, which first forms us to the mind of Christ, then accepts, and then rewards. Truly, if sinners be rewarded, it must be 'of grace, and not of debt.' Yet it is a mercy of unspeakable magnitude that grace should establish a connexion between obedience and enjoyment, such a connexion as at once insures joy to the believer, and glory to Christ.

"Oh that our thoughts, our affections, our desires, may be much in heaven! *Here*, you have been taught, is 'no continuing city,' no certain place of abode; and though you have been taught it awfully in flames, yet if you learn it effectually, the terror of the means will be conquered by the excellency and glory of the consequences. Yes, my friends, 'in heaven we have a better and enduring substance;' the apartments there are more spacious; the society more sweet; the enjoyments more perfect; and all to last for ever. Well may Christians 'rejoice in hope of the glory of God!'"

TO MR. AND MRS. BOWYER, PALL MALL.

"Nov. 17, 1797.

"Blessed be 'the Preserver of men' for all his goodness to dear Mr. and Mrs. B——. With theirs shall my gratitude also ascend, whilst separated from their society; and with theirs shall it more warmly and permanently ascend, when we meet to form a part of the 'general assembly, and church of the first-born.'

"I do not return to London this autumn, but I mean to visit Portsmouth. I must be indebted to you for my directions. We shall be very happy to see you at Luke Street; but *Wales* I suppose will be the vortex that will swallow up much of your time. Well, so *you* are happy, we must be disinterested enough to be satisfied, although we be denied a personal participation.

"Let us not forget that we are Christians; and Christians profess a hope

of a better country than *Cambria* contains. *There* we all belong. Already citizens by privilege, we shall be so by possession soon.

‘Roll swiftly round, ye wheels of time,
And bring the welcome day!’

“In hope of greeting you both in that good land, I remain most affectionately yours,—S. P.”

TO DR. RYLAND.

“Nov. 17, 1797.

“I feel much for you in relation both to the duties and trials of your present situation ; at the same time I bless God who fixed you in it, because I am persuaded that it will be for his glory in the churches of Christ. And though none but those whose hands are full of religious concerns can guess at your difficulties, yet our blessed Redeemer knows them all. O my brother, you are travailing for him who redeemed you by his blood, who sympathizes with you, and who will graciously crown you at last. Small as my trials are, I would turn smith, and work at the anvil and the forge, rather than bear them for any other master than *Christ*. Yet, were they ten thousand times as many as they are, the thought of their being for Him, I trust, would sweeten them all.

“I have reason to be very thankful for much pleasure of late, both as a Christian and a minister. I have never felt so deeply my need of a Divine Redeemer, and seldom possessed such solid confidence that he is mine. I want more and more to become a little child, to dwindle into nothing in my own esteem, to renounce my own wisdom, power, and goodness, and simply look to and live upon Jesus for all. I am ashamed that I have so much pride, so much self-will. O my Saviour! make me ‘meek and lowly in heart;’ in this alone I find ‘rest to my soul.’

“I could say much of what Immanuel has done for my soul ; but I fear lest even this should savour of vanity. When shall I be like my Lord? Oh welcome death, when I have nothing more to do for Christ! To him, till then, may I live every day and every hour. Rather may I be annihilated than not live to him.

“You will rejoice with me to hear that we have a pleasing prospect as a church. Several very hopeful and some very valuable characters are about to join us. Lord, carry on thy work!”

TO MRS. PEARCE,

On the dangerous illness of one of the children.

“Portsmouth, Jan. 29, 1798.

“Ignorant of the circumstances of our dear child, how shall I address myself to her dearer mother? With a fluttering heart, and a trembling hand, I, in this uncertainty, resume my pen. One consideration tranquillizes my mind,—I and mine are in the hands of *God*; the wise, the good, the indulgent Parent of mankind! Whatever *he* does is best. I am prepared for all his will, and hope that I shall never have a feeling whose language is not, ‘Thy will be done.’

“I am most kindly entertained here by Mr. and Mrs. Shoveller; and, except my dear Sarah’s presence, feel myself at home. *They* have had greater trials than *we* can at present know. They have attended *seven* children to the gloomy tomb; they have been supported beneath their loss by Him who hath said, ‘As thy days, so shall thy strength be.’ Mrs. S. tells me she ‘blessed God for all.’ May my dear Sarah be enabled to do the same, whatever the result may prove. To-morrow I expect another letter

from you; yet, lest you should too much feel my absence, I will not delay forwarding this a single post. Oh that it may prove in some degree a messenger of consolation!

"Yesterday I preached three times: God was very good. I received your letter before the first service: you may be assured that I bore you on my heart in the presence of my Lord and yours; nor shall I pray in vain: He will either restore the child, or support you under the loss of it. I dare not pray with importunity for any *earthly good*; for 'who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?' But *strength* to bear the loss of earthly comforts he has *promised*: for *that* I importune; and *that*, I doubt not, will be granted.

"In a house directly opposite to the window before which I now write, a *wife*, a *mother*, is just departed! Why am I not a bereaved husband? Why are not my children motherless? When we compare our condition with our wishes, we often complain; but if we compare it with that of many around us, our complaints will be exchanged for gratitude and praise."

TO R. BOWYER, ESQ.

"Feb. 14, 1798.

"Not a day has hurried by, since I parted with my dear friends in Pall Mall, but they have been in my affectionate remembrance; but, not being able to speak with any satisfaction respecting our dear child, I have withheld myself from imparting new anxieties to bosoms already alive to painful sensibility.

"At length, however, a gracious God puts it in my power to say that there is hope. After languishing between life and death for many days, she now seems to amend. We flatter ourselves that she has passed the crisis, and will yet be restored to our arms; but parental fears forbid too strong a confidence. It may be that our most merciful God saw that the shock of a sudden removal would be too strong for the tender feelings of a mother; and so by degrees prepares for the stroke which must fall at last. However, she is in the best hands, and we are, I hope, preparing for submission to whatever may be the blessed will of God.

"I was brought home in safety, and feel myself in much better health in consequence of my journey. Oh that it may be all consecrated to my Redeemer's praise!

"Happy should I be if I could oftener enjoy your friendly society; but we must wait for the full accomplishment of our social wishes till we come to that better world for which Divine grace is preparing us.—*There* our best, our brightest hopes, and there our warmest affections must be found. Could we have all we want below, we should be reluctant to ascend, when Jesus calls us home. No, this is not our rest; it is polluted with sin, and dashed with sorrow: but though our pains in themselves are evil, yet our God turns the curse into a blessing, and makes all that we meet with accomplish our good.

"What better can I wish, my friends, than the humble place of Mary, or the happy rest of John! Faith can enjoy them both, till actually we fall at the Saviour's feet, and lean upon his bosom, when we see him as he is.

'Oh the delights, the heavenly joys,
The glories of the place,
Where Jesus sheds the brightest beams
Of his o'erflowing grace!'"

CHAPTER IV.

AN ACCOUNT OF HIS LAST AFFLICTION, AND THE HOLY AND HAPPY
EXERCISES OF HIS MIND UNDER IT.

EARLY in October, 1798, Mr. Pearce attended at the Kettering ministers' meeting, and preached from Psal. xc. 16, 17, "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." He was observed to be singularly solemn and affectionate in that discourse. If he had known it to be the last time that he should address his brethren in that part of the country, he could scarcely have felt or spoken in a more interesting manner. It was a discourse full of instruction, full of a holy unction, and that seemed to breathe an apostolical ardour. On his return he preached at Market-Harborough; and riding home the next day in company with his friend Mr. Summers, of London, they were overtaken with rain. Mr. Pearce was wet through his clothes, and towards evening complained of a chilliness. A slight hoarseness followed. He preached several times after this, which brought on an inflammation, and issued in a consumption. It is probable that if his constitution had not been previously impaired, such effects might not have followed in this instance. His own ideas on this subject are expressed in a letter to Dr. Ryland, dated Dec. 4, 1798; and in another to Mr. King, dated from Bristol, on his way to Plymouth, March 30, 1799. In the former, he says, "Ever since my Christmas journey last year to Sheepshead, Nottingham, and Leicester, on the mission business, I have found my constitution greatly debilitated, in consequence of a cold caught after the unusual exertions which circumstances then demanded: so that, from a frame that could endure any weather, I have since been too tender to encounter a single shower without danger; and the duties of the Lord's day, which, as far as bodily strength went, I could perform with little fatigue, have since frequently overcome me. But the severe cold I caught in my return from the last Kettering ministers' meeting has affected me so much that I have sometimes concluded I must give up preaching entirely; for though my head and spirits are better than for two years past, yet my stomach is so very weak that I cannot pray in my family without frequent pauses for breath, and in the pulpit it is labour and agony which must be felt to be conceived of. I have however made shift to preach sometimes thrice, but mostly only twice on a Lord's day, till the last, when the morning sermon only, though I delivered it with great pleasure of mind, and with as much caution as to my voice as possible, yet cost me so much labour as threw me into a fever till the next day, and prevented my sleeping all night."—In the latter,—he thus writes:—"Should my life be spared, I and my family, and all my connexions, will stand indebted, under God, to you. Unsuspecting of danger myself, I believe I should have gone on with my exertions, till the grave had received me. Your attention sent Mr. B. (the apothecary) to me, and then I first learned what I have since been increasingly convinced of—that *I was rapidly destroying the vital principle*. And the kind interest you have taken in my welfare ever since, has often drawn the grateful tear from my eye. May the God of heaven and earth reward your kindness to his unworthy servant, and save you from all the evils from which your distinguished friendship would have saved me."

Such were his ideas. His labours were certainly abundant; perhaps too great for his constitution: but it is probable that nothing was more injurious to his health than a frequent exposure to night air, and an inattention to the necessity of changing damp clothes.

Hitherto we have seen in Mr. Pearce the active, assiduous, and laborious servant of Jesus Christ; but now we see him laid aside from his work, wasting away by slow degrees, patiently enduring the will of God, and cheerfully waiting for his dissolution. And as here is but little to narrate, I shall content myself with copying his letters, or extracts from them, to his friends, in the order of time in which they were written, only now and then dropping a few hints to furnish the reader with the occasions of some of them.

TO DR. RYLAND.

"Birmingham, Oct. 8, 1798.

"O my dear brother, your letter of the 5th, which I received this morning, has made me thankful for all *my pulpit agonies*, as they enable me to weep with a weeping brother. They have been of use to me in other respects; particularly in teaching me the importance of attaining and maintaining that spirituality and pious ardour in which I have found the most effectual relief; so that on the whole I must try to 'glory in tribulations also.' I trust I often can when the conflict is past; but to glory 'in' them, especially in mental distress—*hic labor, hoc opus est*.

"But how often has it been found that when ministers have felt themselves most embarrassed, the most effectual good has been done to the people! Oh for hearts entirely resigned to the will of God!

"How happy should I be could I always enjoy the sympathies of a brother who is tried in these points as I of late have been!"

TO MR. FULLER.

"Birmingham, Oct. 29, 1798.

"I caught a violent cold in returning from our last committee-meeting, from which I have not yet recovered. A little thing now affects my constitution, which I once judged would be weather and labour proof for at least thirty years, if I lived so long. I thank God that I am not debilitated by iniquity. I have lately met with an occurrence which occasioned me much pain and perplexity. . . . Trials soften our hearts, and make us more fully prize the dear few into whose faithful, sympathizing bosoms we can with confidence pour our sorrows. I think I should bless God for my afflictions, if they produced no other fruit than these—the tenderness they inspire, and the friendships they capacitate us to enjoy. Pray, my dear brother, for yours affectionately,—S. P."

To a young man who had applied to him for advice how he should best improve his time, previous to his going to the Bristol Academy:—

"MY DEAR M.,

Birmingham, Nov. 13, 1798.

"I can only confess my regret at not replying to yours at a much earlier period, and assure you that the delay has been accidental, and not designed. I felt the importance of your request for advice—I was sensible it deserved some consideration before it was answered.—I was full of business at the moment—I put it by, and it was forgotten; and now it is too late. The time of your going to Bristol draws nigh. If, instead of an opinion respecting the best way of occupying your time before you go, you will accept a little counsel during your continuance there, I shall be happy at any time to contribute such a mite as my experience and observation have put in my power.

"At present, the following rules appear of so much moment, that, were I to resume a place in any literary establishment, I would religiously adopt them as the standard of my conduct:—First, I would cultivate a spirit of habitual devotion. Warm piety connected with my studies, especially at my entrance upon them, would not only assist me in forming a judgment on their respective importance, and secure the blessing of God upon them; but would so cement the religious feeling with the literary pursuit, as that it might abide with me for life. The habit of uniting these, being once formed, would, I hope, be never lost; and I am sure that, without this, I shall both pursue trivial and unworthy objects, and those that are worthy I shall pursue for a wrong end.—Secondly, I would determine on a uniform submission to the instructions of my preceptor, and study those things which would give him pleasure. If he be not wiser than I am, for what purpose do I come under his care? I accepted the pecuniary help of the Society on condition of conforming to its will; and it is the Society's will that my tutor should govern me. My example will have influence: let me not, by a single act of disobedience, or by a word that implicates dissatisfaction, sow the seeds of discord in the bosoms of my companions.—Thirdly, I would pray and strive for the power of *self-government*, to form no plan, to utter not a word, to take no step, under the mere influence of passion. Let my judgment be often asked, and let me always give it time to answer. Let me always guard against a light or trifling spirit; and particularly as I shall be amongst a number of youths whose years will incline them all to the same frailty.—Fourthly, I would in all my weekly and daily pursuits observe the strictest *order*. Always let me act by a plan. Let every hour have its proper pursuit; from which let nothing but a settled conviction that I can employ it to better advantage ever cause me to deviate. Let me have fixed time for prayer, meditation, reading, languages, correspondence, recreation, sleep, &c.—Fifthly, I would not only assign to every hour its proper pursuit; but what I did I would try to do with all my might. The hours at such a place are precious beyond conception, till the student enters on life's busy scenes. Let me set the best of my class ever before me, and strive to be better than they. In humility and diligence, let me aim to be the first.—Sixthly, I would particularly avoid a *versatile habit*. In all things I would persevere. Without this, I may be a gaudy butterfly; but never, like the bee, will my hive bear examining. Whatever I take in hand, let me first be sure I understand it, then duly consider it, and, if it be good, let me adopt and use it.

"To these, my dear brother, let me add three or four things more minute, but which, I am persuaded, will help you much.—*Guard against a large acquaintance while you are a student.* Bristol friendship, while you sustain that character, will prove a vile thief, and rob you of many an invaluable hour.—*Get two or three of the students, whose piety you most approve, to meet for one hour in a week for experimental conversation and mutual prayer.* I found this highly beneficial, though, strange to tell, by some we were persecuted for our practice!—*Keep a diary.* Once a week at furthest call yourself to an account. What advances you have made in your different studies; in divinity, history, language, natural philosophy, style, arrangement, and, amidst all, do not forget to inquire, Am I more fit to *serve* and to *enjoy* God than I was last week?"

On Dec. 2, 1798, he delivered his last sermon. The subject was taken from Dan. x. 19, "O man greatly beloved, fear not; peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me."—"Amongst all the Old Testament saints," said he, in his introduction to that

discourse, "there is not one whose virtues were more, and whose imperfections were fewer, than those of Daniel. By the history given of him in this book, which yet seems not to be complete, he appears to have excelled among the excellent." Doubtless, no one was further from his thoughts than himself: several of his friends, however, could not help applying it to him, and that with a painful apprehension of what followed soon after.

TO MR. CAVE, LEICESTER.

"*Birmingham, Dec. 4, 1798.*

"..... Blessed be God, my mind is calm; and though my body be weakness itself, my spirits are good, and I can write as well as ever, though I can hardly speak two sentences without a pause. All is well, brother! all is well, for time and eternity. My soul rejoices in the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure. Peace from our dear Lord Jesus be with your spirit, as it is (yea, more also) with your affectionate brother—S. P."

TO MR. NICHOLS, NOTTINGHAM.

"*Birmingham, Dec. 10, 1798.*

"I am now quite laid by from preaching, and am so reduced in my internal strength that I can hardly converse with a friend for five minutes without losing my breath. Indeed, I have been so ill that I thought the next ascent would be, not to a pulpit, but to a throne—the throne of glory. Yes, indeed, my friend, the religion of Jesus will support when flesh and heart fail; and, in my worst state of body, my soul was filled with joy. I am now getting a little better, though but very slowly. But fast or slow, or as it may, the Lord doth all things well."

TO R. BOWYER, ESQ.

—— I have overdone myself in preaching. I am now ordered to lie by, and not even to *converse*, without great care; nor indeed, till to-day, have I for some time been able to utter a sentence without a painful effort. Blessed be God! I have been filled all through my affliction with peace and joy in believing; and at one time, when I thought I was entering the valley of death, the prospect beyond was so full of glory, that, but for the sorrow it would have occasioned to some who would be left behind, I should have longed that moment to have mounted to the skies. O my friend, what a mercy that I am not receiving the wages of sin; that my health has not been impaired by vice; but that, on the contrary, I am *bearing in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus!* To him be all the praise! Truly, I have proved that God is faithful; and most cheerfully would I take double the affliction for one half of the joy and sweetness which have attended it. Accept a sermon which is this day published."*

TO MR. BATES AND MRS. BARNES, MINORIES.

"*Birmingham, Dec. 14, 1798.*

"..... I could tell you much of the Lord's goodness during my affliction. Truly 'his right hand hath been under my head, and his left embraced me.' And when I was at the worst, especially, and expected ere long to have done with time, even *then*, such holy joy, such ineffable sweetness filled my soul, that I would not have exchanged that situation for any besides heaven itself.

"O my dear friends, let us live to *Christ*, and lay ourselves wholly out for

* The last but one he ever preached, entitled, *MOTIVES TO GRATITUDE*. It was delivered on the day of national thanksgiving, and printed at the request of his own congregation.

him whilst we live; and then, when health and life forsake us, he will be the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever."

About this time the congregation at Cannon Street was supplied for several months by Mr. Ward, who has since gone as a missionary to India. Here that amiable young man became intimately acquainted with Mr. Pearce, and conceived a most affectionate esteem for him. In a letter to a friend, dated Jan. 5, 1799, he writes as follows:—

"I am happy in the company of dear brother Pearce. I have seen more of God in him than in any other person I ever knew. Oh how happy should I be to live and die with him! When well, he preaches three times on a Lord's day, and two or three times in the week besides. He instructs the young people in the principles of religion, natural philosophy, astronomy, &c. They have a benevolent society, from the funds of which they distribute forty or fifty pounds a year to the poor of the congregation. They have a sick society for visiting the afflicted in general; a book society at chapel; a Lord's day school, at which more than two hundred children are instructed. Add to this, missionary business, visiting the people, an extensive correspondence, two volumes of mission history preparing for the press, &c.; and then you will see something of the soul of Pearce. He is every where venerated, though but a young man; and all the kind, tender, gentle affections make him as a little child at the feet of his Saviour.—W. W."

In February, he rode to the opening of a Baptist meeting-house at Bedworth; but did not engage in any of the services. Here several of his brethren saw him for the last time. Soon afterwards, writing to the compiler of these Memoirs, he says,—“The Lord's day after I came home I tried to speak a little after sermon. It inflamed my lungs afresh, produced phlegm, coughing, and spitting of blood. Perhaps I may never preach more. Well, the Lord's will be done. I thank him that he ever took me into his service; and now, if he sees fit to give me a discharge, I submit.”

During the above meeting a word was dropped by one of his brethren which he took as a reflection, though nothing was further from the intention of the speaker. It wrought upon his mind; and in a few days he wrote as follows:—“Do you remember what passed at B——? Had I not been accustomed to receive *plain, friendly* remarks from you, I should have thought you meant to insinuate a reproof. If you did, tell me plainly. If you did not, it is all at an end. You will not take my naming it unkindly, although I should be mistaken; such affectionate explanations are necessary, when suspicions arise, to the preservation of friendship; and I need not say that I hold the preservation of your friendship in no small account.”

The above is copied, not only to set forth the spirit and conduct of Mr. Pearce in a case wherein he felt himself aggrieved, but to show in how easy and amiable a manner thousands of mistakes might be rectified, and differences prevented, by a frank and timely explanation.

TO MR. COMFIELD, NORTHAMPTON.

“*Birmingham, March 4, 1799.*”

“I could wish my sympathies to be as extensive as human—I was going to say (and why not?) as animal misery. The very limited comprehension of the human intelligence forbids this indeed, and whilst I am attempting to participate as far as the news of affliction reaches me, I find the same events do not often produce equal feelings. We measure our sympathies, not by the causes of sorrow, but by the sensibilities of the sorrowful; hence I abound in feeling on *your* account. The situation of your family must have given distress to a president of any character; but in you it must have

produced agonies. I know the tenderness of your heart: your feelings are delicately strong. You must feel much, or nothing; and he that knows you, and does not feel much when you feel, must be a brute.

"May the fountain of mercy supply you with the cheering stream. May your sorrow be turned into joy.

"I am sure that I ought to value more than ever your friendship for me. You have remembered me, not merely in my affliction, but in your own. Our friendship, our benevolence, must never be compared with that of Jesus; but it is truly delightful to see the disciple treading, though at a humble distance, in the footsteps of a Master, who, amidst the tortures of crucifixion, exercised forgiveness to his murderers, and the tenderness of filial piety to a disconsolate mother! When we realize the scene, how much do our imaginations embrace—the persons—the circumstances—the words—'Woman behold thy son; John, behold thy mother!'"

By the above letter, the reader will perceive that, while deeply afflicted himself, he felt in the tenderest manner for the afflictions of others.

TO MR. FULLER.

"*March 23, 1799.*"

He was now setting out for Plymouth; and after observing the great danger he was supposed to be in, with respect to a consumption, he adds,—
"But thanks be to God, who giveth my heart the victory, let my poor body be consumed, or preserved. In the thought of *leaving*, I feel a momentary gloom; but in the thought of *going*, a heavenly triumph.

'Oh to grace how great a debtor!'

"Praise God with me, and for me, my dear brother, and let us not mind dying any more than sleeping. No, no; let every Christian sing the loudest as he gets the nearest to the presence of his God. Eternally yours in Him who hath washed us both in his blood,—S. P."

TO MR. MEDLEY, LONDON.

"*March 23, 1799.*"

"My affliction has been rendered sweet by the supports and smiles of Him whom I have served in the gospel of his Son. He hath delivered, he doth deliver, and I trust that he will yet deliver. Living or dying, all is well for ever. Oh what shall I render to the Lord!"

It seems that, in order to avoid wounding Mrs. P.'s feelings, he deferred the settlement of his affairs till he arrived at Bristol; whence he wrote to his friend, Mr. King, requesting him to become an executor. Receiving a favourable answer, he replied as follows:—

"*Bristol, April 6, 1799.*"

"Your letter, just received, affected me too much with feelings both of sympathy and gratitude, to remain unanswered a single post. Most heartily do I thank you for accepting a service which friendship alone can render agreeable in the most simple cases. Should that service demand your activities at an early period, may no unforeseen occurrence increase the necessary care! But may the Father of the fatherless, and Judge of the widows, send you a recompense into your own bosom, equal to all that friendship to which, under God, I have been so much indebted in life, and reposing on whose bosom, even death itself loses a part of its gloom. In you, my children will find another father—in you, my wife another husband. Your tenderness will sympathize with the one, under the most distressing

sensibilities; and your prudent counsels be a guide to the others, through the unknown mazes of inexperienced youth. Enough—blessed God! my soul prostrates, and adores thee for such a friend.”

TO MR. FULLER.

“Plymouth, April 18, 1799.”

“The last time that I wrote to you was at the close of a letter sent to you by brother Ryland. I did not like that postscript form; it looked so card-like as to make me fear that you would deem it unbrotherly. After all, perhaps, you thought nothing about it; and my anxieties might arise only from my weakness, which seems to be constantly increasing my sensibilities. If ever I felt love in its tenderness for my friends, it has been since my affliction. This, in a great measure, is no more than the love of ‘publicans and harlots, who love those that love them.’ I never conceived myself by a hundred degrees so interested in the regards of my friends, as this season of affliction has manifested I was; and therefore, so far from claiming any ‘reward’ for loving them in return, I should account myself a monster of ingratitude were it otherwise. Yet there is something in affliction itself, which, by increasing the delicacy of our feelings, and detaching our thoughts from the usual round of objects which present themselves to the mind when in a state of health, may be easily conceived to make us susceptible of stronger and more permanent impressions of an affectionate nature.

“I heard at Bristol that you and your friends had remembered me in your prayers, at Kettering. Whether the Lord whom we serve may see fit to answer your petitions on my account, or not, may they at least be returned into your own bosoms.

“For the sake of others I should be happy could I assure you that my health was improving. As to myself, I thank God that I am not without a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better. I find that neither in sickness, nor in health, I can be so much as I wish like Him whom I love. ‘To die is gain.’ oh to gain that state, those feelings, that character, which perfectly accord with the mind of Christ, and are attended with the full persuasion of his complete and everlasting approbation! I want no heaven but this; and, to gain this, most gladly would I this moment expire. But if to abide in the flesh be more needful for an individual of my fellow men,—Lord, let thy will be done; only let Christ be magnified by me, whether in life or death!

“The weather has been so wet and windy since I have been at Plymouth, that I could not reasonably expect to be much better; and I cannot say that I am much worse. All the future is uncertain. Professional men encourage me; but frequent returns appear, and occasional discharges of blood check my expectations. If I speak but for two minutes, my breast feels as sore as though it were scraped with a rough-edged razor; so that I am mute all the day long, and have actually learned to converse with my sister by means of our fingers.

“I thank you for yours of April 4th, which I did not receive till the 12th, the day that I arrived at Plymouth. On the 16th, a copy of yours to brother Ryland came to hand, to which I should have replied yesterday, but had not leisure. I am happy and thankful for your success. May the Lord himself pilot the ‘Criterion’ safely to Calcutta river.

“Unless the Lord work a miracle for me, I am sure that I shall not be able to attend the Olney meeting. It is to my feelings a severe anticipation; but how can I be a Christian, and not submit to God?”

TO MR. WM. WARD.

"Plymouth, April 22, 1799.

"Most affectionately do I thank you for your letter, so full of information and of friendship. To our common Friend, who is gone into heaven, where he ever sitteth at the right hand of God for us, I commend you. Whether I die, or live, God will take care of you till he has ripened you for the common salvation. Then shall I meet my dear brother Ward again; and who can tell how much more interesting our intercourse in heaven will be made by the scenes that most distress our poor spirits here? Oh, had I none to live for, I had rather die than live, that I may be at once like Him whom I love. But while he insures me grace, why should I regret the delay of glory? No: I will wait his will who performeth all things for me.

"My dear brother, had I strength I should rejoice to acquaint you with the wrestlings and the victories, the hopes and the fears, the pleasures and the pangs, which I have lately experienced. But I must forbear. All I can now say is that God hath done me much good by all, and made me very thankful for all he has done.

"Alas! I shall see you no more. I cannot be at Olney on the 7th of May. The journey would be my death. But the Lord whom you serve will be with you then, and for ever. My love to all the dear assembled saints, who will give you their benedictions at that solemn season."

TO DR. RYLAND.

"VERY DEAR BROTHER,

"Plymouth, April 24, 1799.

"My health is in much the same state as when I wrote last, excepting that my muscular strength rather increases, and my powers of speaking seem less and less every week. I have, for the most part, spoken only in whispers for several days past; and even these seem too much for my irritable lungs. My father asked me a question to-day; he did not understand me when I whispered; so I was obliged to utter *one word*, and one word *only*, a little louder, and that brought on a soreness, which I expect to feel till bed-time.

"I am still looking out for fine weather; all here is cold and rainy. We have had but two or three fair and warm days since I have been here; then I felt better. I am perfectly at a loss even to guess what the Lord means to do with me; but I desire to commit my ways to him, and be at peace. I am going to-day about five miles into the country, (to Tamerton,) where I shall await the will of God concerning me.

"I knew not of any committee-meeting of our Society to be held respecting Mr. Marshman and his wife. I have therefore sent no vote, and, indeed, it is my happiness that I have full confidence in my brethren, at this important crisis, since close thinking, or much writing, always increases my fever, and promotes my complaint.

"My dear brother, I hope you will correspond much with Kettering. I used to be a medium; but God has put me out of the way. I could weep that I can serve him no more; and yet I fear some would be tears of pride. On for perfect likeness to my humble Lord!"

TO MR. KING.

"Tamerton, May 2, 1799.

"... Give my love to all the dear people at Cannon Street. O pray that He who afflicts would give me patience to endure. Indeed, the state of suspense in which I have been kept so long requires much of it; and I often exclaim, ere I am aware, O my dear people! O my dear family! when shall I be restored to you again? The Lord forgive all the sin of my desires!

At times I feel a sweet and perfect calm, and wish ever to live under the influence of a belief in the *goodness* of God, and of all his plans, and all his works."

The reader has seen how much he regretted being absent from the solemn designation of the missionaries at Olney. He, however, addressed the following lines to Mr. Fuller, which were read at the close of that meeting, to the dissolving of nearly the whole assembly in tears :—

"Tamerton, May 2, 1799.

" . . . Oh that the Lord, who is unconfined by place or condition, may copiously pour out upon you all the rich effusions of his Holy Spirit on the approaching day! My most hearty love to each missionary who may then encircle the throne of grace. Happy men! Happy women! You are going to be fellow labourers with Christ himself! I congratulate—I almost envy you; yet I love you, and can scarcely now forbear dropping a tear of love as each of your names passes across my mind. Oh what promises are yours; and what a reward! Surely heaven is filled with double joy, and resounds with unusual acclamations, at the arrival of each missionary there. O be faithful, my dear brethren, my dear sisters, be faithful unto death, and all this joy is yours! Long as I live, my imagination will be hovering over you in Bengal; and, should I die, if separate spirits be allowed a visit to the world they have left, methinks mine would soon be at Mudnabatty, watching your labours, your conflicts, and your pleasures, whilst you are always abounding in the work of the Lord."

TO DR. RYLAND.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"Plymouth, May 14, 1799.

"Yours of the 11th instant I have just received, and thank you for your continued concern for your poor unworthy brother.

"I have suffered much in my health since I wrote to you last, by the increase of my feverish complaint, which filled me with heat and horror all night, and in the day sometimes almost suffocated me with the violence of its paroxysms. I am extremely weak; and now that warm weather, which I came into Devon to seek, I dread as much as the cold, because it excites the fever. I am happy however in the Lord. I have not a wish to live or die, but as he pleases. I truly enjoy the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and would not be without his Divine atonement, whereon to rest my soul, for ten thousand worlds. I feel quite weaned from earth, and all things in it. Death has lost his sting, the grave its horrors, and the attractions of heaven, I had almost said, are sometimes violent.

‘Oh to grace how great a debtor!’

"But I am wearied. May all grace abound towards my dear brother, and his affectionate—S. P."

TO THE CHURCH IN CANNON STREET.

"Plymouth, May 31, 1799.

"To the dear people of my charge, the flock of Christ, assembling in Cannon Street, Birmingham, their afflicted but affectionate pastor, presents his love in Christ Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep.

"MY DEAREST, DEAREST FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,

"Separated as I have been a long time from you, and during that time of separation having suffered much both in body and mind, yet my heart has still been with you, participating in your sorrows, uniting in your prayers,

and rejoicing with you in the hope of that glory *to* which Divine faithfulness has engaged to bring us, and *for* which our heavenly Father, by all his providences and by every operation of his Holy Spirit, is daily preparing us.

"Never, my dear brethren, did I so much rejoice in our being made 'partakers of the heavenly calling' as during my late afflictions. The sweet thoughts of glory, where I shall meet my dear Lord Jesus, with all his redeemed ones, perfectly freed from all that sin which now burdens us and makes us groan from day to day,—this transports my soul, whilst out of weakness I am made strong, and at times am enabled to glory even in my bodily infirmities, that the power of Christ, in supporting when flesh and heart fail, may the more evidently rest upon me. O my dear brethren and sisters, let me, as one alive almost from the dead, let me exhort you to stand fast in that blessed gospel which for ten years I have now preached among you—the gospel of the grace of God; the gospel of God; the gospel of free, full, everlasting salvation, founded on the sufferings and death of *God manifest in the flesh*. Look much at this all-amazing scene!

‘Behold! a God descends and dies
To save my soul from gaping hell;’

and then say, whether any poor broken-hearted sinner need be afraid to venture his hopes of salvation on such a sacrifice; especially since He who is thus ‘mighty to save’ hath said that ‘whosoever cometh to him he will in no wise cast out.’ You, beloved, who have found the peace-speaking virtue of this blood of atonement, must not be satisfied with what you have already known or enjoyed. The only way to be constantly happy, and constantly prepared for the most awful changes which we must all experience, is, to be constantly *looking* and *coming* to a dying Saviour; renouncing all our own worthiness; cleaving to the loving Jesus as our all in all; giving up every thing, however valuable to our worldly interests, that clashes with our fidelity to Christ; begging that of his fulness we may receive ‘grace upon grace,’ whilst our faith actually *relies* on his power and faithfulness, for the full accomplishment of every promise in his word that we plead with him; and guarding against every thing that might for a moment bring distance and darkness between your souls and your precious Lord. If you *thus live*, (and oh that you may daily receive fresh life from Christ so to do!) ‘the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds,’ and you will be filled with ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory.’

“As a *church*, you cannot conceive what pleasure I have enjoyed in hearing that you are in peace, that you attend prayer-meetings, that you seem to be stirred up of late for the honour and prosperity of religion. Go on in these good ways, my beloved friends, and assuredly the God of peace will be with you. Yes, if after all I should be taken entirely from you, yet God will surely visit you, and never leave you, nor forsake you.

“As to my health, I seem on the whole to be still mending, though but very slowly. The fever troubles me often, both by day and night, but my strength increases. I long to see your faces in the flesh; yea, when I thought myself near the gates of the grave, I wished, if it were the Lord’s will, to depart among those whom I so much loved. But I am in good hands, and all must be right.

“I thank both you and the congregation most affectionately for all the kindness you have shown respecting me and my family during my absence. The Lord return it a thousand-fold! My love to every one, both old and young, rich and poor, as though named. The Lord bless to your edification the occasional ministry which you enjoy. I hope you regularly attend upon it, and keep together, as ‘the horses in Pharaoh’s chariot.’ I pray

much for you; pray, still pray, for your very affectionate, though unworthy, pastor."

In a postscript to Mr. King, he says, "I have made an effort to write this letter: my affections would take no denial; but it has brought on the fever."

Towards the latter end of May, when Mr. Ward and his companions were just ready to set sail, a consultation concerning Mr. Pearce was held on board the *Criterion*, in which all the missionaries and some of the members of the Baptist Missionary Society were present. It was well known that he had for several years been engaged in preparing materials for a "History of Missions," to be comprised in two volumes octavo; and as the sending of the gospel amongst the heathen had so deeply occupied his heart, considerable expectations had been formed by religious people of his producing an interesting work on the subject. The question now was, Could not this performance be finished by other hands, and the profits of it be appropriated to the benefit of Mr. Pearce's family? It was admitted by all that this work would, partly from its own merits, and partly from the great interest which the author justly possessed in the public esteem, be very productive; and that it would be a delicate and proper method of enabling the religious public, by subscribing liberally to it, to afford substantial assistance to the family of this excellent man. The result was, that one of the members of the Society addressed a letter to Mr. Pearce's relations at Plymouth, requesting them to consult him, as he should be able to bear it, respecting the state of his manuscripts, and to inquire whether they were in a condition to admit of being finished by another hand; desiring them also to assure him, for his present relief concerning his dear family, that whatever the hand of friendship could effect on their behalf should be accomplished. The answer, though it left no manner of hope as to the accomplishment of the object, yet is so expressive of the reigning dispositions of the writer's heart, as an affectionate husband, a tender father, a grateful friend, and a sincere Christian, that it cannot be uninteresting to the reader:—

"Tamerton, June 24, 1799.

"To use the common introduction of 'dear brother' would fall so far short of my feelings towards a friend whose uniform conduct has ever laid so great claim to my affection and gratitude, but whose recent kindness—kindness in *adversity*—kindness to my *wife*—kindness to my *children*—kindness that would go far to 'smooth the bed of death,' has overwhelmed my whole soul in tender thankfulness, and engaged my everlasting esteem. I know not how to begin . . . 'Thought is poor, and poor expression.' The *only* thing that lay heavy on my heart, when in the nearest prospect of eternity, was the future situation of my family. I had but a comparatively small portion to leave behind me, and yet that little was the *all* that an amiable woman,—delicately brought up, and, through mercy, for the most part comfortably provided for since she entered on domestic life,—with five babes to feed, clothe, and educate, had to subsist on. Ah, what a prospect! Hard and long I strove to realize the promises made to the widows and the fatherless; but *these alone* I could not fully rest on and enjoy. For my own part, God was indeed very gracious. I was willing, I hope, to linger in suffering, if I might thereby most glorify him; and death was an angel whom I longed to come and embrace me, 'cold' as his embraces are; but how could I leave those who were dearest to my heart in the midst of a world in which although thousands now professed friendship for me, and, on my account, for mine; yet, after my decease, would, with few exceptions, soon forget my widow and my children, among the crowds of the needy and distressed.—It was at

this moment of painful sensibility that *your heart* meditated a plan to remove my anxieties—a plan too that would involve much personal labour before it could be accomplished. ‘Blessed be God who put it into thy heart, and blessed be thou.’ May the blessing of the widow and the fatherless rest on you and yours for ever. Amen and amen!

“You will regret perhaps that I have taken up so much respecting yourself; but I have scarcely gratified the shadow of my wishes. Excuse then, on the one hand, that I have said so much; and accept, on the other, what remains unexpressed.

“My affections and desires are among my dear people at Birmingham; and, unless I find my strength increase here, I purpose to set out for that place in the course of a fortnight, or at most a month. The journey, performed by short stages, may do me good; if not, I expect when the winter comes to sleep in peace! and it will delight my soul to see them once more before I die. Besides, I have many little arrangements to make among my books and papers, to prevent confusion after my decease. Indeed, till I get home, I cannot fully answer your kind letter; but I fear that my materials consist so much in references which none but myself would understand, that a second person could not take it up and prosecute it. I am still equally indebted to you for a proposal so generous, so laborious.

“Rejoice with me that the blessed gospel still ‘bears my spirits up.’ I am become familiar with the thoughts of dying. I have taken my leave often of the world, and, thanks be to God, I do it *always* with *tranquillity*, and *often* with *rapture*. Oh what grace, what grace it was that ever called me to be a Christian! What would have been my present feelings if I were going to meet God with all the filth and load of my sin about me! But God in my nature hath put my sin away, taught me to love him, and long for his appearing. O my dear brother, how consonant is *everlasting praise* with such a great salvation!”

After this, another letter was addressed to Mr. Pearce, informing him more particularly that the above proposal did not originate with an individual, but with several of the brethren who dearly loved him, and had consulted on the business; and that it was no more than an act of justice to one who had spent his life in serving the public; also requesting him to give directions by which his manuscripts might be found and examined, lest he should be taken away before his arrival at Birmingham. To this he answered as follows:—

Plymouth, July 6, 1799.

“I need not repeat the growing sense I have of your kindness, and yet I know not how to forbear.

“I cannot direct Mr. K—— to *all* my papers, as many of them are in books from which I was making extracts; and if I could, I am persuaded that they are in a state too confused, incorrect, and unfinished, to suffer you or any other friend to realize your kind intentions.

“I have possessed a tenacious memory. I have begun one part of the history; read the necessary books; reflected; arranged; written perhaps the introduction, and then trusting to my recollection, with a revival of the books as I should want them, have employed myself in getting materials for another part, &c. Thus, till my illness, the volumes existed in my head—my books were at hand, and I was on the eve of writing them out, when it pleased God to make me pause; and as close thinking has been strongly forbidden me, I dare say that were I again restored to health, I should find it necessary to go over much of my former reading to refresh my memory.

“It is now Saturday. On Monday next we purpose setting out on our

return. May the Lord prosper our way! Accept the sincere affection, and the ten thousand thanks, of your brother in the Lord,—S. P.”

As the manuscripts were found to be in such a state that no person, except the author himself, could finish them, the design was necessarily dropped. The public mind, however, was deeply impressed with Mr. Pearce's worth; and that which the friendship of a few could not effect, has since been amply accomplished by the liberal exertions of many.

TO MR. BIRT.

“Birmingham, July 26, 1799.

“It is not with common feelings that I begin a letter to *you*. Your name brings so many interesting circumstances of my life before me, in which your friendship has been so uniformly and eminently displayed, that now, amidst the imbecilities of sickness, and the serious prospect of another world, my heart is overwhelmed with gratitude, whilst it glows with affection,—an affection which eternity shall not annihilate, but improve.

“We reached Bristol on the Friday after we parted from you, having suited our progress to my strength and spirits. We staid with Bristol friends till Monday, when we pursued our journey, and went comfortably on till the uncommonly rough road from Tewkesbury to Evesham quite jaded me; and I have not yet quite recovered from the excessive fatigue of that miserable ride. At Alcester we rested a day and a half; and, through the abundant goodness of God, we safely arrived at Birmingham on Friday evening, the 19th of July.

“I feel an undisturbed tranquillity of soul, and am cheerfully waiting the will of God. My voice is gone, so that I cannot whisper without pain; and of this circumstance I am at times most ready to complain. For, to see my dear and amiable Sarah look at *me*, and then at the *children*, and at length bathe her face in tears, without my being able to say one kind word of comfort,—Oh!! . . . Yet the Lord supports me under this also; and I trust will support me to the end.”

TO MR. ROCK.

“July 28, 1799.

“. . . I am now to all appearance within a few steps of eternity. In Christ I am safe. In him I am happy. I trust we shall meet in heaven.”

TO R. BOWYER, ESQ.

“Birmingham, Aug. 1, 1799.

“Much disappointed that I am not released from this world of sin, and put in possession of the pleasures enjoyed by the spirits of just men made perfect, I once more address my dear fellow heirs of that glory which, ere long, shall be revealed to us all.

“We returned from Devon last Friday week. I was exceedingly weak, and for several days afterwards got rapidly worse. My friends compelled me to try another physician. I am still told that I shall recover. Be that as it may, I wish to have my own will annihilated, that the will of the Lord may be done. Through his abundant grace, I have been, and still am, happy in my soul; and I trust my prevailing desire is that, living or dying, I may be the Lord's.”

To R. BOWYER, Esq.

On his having sent him a print of Mr. SCHWARTZ, the missionary on the Malabar coast.

"Birmingham, Aug. 16, 1799.

"On three accounts was your last parcel highly acceptable. It represented a man whom I have long been in the habit of loving and revering; and whose character and labours I intended, if the Lord had not laid his hand upon me by my present illness, to have presented to the public in Europe, as he himself presented them to the millions of Asia.—The execution, bearing so strong a likeness to the original, heightened its value. And then the hand from whence it came, and the friendship it was intended to express, add to its worth."

To MR. FULLER.

"Birmingham, Aug. 19, 1799.

"The doctor has been making me worse and weaker for three weeks. In the middle of last week he spoke confidently of my recovery; but to-day he has seen fit to alter his plans; and if I do not find a speedy alteration for the better, I must have done with all physicians but Him who 'healeth the broken in heart.'

"For some time after I came home, I was led to believe my case to be consumptive; and then, thinking myself of a certainty near the kingdom of heaven, I rejoiced hourly in the delightful prospect.

"Since then I have been told that I am not in a dangerous way; and though I give very little credit to such assertions in this case, yet I have found my mind so taken up with earth again, that I seem as though I had another soul. My spiritual pleasures are greatly interrupted, and some of the most plaintive parts of the most plaintive psalms seem the only true language of my heart. Yet, 'Thy will be done,' I trust, prevails; and if it be the Lord's will that I linger long, and suffer much, O let him give me the patience of hope, and still, his will be done!—I can write no more. This is a whole day's work; for it is only after tea that, for a few minutes, I can sit up, and attend to any thing."

From the latter end of August, and all through the month of September, to the 10th of October, *the day on which he died*, he seems to have been unable to write. He did not, however, lose the exercise of his mental powers; and though, in the last of the above letters, he complains of darkness, it appears that he soon recovered that peace and joy in God by which his affliction, and even his life, were distinguished.

A little before he died, he was visited by Mr. Medley, of London, with whom he had been particularly intimate on his first coming to Birmingham. Mr. Pearce was much affected at the sight of his friend, and continued silently weeping for nearly ten minutes, holding and pressing his hand. After this, he spoke, or rather whispered, as follows:—"This sick bed is a Beth-el to me; it is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. I can scarcely express the pleasures that I have enjoyed in this affliction. The nearer I draw to my dissolution, the happier I am. It scarcely can be called an affliction, it is so counterbalanced with joy. You have lost your pious father; tell me how it was."—Here Mr. Medley informed him of particulars. He wept much at the recital, and especially at hearing of his last words,—"*Home, home!*"—Mr. Medley telling him of some temptations he had lately met with, he charged him to keep near to God. "Keep close to God," said he, "and nothing will hurt you!"

The following *letters and narrative* were read by Dr. Ryland at the close

of his funeral sermon; and being printed at the end of it, were omitted in some of the former editions of the Memoirs.

TO DR. RYLAND.

*"Birmingham, Dec. 9, 1798.
Lord's-day Evening.*

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"After a sabbath—such a one I never knew before—spent in an entire seclusion from the house and ordinances of my God, I seek Christian converse with you, in a way in which I am yet permitted to have intercourse with my brethren. The day after I wrote to you last, my medical attendant laid me under the strictest injunctions not to speak again in public for one month at least. He says that my stomach is become so irritable through repeated inflammations, that conversation, unless managed with great caution, would be dangerous;—that he does not think my present condition alarming, provided I take rest; but, without that, he intimated my life was in great danger. He forbids my exposing myself to the evening air, on any account, and going out of doors, or to the door, unless when the air is dry and clear; so that I am, during the weather we now have in Birmingham, (very foggy,) a complete prisoner; and the repeated cautions from my dear and affectionate friends, whose solicitude, I conceive, far exceeds the danger, compels me to a rigid observance of the doctor's rules.

"This morning brother Pope took my place; and, in the afternoon, Mr. Brewer (who has discovered uncommon tenderness and respect for me and the people, since he knew my state) preached a very affectionate sermon from 1 Sam. iii. 18—'It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.' By what I hear, his sympathizing observations, in relation to the event which occasioned his being then in my pulpit, drew more tears from the people's eyes than a dozen such poor creatures as their pastor could deserve. But I have, . . . blessed be God, long had the satisfaction of finding myself embosomed in friendship, . . . the friendship of the people of my charge; though I lament their love should occasion them a pang, . . . but thus it is . . . our heavenly Father sees that, for our mixed characters, a mixed state is best.

"I anticipated a day of gloom; but I had unexpected reason to rejoice, that the shadow of death was turned into the joy of the morning; and though I said, with perhaps before unequalled feeling, 'How amiable are thy tabernacles!' yet I found the God of Zion does not neglect the dwellings of Jacob. My poor wife was much affected at so novel a thing as leaving me behind her, and so it was a dewy morning; but the Sun of Righteousness soon arose, and shed such ineffable delight throughout my soul, that I could say, 'It is good to be *here*.'—Motive to resignation and gratitude also crowded upon motive, till my judgment was convinced that I ought to rejoice in the Lord exceedingly, and so my whole soul took its fill of joy. May I, if it be my Saviour's will, feel as happy when I come to die. When my poor Sarah lay at the point of death, for some days after her first lying-in, toward the latter days, I enjoyed such support, and felt my will so entirely bowed down to that of God, that I said in my heart, 'I shall never fear another trial . . . He that sustained me amidst this flame will defend me from every spark!' And this confidence I long enjoyed.—But that was nearly six years ago, and I had almost forgotten the land of the Hermonites and the hill Mizar. But the Lord has prepared me to receive a fresh display of his fatherly care, and his (shall I call it?) punctilious veracity. If I should be raised up again, I shall be able to preach on the faithfulness of God more experimentally than ever. Perhaps some trial is coming on, and I am to be instrumental in preparing them for it; or if not, if I am to depart hence to be no more seen, I

know the Lord can carry on his work as well without me as with me. He who redeemed the sheep with his blood will never suffer them to perish for want of shepherding, especially since he himself is the chief Shepherd of souls. But my *family*! Ah, *there* I find my faith but still imperfect. However, I do not think the Lord will ever take me away till he helps me to leave my fatherless children in his hands, and trust my widow also with him. 'His love in times past,' and I may add in times *present* too, 'forbids me to think he will leave me at *last* in trouble to sink.'

"Whilst my weakness was gaining ground, I used to ask myself how I could like to be laid by? I have dreamed that this was the case; and both awake and asleep I felt as though it were an evil that could not be borne:—but now I find the Lord can fit the back to the burden; and though I think I love the thought of serving Christ at this moment better than ever, yet he has made me willing to be . . . nothing, if he please to have it so; and now my happy heart 'could sing itself away to everlasting bliss.'

"Oh what a mercy that I have not brought on my affliction by serving the *devil*! What a mercy that I have so many dear sympathizing friends! What a mercy that I have so much dear domestic comfort! What a mercy that I am in no violent bodily pain! What a mercy that I can read and write without doing myself an injury! What a mercy that my animal spirits have all the time this has been coming on (ever since the last Kettering meeting of ministers) been vigorous—free from dejection! And, which I reckon among the greatest of this day's privileges, what a mercy that I have been able to employ myself for Christ and his dear cause to-day; as I have been almost wholly occupied in the concerns of the (I hope) *reviving* church at Broomsgrove, and the infant church at Cradley! O my dear brother, it is *all* mercy; is it not? O help me then in his praise, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever.

"Ought I to apologize for this experimental chat with you, who have concerns to transact of so much more importance than any that are confined to an individual? Forgive me, if I have intruded too much on your time—but do not forget to praise on my behalf a faithful God. I shall now leave room against I have some business to write about—till then adieu—but let us not forget that 'this God is our God for ever and ever, and will be *our guide* even until death.' Amen. Amen. We shall soon meet in heaven."

TO MR. KING.

"Plymouth, April 23, 1799.

"MY DEAR FRIEND AND BROTHER,

"I have the satisfaction to inform you that at length my complaint appears to be removed, and that I am by degrees returning to my usual diet, by which, with the Divine blessing, I hope to be again strengthened for the discharge of the duties and the enjoyment of the pleasures which await me among the dear people of my charge.

"I am indeed informed, by a medical attendant here, that I shall never be equal to the labours of my past years, and that my return to moderate efforts must be made by slow degrees. As the path of duty, I desire to submit; but, after so long a suspension from serving the Redeemer in his church, my soul pants for usefulness more extensive than ever, and I long to become an apostle to the world. I do not think I ever prized the ministerial work so much as I now do. Two questions have been long before me. The first was, Shall I live or die? The second, If I live, how will my life be spent? With regard to the former, my heart answered, 'It is no matter—all is well—for my own sake, I need not be taught that it is best to be with Christ; but, for the sake of others, it may be best to abide in the body I

am in the Lord's hands, let him do by me as seemeth him best for me and mine, and for his cause and honour in the world!—But as to the second question, I could hardly reconcile myself to the thoughts of living, unless it were to promote the interest of my Lord; and if my disorder should so far weaken me as to render me incapable of the ministry, nothing then appeared before me but gloom and darkness. However, I will hope in the Lord, that though he hath chastened me sorely, yet, since he hath not given me over unto death, sparing mercy will be followed with strength, that I may show forth his praise in the land of the living.

“I am still exceedingly weak; more so than at any period before I left home, except the first week of my lying by; but I am getting strength, though slowly. It is impossible at present to fix any time for my return. It grieves me that the patience of the dear people should be so long tried; but the trial is as great on my part as it can be on theirs, and we must pity and pray for one another. It is now a task for me to write at all, or this should have been longer.”

TO MR. POPE.

“Plymouth, May 24, 1799.”

“I cannot write much—this I believe is the only letter I have written (except to my wife) since I wrote to you last. My complaint has issued in a confirmed, slow, nervous fever; which has wasted my spirits and strength, and taken a great part of the little flesh I had, when in health, away from me. The symptoms have been very threatening, and I have repeatedly thought that, let the physician do what he will, he cannot keep me long from those heavenly joys for which, blessed be God, I have lately been much longing; and were it not for my *dear people* and *family*, I should have earnestly prayed for leave to depart, and to be with Christ, which is so much better than to abide in this vain, suffering, sinning world.

“The doctors however now pronounce my case very hopeful—say there is little or no danger—but that all these complaints require a *great deal of time* to get rid of. I still feel myself on precarious ground, but quite resigned to the will of *him*, who, unworthy as I am, continues daily to ‘fill my soul with joy and peace in believing.’ Yes, my dear friend, *now* my soul feels the value of a free, full, and everlasting salvation—and, what is more, I do *enjoy* that salvation; while I rest all my hope on the *SON* of *GOD* in human nature dying on the cross for me. To me now, health or sickness, pain or ease, life or death, are things indifferent. I feel so happy, in being in the hands of infinite love, that when the severest strokes are laid upon me, I receive them with pleasure, because they come from my heavenly Father's hands! ‘Oh to grace how great a debtor!’ &c.”

TO DR. RYLAND.

“MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,

“Birmingham, July 20, 1799.”

“Your friendly anxieties on my behalf demand the earliest satisfaction. We had a pleasant ride to Newport on the afternoon we left you, and the next day without much fatigue reached Tewkesbury; but the road was so rough from Tewkesbury to Evesham that it wearied and injured me more than all the jolting we had had before put together. However, we reached Alcester on Wednesday evening, stopped there a day to rest, and last night (Friday) were brought safely hither, blessed be God!

“I find myself getting weaker and weaker, and so my Lord instructs me in his pleasure to remove me soon. You say well, my dear brother, that at such a prospect I ‘cannot complain.’ No, blessed be his dear name who shed his blood for me, he helps me to rejoice at times with joy unspeakable.

Now I see the value of the religion of the cross. It is a religion for a dying sinner. It is all the most guilty, the most wretched, can desire. Yes, I taste its sweetness and enjoy its fulness with all the gloom of a dying bed before me. And far rather would I be the poor emaciated and emaciating creature that I am than be an emperor, with every earthly good about him—but without a God!

"I was delighted the other day, in re-perusing the Pilgrim's Progress, to observe that, when *Christian* came to the top of the hill *Difficulty*, he was put to sleep in a chamber called *Peace*. 'Why how good is the Lord of the way to me!' said I. I have not reached the summit of the hill yet, but, notwithstanding, he puts me to sleep in the chamber of *Peace every night* . . . True, it is often a chamber of *pain*; but, let pain be as formidable as it may, it has never yet been able to expel that peace which the great Guardian of Israel has appointed to keep my heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

"I have been labouring lately to exercise most love to God when I have been suffering most severely:—but what shall I say? Alas! too often the sense of pain absorbs every other thought. Yet there have been seasons when I have been affected with such a delightful sense of the loveliness of God as to ravish my soul, and give predominance to the sacred passion.—It was never till to-day that I got any personal instruction from our Lord's telling Peter by 'what death' he should glorify God. Oh what a satisfying thought it is that God appoints those means of dissolution whereby he gets most glory to himself. It was the very thing I needed; for, of all the ways of dying, that which I most dreaded was by a consumption (in which it is now highly probable my disorder will issue). But, O my dear Lord, *if by this death* I can most *glorify thee*, I prefer it to all others, and thank thee that by this means thou art hastening my fuller enjoyment of thee in a purer world.

"A *sinless* state! 'O 'tis a heaven worth dying for!' I cannot realize any thing about heaven, but the presence of Christ and his people, and a perfect deliverance from sin—and I want no more—I am sick of sinning—soon I shall be beyond its power.

'O joyful hour! O blest abode!
I shall be near and *like* my God!

"I only thought of filling one side—and now have not left room to thank you and dear Mrs. Ryland for the minute, affectionate, and constant attentions you paid us in Bristol. May the Lord reward you. Our hearty love to all around, till we meet in heaven. Eternally yours in Christ,—S. P."

"Birmingham, Aug. 4, 1799.
Lord's-day Evening.

"MY VERY DEAR BROTHER,

"Still, I trust, hastening to the land 'where there shall be no more curse,' I take this opportunity of talking a little with you on the road, for we are fellow travellers; and a little conversation by the way will not lose me the privilege of getting first to the end of my journey.

"It is seventeen years within about a week since I first actually set out on my pilgrimage; and when I review the many dangers to which during that time I have been exposed, I am filled with conviction that I have all along been the care of Omnipotent love. Ah, how many Pliables, and Timorouses, and Talkatives have I seen, while my quivering heart said, 'Alas! I shall soon follow these sons of apostacy, prove a disgrace to religion, and have my portion with hypocrites at last.'

"These fears may have had their uses—may have made me more cautious, more distrustful of myself, and kept me more dependent on the Lord. Thus—

'All that I've met has worked for my good.'

"With what intricacy to our view, and yet with what actual skill and goodness, does the Lord draw his plans, and mark out our path! Here we wonder and complain.—Soon we shall all agree that it was a right path to the city of habitation; and what we now most deeply regret shall become the subject of our warmest praises.

"I am afraid to come back again to life. Oh how many dangers await me! Perhaps I may be overcome of some fleshly lust—perhaps I may get proud and indolent, and be more of the priest than of the evangelist—surely I rejoice in feeling my outward man decay, and having the sentence of death in myself. Oh what prospects are before me in the blessed world whither I am going! To be *holy* as *God is holy*—to have nothing but holiness in my nature—to be assured, without a doubt, and eternally to carry about this assurance with me, that the pure God looks on me with constant complacency, for ever blesses me, and says, as at the first creation,—‘It is very good.’ I am happy now in hoping in the Divine purposes towards me; but I know, and the thought is my constant burden, that the Being I love best always sees something in me which he *infinitely hates*. ‘O wretched, wretched man that I am!’ The thought even now makes me weep; and who can help it that seriously reflects he never comes to God, to pray or praise, but he brings what his God detests along with him, carries it with him wherever he goes, and can never get rid of it as long as he lives? Come, my dear brother, will you not share my joy and help my praise, that soon I shall leave this body of sin and death behind, to enter on the perfection of my spiritual nature; and patiently to wait till this natural body shall become a spiritual body, and so be a fit vehicle for my immortal and happy spirit.

"But I must forbear—I have been very unwell all day; but this evening God has kindly given me a respite—my fever is low and my spirits are cheerful, so I have indulged myself in unbosoming my feelings to my dear friend."

MEMORANDA.

Taken down occasionally by Mrs. Pearce, within four or five weeks of Mr. Pearce's death.

He once said, "I have been in darkness two or three days, crying, Oh when wilt thou comfort me? But last night the mist was taken from me, and the Lord shone in upon my soul. Oh that I could speak! I would tell a world to trust a faithful God. Sweet affliction, now it worketh glory, glory!"

Mrs. P. having told him the various exercises of her mind, he replied,—“O trust the Lord; if he lifts up the light of his countenance upon you, as he has done upon me this day, all your mountains will become molehills. I feel your situation, I feel your sorrows; but he who takes care of sparrows will care for you and my dear children.”

When scorching with burning fever, he said, "Hot and happy."—One Lord's day morning he said, "Cheer up, my dear, think how much will be said to-day of the faithfulness of God. Though *we* are called to separate, *he* will never separate from you. I wish I could tell the world what a good and gracious God he is. Never need they who trust in him be afraid of trials. He has promised to give strength for the day; that is his promise. Oh what a lovely God! and he is *my* God and *yours*. He will never leave us nor forsake us, no never! I have been thinking that this and that medicine will do me good, but what have I to do with it? It is in my Jesus's hands; he will do it all, and there I leave it. What a mercy is it I have a good bed to lie upon; you, my dear Sarah, to wait upon me, and friends to pray for me! Oh how thankful should I be for all my pains! I want for nothing; all my wishes are anticipated. Oh I have felt the force of those words of

David,—‘Unless thy law (my gracious God!) had been my delights, I should have perished in mine affliction.’ Though I am too weak to read it, or hear it, I can think upon it, and oh how good it is! I am in the best hands I could be in; in the hands of my dear Lord and Saviour, and he will do all things well. Yes, yes, he cannot do wrong.”

One morning Mrs. P. asked him how he felt.—“Very ill, but unspeakably happy in the Lord, and my dear *Lord Jesus*.” Once beholding her grieving, he said, “O my dear Sarah, do not be so anxious, but leave me entirely in the hands of Jesus, and think, if you were as wise as he, you would do the same by me. If he takes me, I shall not be lost; I shall only go a little before: we shall meet again never to part.”

After a violent fit of coughing he said, “It is all well. Oh what a good God is he! It is done by him, and it must be well.—If I ever recover, I shall pity the sick more than ever; and if I do not, I shall go to sing delivering love; so you see it will be all well. Oh for more patience! Well, my God is the God of patience, and he will give me all I need. I rejoice it is in my Jesus’s hands to communicate, and it cannot be in better. It is my God who gives me patience to bear all his will.”

When, after a restless night, Mrs. P. asked him what she should do for him, —“You can do nothing but pray for me, that I may have patience to bear all my Lord’s will.”—After taking a medicine he said, “If it be the Lord’s will to bless it, for your sake, and for the sake of the dear children . . . but the Lord’s will be done. Oh I fear I sin, I dishonour God by impatience; but I would not for a thousand worlds sin in a thought if I could avoid it.” Mrs. P. replied, she trusted the Lord would still keep him; seeing he had brought him thus far, he would not desert him at last. “No, no,” he said, “I hope he will not. As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Why do I complain? My dear Jesus’s sufferings were much sorer and more bitter than mine. ‘And did he thus suffer, and shall I repine?’ No; I will cheerfully suffer my Father’s will.”

One morning, after being asked how he felt, he replied, “I have but one severe pain about me; what a mercy! Oh how good a God to afford some intervals amidst so much pain! He is altogether good. Jesus lives, my dear, and that must be our consolation.” After taking a medicine which operated very powerfully, he said, “This will make me so much lower; well, let it be. Multiply my pains, thou good God; so thou art but glorified, I care not what I suffer: all is right.”

Being asked how he felt after a restless night, he replied, “I have so much weakness and pain, I have not had much enjoyment; but I have a full persuasion that the Lord is doing all things well. If it were not for strong confidence in a lovely God, I must sink; but all is well. O blessed God, I would not love thee less. O support a sinking worm! Oh what a mercy to be assured that all things are working together for good!”

Mrs. P. saying, If we must part, I trust the separation will not be for ever —“Oh, no,” he replied, “we sorrow not as those who have no hope.” She said, Then you can leave me and your dear children with resignation, can you? He answered, “My heart was pierced through with many sorrows, before I could give you and the dear children up; but the Lord has heard me say, Thy will be done; and I now can say (blessed be his dear name!) I have none of my own.”

His last day, October 10th, was very happy. Mrs. P. repeated this verse,—

“Since all that I meet shall work for my good,
The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food;
Though painful at present, ’twill cease before long,
And then oh how pleasant the conqueror’s song!”

He repeated, with an inexpressible smile, the last line, "*The conqueror's song.*"

He said once, "O my dear! what shall I do? But why do I complain? he makes all my bed in my sickness." She then repeated those lines,—

"Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are."

"Yes," he replied, "he can, he does, I feel it."

CHAPTER V.

GENERAL OUTLINES OF HIS CHARACTER.

To develop the character of any person, it is necessary to determine what was his governing principle. If this can be clearly ascertained, we shall easily account for the tenor of his conduct.

The governing principle in Mr. Pearce, beyond all doubt, was HOLY LOVE.

To mention this is sufficient to prove it to all who knew him. His friends have often compared him to "that disciple whom Jesus loved." His religion was that of the heart. Almost every thing that he saw, or heard, or read, or studied, was converted to the feeding of this divine flame. Every subject that passed through his hands seemed to have been cast into this mould. Things that to a merely speculative mind would have furnished matter only for curiosity, to him afforded materials for devotion. His sermons were generally the effusions of his heart, and invariably aimed at the hearts of his hearers.

For the justness of the above remarks I might appeal, not only to the letters which he addressed to his friends, but to those which his friends addressed to him. It is worthy of notice how much we are influenced in our correspondence by the turn of mind of the person we address. If we write to a humorous character, we shall generally find that what we write, perhaps without being conscious of it, will be interspersed with pleasantries; or if to one of a very serious cast, our letters will be more serious than usual. On this principle it has been thought we may form some judgment of our own spirit by the spirit in which our friends address us. These remarks will apply with singular propriety to the correspondence of Mr. Pearce. In looking over the first volume of "*Periodical Accounts of the Baptist Mission,*" the reader will easily perceive the most affectionate letters from the missionaries are those which are addressed to him.

It is not enough to say of this affectionate spirit, that it formed a prominent feature in his character; it was rather the life-blood that animated the whole system. He seemed, as one of his friends observed, to be baptized in it. It was holy love that gave the tone to his general deportment: as a son, a subject, a neighbour, a Christian, a minister, a pastor, a friend, a husband, and a father, he was manifestly governed by this principle; and this it was that produced in him that lovely uniformity of character which constitutes the true *beauty of holiness*.

By the grace of God he was what he was; and to the honour of grace, and not the glory of a sinful worm, be it recorded. Like all other men, he was the subject of a depraved nature. He felt it, and lamented it, and longed to depart that he might be freed from it; but certainly we have seldom seen

a character, taking him altogether, "whose excellences were so many and so uniform, and whose imperfections were so few." We have seen men rise high in contemplation, who have abounded but little in action.—We have seen zeal mingled with bitterness, and candour degenerate into indifference: experimental religion mixed with a large portion of enthusiasm; and what is called rational religion void of every thing that interests the heart of man.—We have seen splendid talents tarnished with insufferable pride; seriousness with melancholy; cheerfulness with levity; and great attainments in religion with uncharitable censoriousness towards men of low degree: but we have not seen these things in our brother Pearce.

There have been few men in whom has been united a greater portion of the contemplative and the active—holy zeal and genuine candour—spirituality and rationality—talents that attracted almost universal applause, and yet the most unaffected modesty—faithfulness in bearing testimony against evil, with the tenderest compassion to the soul of the evil doer—fortitude that would encounter any difficulty in the way of duty, without any thing boisterous, noisy, or overbearing—deep seriousness, with habitual cheerfulness—and a constant aim to promote the highest degrees of piety in himself and others, with a readiness to hope the best of the lowest; not "breaking the bruised reed," nor "quenching the smoking flax."

He loved the Divine character as revealed in the Scriptures.—To adore God, to contemplate his glorious perfections, to enjoy his favour, and to submit to his disposal, were his highest delight. "I felt," says he, "when contemplating the hardships of a missionary life, that were the universe destroyed, and I the only being in it besides God, he is fully adequate to my complete happiness; and had I been in an African wood, surrounded with venomous serpents, devouring beasts, and savage men, in such a frame, I should be the subject of perfect peace and exalted joy. Yes, O my God! thou hast taught me that THOU ALONE art worthy of my confidence; and, with this sentiment fixed in my heart, I am freed from all solicitude about my temporal concerns. If thy presence be enjoyed, poverty shall be riches, darkness light, affliction prosperity, reproach my honour, and fatigue my rest!"

He loved the gospel.—The truths which he believed and taught dwelt richly in him, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. The reader will recollect how he went over the great principles of Christianity, examining the grounds on which he rested, in the first of those days which he devoted to solemn fasting and prayer in reference to his becoming a missionary;* and with what ardent affection he set his seal anew to every part of Divine truth as he went along.

If salvation had been of works, few men, according to our way of estimating characters, had a fairer claim; but, as he himself has related, he could not meet the king of terrors in this armour.† So far was he from placing any dependence on his own works, that the more he did for God, the less he thought of it in such a way. "All the satisfaction I wish for here," says he, "is to be doing my heavenly Father's will. I hope I have found it my meat and drink to do his work; and can set to my seal that the purest pleasures of human life spring from the humble obedience of faith. It is a good saying, 'We cannot do too much for God, nor trust in what we do too little.' I find a growing conviction of the necessity of a free salvation. The more I do for God, the less I think of it; and am progressively ashamed that I do no more."

Christ crucified was his darling theme, from first to last. This was the subject on which he dwelt at the outset of his ministry among the Coleford

* See Chap. II. p. 386.

† Chap. I. p. 374.

colliers, when "he could scarcely speak for weeping, nor they hear for interrupting sighs and sobs." This was the burden of the song, when addressing the more polished and crowded audiences at Birmingham, London, and Dublin; this was the grand motive exhibited in sermons for the promotion of public charities; and this was the rock on which he rested all his hopes, in the prospect of death. It is true, as we have seen, he was shaken for a time, by the writings of a *Whitby*, and of a *Priestley*; but this transient hesitation, by the overruling grace of God, tended only to establish him more firmly in the end. "Blessed be his dear name," says he, under his last affliction, "who shed his blood for me. He helps me to rejoice at times with joy unspeakable. Now I see the value of the religion of the cross. It is a religion for a dying sinner. It is all the most guilty and the most wretched can desire. Yes, I taste its sweetness, and enjoy its fulness, with all the gloom of a dying bed before me; and far rather would I be the poor emaciated and emaciating creature that I am, than be an emperor with every earthly good about him, but without a God."

Notwithstanding this, however, there were those in Birmingham, and other places, who would not allow that *he preached the gospel*. And if by the gospel were meant the doctrine taught by Mr. *Huntington*, Mr. *Bradford*, and others who follow hard after them, it must be granted he did not. If the fall and depravity of man operate to destroy his accountableness to his Creator—if his inability to obey the law, or comply with the gospel, be of such a nature as to excuse him in the neglect of either—or, if not, yet if Christ's coming under the law frees believers from all obligations to obey its precepts—if gospel invitations are addressed only to the regenerate—if the illuminating influences of the Holy Spirit consist in revealing to us the secret purposes of God concerning us, or impressing us with the idea that we are the favourites of Heaven—if believing such impressions be Christian faith, and doubting of their validity unbelief—if there be no such thing as progressive sanctification, nor any sanctification inherent, except that of the illumination before described—if wicked men are not obliged to do any thing beyond what they can find in their hearts to do, nor good men to be holy beyond what they actually are—and if these things constitute the *gospel*, Mr. Pearce certainly *did not* preach it. But if a man, whatever be his depravity, be necessarily a free agent, and accountable for all his dispositions and actions—if gospel invitations be addressed to men, not as elect nor as non-elect, but as sinners exposed to the righteous displeasure of God—if Christ's obedience and death rather increase than diminish our obligations to love God and one another—if faith in Christ be a falling in with God's way of salvation, and unbelief a falling out with it—if sanctification be a progressive work, and so essential a branch of our salvation as that without it no man shall see the Lord—if the Holy Spirit instruct us in nothing by his illuminating influences but what was already revealed in the Scriptures, and which we should have perceived but for that we loved darkness rather than light—and if he incline us to nothing but what was antecedently right, or to such a spirit as every intelligent creature ought at all times to have possessed—then Mr. Pearce *did* preach the gospel; and that which his accusers call by this name is *another gospel*, and not the gospel of Christ.

Moreover, If the doctrine taught by Mr. Pearce be not the gospel of Christ, and that which is taught by the above writers and their adherents be, it may be expected that the effects produced will in some degree correspond with this representation. And is it evident to all men who are acquainted with both, and who judge impartially, that the doctrine taught by Mr. Pearce is productive of "hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, railings, evil sur-

misings, and perverse disputings;" that it renders those who embrace it, "lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, false accusers, fierce, despisers of those that are good;" while that of his adversaries promotes "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance?" "*why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? ye shall know them by their fruits.*"

Mr. Pearce's ideas of preaching *human obligation* may be seen in the following extract from a letter addressed to a young minister who was sent out of the church of which he was a pastor. "You request my thoughts how a minister should preach *human obligation*. I would reply, do it *extensively*, do it *constantly*; but, withal, do it *affectionately*, and *evangelically*. I think, considering the general character of our hearers, and the state of their mental improvement, it would be time lost to argue much from the data of natural religion. The best way is perhaps to express duties in Scripture language, and enforce them by evangelical motives; as the example of Christ—the end of his sufferings and death—the consciousness of his approbation—the assistance he has promised—the influence of a holy conversation on God's people, and on the people of the world—the small returns we at best can make for the love of Jesus—and the hope of eternal holiness. These form a body of arguments which the most simple may understand, and the most dull may feel. Yet I would not neglect on *some occasions* to show the obligations of man to love his Creator—the reasonableness of the Divine law—and the natural tendency of its commands to promote our own comfort, the good of society, and the glory of God. These will serve to *illuminate*, but, after all, it is 'the gospel of the grace of God' that will most effectually *animate*, and impel to action."

Mr. Pearce's affection to the doctrine of the cross was not merely, nor principally, on account of its being a system which secured his own safety. Had this been the case, he might, like others whose religion originates and terminates in self-love, have been delighted with the idea of the grace of the Son; but it would have been at the expense of all complacency in the righteous government of the Father. He might have admired something which he accounted the gospel, as saving him from misery; but he could have discerned no loveliness in the Divine law as being holy, just, and good, nor in the mediation of Christ as doing honour to it. That which in his view constituted the glory of the gospel was, that God is therein revealed as "the just God and the Saviour—just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

He was a lover of good men.—He was never more in his element than when joining with them in spiritual conversation, prayer, and praise. His heart was tenderly attached to the people of his charge; and it was one of the bitterest ingredients in his cup during his long affliction to be cut off from their society. When in the neighbourhood of Plymouth, he thus writes to Mr. King, one of the deacons, "Give my love to all the dear people. O pray that He who afflicts would give me patience to endure. Indeed the state of suspense in which I have been kept so long requires much of it; and I often exclaim, ere I am aware, O my dear people! O my dear family, when shall I return to you again?" He conscientiously dissented from the Church of England, and from every other national establishment of religion, as inconsistent with what he judged the Scriptural account of the nature of Christ's kingdom; nor was he less conscientious in his rejection of infant baptism, considering it has having no foundation in the Holy Scriptures, and as tending to confound the church and the world: yet he embraced with brotherly affection great numbers of godly men both in and out of the establishment. His spirit was truly catholic: he loved all who loved our Lord

Jesus Christ in sincerity. "Let us pray," said he in a letter to a friend, "for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper who love—not this part, or the other, but who love *her*—that is, the whole body of Christ."

He bore good-will to all mankind.—It was from this principle that he so ardently desired to go and preach the gospel among the heathen. And even under his long affliction, when at times he entertained hopes of recovery, he would say, "My soul pants for usefulness more extensive than ever: I long to become an apostle to the world!" The errors and sins of men wrought much in him in a way of pity. He knew that they were culpable in the sight of God; but he knew also that he himself was a sinner, and felt that they were entitled to his compassion. His zeal for the Divinity and atonement of his Saviour never appeared to have operated in a way of unchristian bitterness against those who rejected these important doctrines; and though he was shamefully traduced by professors of another description as a mere legal preacher, and his ministry held up as affording no food for the souls of believers—and though he could not but feel the injury of such misrepresentations, yet he does not appear to have cherished unchristian resentment; but would at any time have laid himself out for the good of his worst enemies. It was his constant endeavour to promote as good an understanding between the different congregations in the town as the nature of their different religious sentiments would admit. The cruel bitterness of many people against Dr. Priestley and his friends, at and after the Birmingham riots, was affecting to his mind. Such methods of opposing error he abhorred. His regard to mankind made him lament the consequences of war; but while he wished and prayed for peace to the nations, and especially to his native country, he had no idea of turbulently contending for it. Though friendly to civil and religious liberty, he stood aloof from the fire of political contention. In an excellent Circular Letter to the churches of the midland association in 1794, of which he was the writer, he thus expresses himself:—"Have as little as possible to do with the world. Meddle not with political controversies. An inordinate pursuit of these, we are sorry to observe, has been as a canker-worm at the root of vital piety; and caused the love of many, formerly zealous professors, to wax cold. 'The Lord reigneth;' it is our place to 'rejoice in his government, and quietly wait for the salvation of God.' The establishment of his kingdom will be the ultimate end of all those national commotions which terrify the earth. 'The wrath of man shall praise him; and the remainder of wrath he will restrain.'" From this time, more than ever, he turned his whole attention to the promoting of the kingdom of Christ, cherishing and recommending a spirit of contentment and gratitude for the civil and religious advantages that we enjoyed. Such were the sentiments inculcated in the last sermon that he printed, and the last but one that he preached. His dear young friends who are gone to India will never forget how earnestly he charged them by letter, when confined at Plymouth, to conduct themselves in all civil matters as peaceable and obedient subjects to the government under which they lived, in whatever country it might be their lot to reside.

It was love that tempered his faithfulness with so large a portion of tender concern for the good of those whose conduct he was obliged to censure.—He could not bear them that were evil; but would set himself against them with the greatest firmness; yet it was easy to discover the pain of mind with which this necessary part of duty was discharged. It is well remembered how he conducted himself towards certain preachers in the neighbourhood, who, wandering from place to place, corrupted and embroiled the churches; whose conduct he knew to be as dishonourable as their principles were loose and unscriptural; and, when requested to recite particulars in his own de-

fence, his fear and tenderness for character, his modest reluctance to accuse persons older than himself, and his deep concern that men engaged in the Christian ministry should render such accusations necessary, were each conspicuous, and proved to all present that the work of an accuser was to him a *strange work*.

It was love that expanded his heart, and prompted him to labour in season and out of season for the salvation of sinners.—This was the spring of that constant stream of activity by which his life was distinguished. His conscience would not suffer him to decline what appeared to be right. “I dare not refuse,” he would say, “lest I should shrink from duty. Unjustifiable ease is worse than the most difficult labours to which duty calls.” To persons who never entered into his views and feelings, some parts of his conduct, especially those which relate to his desire of quitting his country that he might preach the gospel to the heathen, will appear extravagant; but no man could with greater propriety have adopted the language of the apostle, “Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause; for the love of Christ constraineth us.”

He was frequently told that his exercises were too great for his strength; but such was the ardour of his heart, “He could not die in a better work.” When he went up into the pulpit to deliver his last sermon, he thought he should not have been able to get through; but when he got a little warm, he felt relieved, and forgot his indisposition, preaching with equal fervour and freedom as when in perfect health. While he was laid aside he could not forbear hoping that he should some time resume his delightful work; and, knowing the strength of his feelings to be such that it would be unsafe to trust himself, he proposed for a time to write his discourses, that his mind might not be at liberty to overdo his debilitated frame.

All his counsels, cautions, and reproofs, appear to have been the effect of love.—It was a rule dictated by his heart, no less than by his judgment, to discourage all evil speaking; nor would he approve of just censure unless some good and necessary end were to be answered by it. Two of his distant friends being at his house together, one of them, during the absence of the other, suggested something to his disadvantage. He put a stop to the conversation by answering, “He is here, take him aside, and tell him of it by himself: you may do him good.”

If he perceived any of his acquaintance bewildered in fruitless speculations, he would in an affectionate manner endeavour to draw off their attention from the mazes of confusion to the simple doctrines of the cross. A specimen of this kind of treatment will be seen in the letter, No. I., towards the close of this chapter.

He was affectionate to all, but especially towards the *rising generation*. The youth of his own congregation, of London, and of Dublin, have not forgot his melting discourses, which were particularly addressed to them. He took much delight in speaking to the children, and would adapt himself to their capacities, and expostulate with them on the things which belonged to their everlasting peace. While at Plymouth, he wrote thus to one of his friends, “Oh how should I rejoice, were there a speedy prospect of my returning to my great and *little* congregations!” Nor was it by preaching only that he sought their eternal welfare: several of his letters are addressed to young persons.—See No. II. and III., towards the close of this chapter.

With what joy did he congratulate one of his most intimate friends, on hearing that three of the younger branches of his family had apparently been brought to take the Redeemer's yoke upon them!—“Thanks, thanks be to God,” said he, “for the enrapturing prospects before you as a *father*, as a

Christian father especially. What, *three* of a family! and these three at once! Oh the heights and depths, and lengths and breadths of his unfathomable grace! My soul feels joy unspeakable at the blessed news. Three immortal souls secured for eternal life! Three rational spirits preparing to grace Immanuel's triumphs, and sing his praise! Three examples of virtue and goodness, exhibiting the genuine influence of the true religion of Jesus before the world!—Perhaps three mothers training up to lead three future families in the way to heaven. Oh what a train of blessings do I see in this event! Most sincerely do I participate with my dear friend in his pleasures, and in his gratitude."

Towards the close of life, writing to the same friend, he thus concludes his letter:—"Present our love to dear Mrs. S——, and the family, especially those whose hearts are engaged to seek the Lord and his goodness. O tell them they will find him good all their lives, supremely good on dying beds, and best of all in glory."

In his visits to the sick he was singularly useful. His sympathetic conversation, affectionate prayers, and endearing manner of recommending to them a compassionate Saviour, frequently operated as a cordial to their troubled hearts. A young man of his congregation was dangerously ill. His father living at a distance was anxious to hear from him; and Mr. Pearce, in a letter to the minister on whose preaching the father attended, wrote as follows:—"I feel for the anxiety of Mr. V——, and am happy in being at this time a Barnabas to him. I was not seriously alarmed for his son till last Tuesday, when I expected from every symptom, and the language of his apothecary, that he was nigh unto death. But, to our astonishment and joy, a surprising change has since taken place. I saw him yesterday apparently in a fair way of recovery. His mind for the first part of his illness was sometimes joyful, and almost constantly calm: but, when at the worst, suspicions crowded his mind; he feared he had been a hypocrite. I talked, and prayed, and wept with him. One scene was very affecting: both he and his wife appeared like persons newly awakened. They never felt *so strongly* the importance of religion before. He conversed about the tenderness of Jesus to broken-hearted sinners; and, whilst we spoke, it seemed as though he came and began to heal the wound. It did me good, and I trust was not unavailing to them. They have since been for the most part happy; and a very pleasant interview I had with them on the past day."

Every man must have his seasons of relaxation. In his earlier years he would take strong bodily exercise. Of late he occasionally employed himself with the microscope, and in making a few philosophical experiments.

"We will amuse ourselves with philosophy," said he to a philosophical friend, "but Jesus shall be our teacher." In all these exercises he seems never to have lost sight of God; but would be discovering something in his works that should furnish matter for praise and admiration. His mind did not appear to have been unfitted, but rather assisted by such pursuits, for the discharge of the more spiritual exercises, into which he would fall at a proper season, as into his native element. If in company with his friends, and the conversation turned upon the works of nature, or art, or any other subject of science, he would cheerfully take a part in it, and when occasion required, by some easy and pleasant transition, direct it into another channel. An ingenious friend once showed him a model of a machine which he thought of constructing, and by which he hoped to be able to produce a perpetual motion. Mr. Pearce, having patiently inspected it, discovered where the operation would stop, and pointed it out. His friend was convinced, and felt, as may be supposed, rather unpleasant at his disappointment. He consoled him; and, a prayer-meeting being at hand, said to this effect, "We may learn from hence our own

insufficiency, and the glory of that Being who is 'wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working:' let us go and worship Him."

His mild and gentle disposition, not apt to give or take offence, often won upon persons in matters wherein at first they have shown themselves averse. When collecting for the Baptist mission, a gentleman, who had no knowledge of him, or of the conductors of that undertaking, made some objections on the ground that the Baptists had little or nothing to say to the unconverted. This objection Mr. Pearce attempted to remove, by alleging that the parties concerned in this business were entirely of another mind. "I am glad to hear it," said the gentleman; "but I have my fears." "Then pray, sir," said Mr. Pearce, "do not give till you are satisfied." "Why, I assure you," replied the other, "I think the Methodists more likely to succeed than you; and should feel more pleasure in giving them ten guineas, than you one." "If you give them twenty guineas, sir," said Mr. Pearce, "we shall rejoice in their success; and if you give us one, I hope it will not be misapplied." The gentleman smiled, and gave him four.

His figure, to a superficial observer, would, at first sight, convey nothing very interesting; but, on close inspection, his countenance would be acknowledged to be a faithful index to his soul. Calm, placid, and, when in the pulpit especially, full of animation, his appearance was not a little expressive of the interest he felt in the eternal welfare of his audience; his eyes beaming benignity, and speaking in the most impressive language his willingness to *impart not only the gospel of God, but his own soul also*.

His imagination was vivid, and his judgment clear. He relished the elegances of science, and felt alive to the most delicate and refined sentiments; yet these were things on account of which he does not appear to have valued himself. They were rather his amusements than his employment.

His address was easy and insinuating; his voice pleasant, but sometimes overstrained in the course of his sermon; his language chaste, flowing, and inclining to the florid: this last, however, abated as his judgment ripened. His delivery was rather slow than rapid; his attitude graceful; and his countenance, in almost all his discourses, approaching to an affectionate smile. He never appears, however, to have studied what are called the graces of pulpit action; and whatever he had read concerning them, it was manifest that he thought nothing of them, or of any other of the ornaments of speech, at the time. Both his action and language were the genuine expressions of an ardent mind, affected, and sometimes deeply, with his subject. Being rather below the common stature, and disregarding, or rather, I might say, disapproving every thing pompous in his appearance, he has upon some occasions been prejudged to his disadvantage; but the song of the nightingale is not the less melodious for his not appearing in a gaudy plumage. His manner of preparing for the pulpit may be seen in a letter addressed to Mr. C——, of L——, who was sent out of his church, and which may be of use to others in a similar situation. See No. IV. towards the close of this chapter.

His ministry was highly acceptable to persons of education; but he appears to have been most in his element when preaching to the poor. The feelings which he himself expresses, when instructing the colliers, appear to have continued with him through life. It was his delight to carry the glad tidings of salvation into the villages wherever he could find access and opportunity. And as he sought the good of their souls, so he both laboured and suffered to relieve their temporal wants; living himself in a style of frugality and self-denial, that he might have whereof to give to them that needed.

Finally, *He possessed a large portion of real happiness.*—There are few

characters whose enjoyments, both natural and spiritual, have risen to so great a height. He dwelt in love; and "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Such a life must needs be happy. If his religion had originated and terminated in self-love, as some contend the whole of religion does, his joys had been not only of a different nature, but far less extensive than they were. His interest was bound up with that of his Lord and Saviour. Its afflictions were his affliction, and its joys his joy. The grand object of his desire was to "see the good of God's chosen, to rejoice in the gladness of his nation, and to glory with his inheritance." "What pleasures do those lose," says he, "who have no interest in God's gracious and holy cause!"*

If an object of joy presented itself to his mind, he would delight in multiplying it by its probable or possible consequences. Thus it was, as we have seen, in his congratulating his friend on the conversion of three of his children; and thus it was when speaking of a people who divided into two congregations, not from discord, but from an increase of numbers; and who generously united in erecting a new and additional place of worship:—"These liberal souls are subscribing," said he, "in order to support a religion which, as far as it truly prevails, will render others as liberal as themselves."

His heart was so much formed for social enjoyment, that he seems to have contemplated the heavenly state under this idea with peculiar advantage. This was the leading theme of a discourse from Rev. v. 9-12, which he delivered at a meeting of ministers at Arnsby, April 18, 1797; and of which his brethren retain a lively remembrance. On this pleasing subject he dwells also in a letter to his dear friend *Birt*.—"I had much pleasure, a few days since, in meditating on the affectionate language of our Lord to his sorrowful disciples:—'I go to prepare a place for you.' What a plenitude of consolation do these words contain! what a sweet view of heaven as a place of *society*! It is *one place* for us all; that place where his glorified body is, there all his followers shall assemble, to part no more. Where he is, there we shall be also. O blessed anticipation! There shall be Abel, and all the martyrs; Abraham, and all the patriarchs; Isaiah, and all the prophets; Paul, and all the apostles; Gabriel, and all the angels; and, above all, Jesus, and all his ransomed people! Oh to be amongst the number! My dear brother, let us be strong in the Lord. Let us realize the bliss before us. Let our faith bring heaven itself near, and feast, and live upon the scene. Oh what a commanding influence would it have upon our thoughts, passions, comforts, sorrows, words, ministry, prayers, praises, and conduct. What manner of persons should we be in all holy conversation and godliness!"

In many persons the pleasures imparted by religion are counteracted by a gloomy constitution; but it was not so in him. In his disposition they met with a friendly soil. Cheerfulness was as natural to him as breathing; and this spirit, sanctified by the grace of God, gave a tincture to all his thoughts, conversation, and preaching. He was seldom heard without tears; but they were frequently tears of pleasure. No levity, no attempts at wit, no aiming to excite the risibility of an audience, ever disgraced his sermons. Religion in him was habitual seriousness, mingled with sacred pleasure, frequently rising into sublime delight, and occasionally overflowing with transporting joy.

* See the Letter to Dr. Ryland, May 30, 1796.

LETTERS REFERRED TO IN THIS CHAPTER.

No. I.

To a young man whose mind he perceived was bewildered with fruitless speculations.

"The conversation we had on our way to — so far interested me in your religious feelings, that I find it impossible to satisfy my mind till I have expressed my ardent wishes for the happy termination of your late exercises, and contributed my mite to the promotion of your joy in the Lord. A disposition more or less to 'scepticism,' I believe, is common to our nature, in proportion as opposite systems and jarring opinions, each supported by a plausibility of argument, are presented to our minds; and with some qualification, I admit Robinson's remark, 'That he who never doubted never believed.' While examining the grounds of persuasion, it is right for the mind to hesitate. Opinions ought not to be prejudged, any more than criminals. Every objection ought to have its weight; and the more numerous and forcible objections are, the more cause shall we finally have for the triumph, '*Magna est veritas et prevalebit*;' but there are two or three considerations which have no small weight with me in relation to religious controversies.

"The first is, The importance of truth. It would be endless to write on truth in general. I confine my views to what I deem the leading truth in the New Testament,—*The atonement made on behalf of sinners by the Son of God; the doctrine of the cross; Jesus Christ and him crucified.* It surely cannot be a matter of small concern whether the Creator of all things, out of mere love to rebellious men, exchanged a throne for a cross, and thereby reconciled a ruined world to God. If this be not true, how can we respect the Bible as an inspired book, which so plainly attributes our salvation to the grace of God, 'through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus?' And if we discard the Bible, what can we do with prophecies, miracles, and all the power of evidence on which, as on adamant pillars, its authority abides? Surely the infidel has more to reject than the believer to embrace. That book then which we receive, not as the word of man, but as the word of God, not as the religion of our ancestors, but on the invincible conviction which attends an impartial investigation of its evidences—that book reveals a truth of the highest importance to man, consonant to the opinions of the earliest ages and the most enlightened nations, perfectly consistent with the Jewish economy as to its spirit and design, altogether adapted to unite the equitable and merciful perfections of the Deity in the sinner's salvation, and above all things calculated to beget the most established peace, to inspire with the liveliest hope, and to engage the heart and life in habitual devotedness to the interest of morality and piety. Such a doctrine I cannot but venerate; and to the *author* of such a doctrine my whole soul labours to exhaust itself in praise.

'Oh the sweet wonders of the cross,
Where God my Saviour loved and died!'

Forgive, my friend, forgive the transport of a soul compelled to feel where it attempts only to explore. I cannot on *this* subject control my passions by the laws of logic. 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ Jesus my Lord!'

"Secondly, I consider man as a depraved creature, so depraved that his judgment is as dark as his appetites are sensual, wholly dependent on God, therefore, for religious light as well as true devotion, yet such a dupe to pride as to reject every thing which the narrow limits of his comprehension cannot embrace, and such a slave to his passions as to admit no law but self-

interest for his government. With these views of human nature I am persuaded we ought to suspect our own decisions, whenever they oppose truths too sublime for our understandings, or too pure for our lusts. To err on this side, indeed, 'is human;' wherefore the wise man saith, 'He that trusteth to his own heart is a fool.' Should therefore the evidence be only equal on the side of the gospel of Christ, I should think with this allowance we should do well to admit it.

"Thirdly, If the gospel of Christ be true, it should be heartily embraced. We should yield ourselves to its influence without reserve. We must come to a point, and resolve to be either infidels or Christians. To know the power of the sun we should expose ourselves to his rays; to know the sweetness of honey we must bring it to our palates. Speculations will not do in either of these cases, much less will it in matters of religion.—'My son,' saith God, 'give me thine heart!'

"Fourthly, A humble admission of the light we already have is the most effectual way to a full conviction of the truth of the doctrine of Christ. 'If any man will *do* his will, he shall know of his doctrine whether it be of God.' If we honour God as far as we know his will, he will honour us with further discoveries of it. Thus shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord; thus, thus shall you, my dear friend, become assured that there is salvation in no other name than that of Jesus Christ: and thus, from an inward experience of the quickening influences of his Holy Spirit, you will join the admiring church, and say of Jesus, 'This is my Beloved, this is my Friend; he is the chiefest among ten thousand, he is altogether lovely.' Yes, I yet hope—I expect—to see you rejoicing in Christ Jesus; and appearing as a living witness that he is faithful who hath said—'Seek, and ye shall find; ask, and receive, that your joy may be full.'"

In another letter to the same correspondent, after congratulating himself that he had discovered such a mode of killing noxious insects as should put them to the least pain, and which was characteristic of the tenderness of his heart, he proceeds as follows: "But enough of nature. How is my brother *as a Christian*? We have had some interesting moments in conversation on the methods of grace, that grace whose influence reaches to the day of adversity and the hour of death; seasons when of every thing else it may be said, Miserable comforters are they all! My dear friend, we will amuse ourselves with philosophy, but Christ shall be our teacher; Christ shall be our glory; Christ shall be our portion. Oh that we may be enabled 'to comprehend the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge!'"

No. II.

To a young gentleman of his acquaintance, who was then studying physic at Edinburgh.

"Did my dear friend P—— know with what sincere affection and serious concern I almost daily think of him, he would need no other evidence of the effect which his last visit and his subsequent letters have produced. Indeed there is not a young man in the world, in earlier life than myself, for whose universal prosperity I am so deeply interested. Many circumstances I can trace, on a review of the past fourteen years, which have contributed to beget and augment affection and esteem; and I can assure you that *every interview* and *every letter* still tends to consolidate my regard.

"Happy should I be if my ability to serve you at this important crisis of human life were equal to your wishes or my own. Your situation demands all the aids which the wisdom and prudence of your friends can afford, that

you may be directed not only to the most worthy objects of pursuit, but also to the most effectual means for obtaining them. In your professional character it is impossible for me to give you any assistance. If any general observations I can make should prove at all useful, I shall be richly rewarded for the time I employ in their communication.

"I thank you sincerely for the freedom wherewith you have disclosed the peculiarities of your situation, and the views and resolutions wherewith they have inspired you. I can recommend nothing better, my dear friend, than a *determined adherence* to the purposes you have already formed respecting the intimacies you contract and the associates you choose. In such a place as Edinburgh, it may be supposed, no description of persons will be wanting. Some so notoriously vicious that their atrocity of character will have no small tendency to confirm your morals, from the odious contrast which their practices present to your view. Against these therefore I need not caution you. You will flee them as so many serpents, in whose breath is venom and destruction. More danger may be apprehended from those mixed characters, who blend the profession of philosophical refinement with the secret indulgence of those sensual gratifications which at once exhaust the pocket, destroy the health, and debase the character.

"That morality is friendly to individual happiness and to social order, no man who respects his own conscience or character will have the effrontery to deny. Its avenues cannot, therefore, be too sacredly guarded, nor those principles which support a virtuous practice be too seriously maintained. But morality derives, it is true, its best, its only support from the principles of religion. 'The fear of the Lord,' said the wise man, 'is to hate evil.' He therefore who endeavours to weaken the sanctions of religion, to induce a sceptical habit, to detach my thoughts from an *ever-present God*, and my hopes from a futurity of holy enjoyment, HE is a worse enemy than the man who meets me with the pistol and the dagger. Should my dear friend then fall into the company of those whose friendship cannot be purchased but by the sacrifice of revelation, I hope he will ever think such a price too great for the good opinion of men who blaspheme piety and dishonour God. Deism is indeed the fashion of the day, and, to be in the mode, you must quit the good old path of devotion, as too antiquated for any but monks and hermits: so as you laugh at religion, that is enough to secure to you the company and the applause of the sons of politeness. Oh that God may be a buckler and a shield to defend you from their assaults! Let but their private morals be inquired into, and, if they may have a hearing, I dare engage they will not bear a favourable testimony to the good tendency of scepticism; and it may be regarded as an indisputable axiom, that what is unfriendly to virtue is unfriendly to man.

"Were I to argue a *posteriori* in favour of truth, I should contend that those principles must be true which, first, corresponded with general observation—secondly, tended to general happiness—thirdly, preserved a uniform connexion between cause and effect, evil and remedy, in all situations.

"I would then apply these data to the principles held on the one side by the deists, and on the other by the believers in revelation. In the application of the *first*, I would refer to the state of human nature. The deist contends for its purity and powers. Revelation declares its depravity and weakness. I compare these opposite declarations with the facts that fall under constant observation. Do I not see that there is a larger portion of vice in the world than of virtue; that no man needs solicitation to evil, but every man a guard against it: and that thousands bewail their subjection to lusts which they have not power to subdue, whilst they live in moral slavery, and cannot burst the chain? Which principle then shall I admit? Will

observation countenance the *deistical*? I am convinced to the contrary, and must say, I cannot be a deist without becoming a fool; and, to exalt my reason, I must deny my senses.

"I take the *second* datum, and inquire which tends most to general happiness. To secure happiness, three things are necessary:—*objects, means, and motives*. The question is, which points out the *true source* of happiness, which directs to the *best means* for attaining it, and which furnishes me with the most *powerful motives* to induce my pursuit of it? If I take a deist for my tutor, he tells me that *fame* is the object, *universal accommodation of manners* to interest the means, and *self-love* the spring of action. Sordid teacher! From him I turn to *Jesus*. His better voice informs me that the source of felicity is the *friendship of my God*; that *love to my Maker*, and *love to man*, expressed in all the noble and amiable effusions of devotion and benevolence, are the means; and that *the glory of God*, and *the happiness of the universe*, must be my motives. Blessed Instructor; thy dictates approve themselves to every illuminated conscience, to every pious heart! Do they not, my dear P——, approve themselves to yours?

"But I will not tire your patience by pursuing these remarks. Little did I think of such amplification when I first took up my pen. Oh that I may have the joy of finding that these (at least well meant) endeavours to establish your piety have not been ungraciously received, nor wholly unprofitable to your mind! I am encouraged to these effusions of friendship by that amiable *self-distrust* which your letter expresses,—a temper not only becoming the earlier stages of life, but graceful in all its advancing periods.

"Unspeakable satisfaction does it afford me to find that you are conscious of the necessity of 'first' seeking assistance from heaven. Retain, my dear friend, this honourable, this equitable sentiment. 'In all thy ways acknowledge God, and he shall direct thy paths.'

"I hope you will still be cautious in your intimacies. You will gain more by a half-hour's intercourse with God than the friendship of the whole college can impart. Too much acquaintance would be followed with a waste of that precious time on the present improvement of which your future usefulness and respectability in your profession depend. Like the bee, you may do best by sipping the sweets of every flower; but remember the sweetest blossom is not the *hive*.

"P. S. So many books have been published on the same subject as the manuscript which you helped me to copy, that I have not sent it to the press."*

No. III.

To a young lady at school, Miss A. H., a daughter of one of the members of his church.

"I cannot deny myself the pleasure which this opportunity affords me of expressing the concern I feel for your happiness, arising from the sincerest friendship,—a friendship which the many amiable qualities you possess, together with the innumerable opportunities I have had of seeing them displayed, have taught me to form and perpetuate.

"It affords me inexpressible pleasure to hear that you are so happy in your present situation—a situation in which I rejoice to see you placed, because it is not merely calculated to embellish the manners, but to profit the

* The compiler believes this was an answer to Mr. Peter Edwards's *Candid Reasons*, &c. He knows Mr. Pearce did write an answer to that performance. By the imposing air of the writer he has acknowledged he was at first a little stunned; but, upon examining his arguments, found it no very difficult undertaking to point out their fallacy.

soul. I hope that my dear Ann, amidst the various pursuits of an ornamental or scientific nature which she may adopt, will not omit that first, that great concern, the dedication of her heart to God. To this, my dear girl, every thing invites you that is worthy of your attention. The dignity of a rational and immortal soul, the condition of human nature, the gracious truths and promises of God, the sweetness and usefulness of religion, the comfort it yields in affliction, the security it affords in temptation, the supports it gives in death, and the prospects it opens of life everlasting; all these considerations, backed with the uncertainty of life, the solemnity of judgment, the terrors of hell, and the calls of conscience and of God,—all demand your heart for the *blessed Jehovah*. This, and nothing short of this, is true religion. You have often heard, and often *written* on religion: it is time you should *FEEL* it now. Oh what a blessedness will attend your hearty surrender of yourself to the God and Father of men! Methinks I see all the angels of God rejoicing at the sight; all the saints in heaven partaking of their joy; Jesus himself, who died for sinners, gazing on you with delight; your own heart filled with peace and joy in believing; and a thousand streams of goodness flowing from your renovated soul to refresh the aged saint, and to encourage your fellow youth to seek first the kingdom of heaven, and press on to God. But oh, should I be mistaken! Alas, alas, I cannot bear the thought. O thou Saviour of sinners, and God of love, take captive the heart of my dear young friend, and make her truly willing to be wholly thine!

“If you can find freedom, do oblige me with a letter on the state of religion in your soul, and be assured of every sympathy or advice that I am capable of feeling or giving.”

No. IV.

To a young Minister, Mr. Cave, of Leicester, on preparation for the pulpit.

“MY DEAR BROTHER,

“Your first letter gave me much pleasure. I hoped you would learn some useful lesson from the first sabbath disappointment. Every thing is good that leads us to depend more simply on the Lord. Could I choose my frames, I would say respecting industry in preparation for public work, as is frequently said respecting Christian obedience—I would apply as close as though I expected no help from the Lord, whilst I would depend upon the Lord for assistance as though I had never made any preparation at all.

“I rejoice much in every thing that affords you ground for solid pleasure. The account of the affection borne you by the people of God was therefore a matter of joy to my heart, especially as I learnt from the person who brought your letter that the friendship seemed pretty general.

“Your last has occasioned me some pain on your account, because it informs me that you have been ‘exceedingly tried in the pulpit;’ but I receive satisfaction again from considering that the gloom of midnight precedes the rising day, not only in the natural world, but frequently also in the Christian minister’s experience. Do not be discouraged, my dear brother; those whose labours God has been pleased most eminently to bless, have generally had their days of prosperity ushered in with clouds and storms. You are in the sieve; but the sieve is in our Saviour’s hands; and he will not suffer any thing but the chaff to fall through, let him winnow us as often as he may. No one at times, I think I may say, has been worse tried than myself in the same manner as you express; though I must be thankful it has not been often.

"You ask direction of me, my dear brother. I am too inexperienced myself to be capable of directing others; yet if the little time I have been employed for God has furnished me with any thing worthy of communication, it will be imparted to no one with more readiness than to you.

"I should advise you, when you have been distressed by hesitation, to reflect whether it arose from an inability to recollect your ideas, or to obtain words suited to convey them.—If the former, I think these two directions may be serviceable: First, Endeavour to think *in a train*. Let one idea depend upon another in your discourses, as one link does upon another in a chain. For this end I have found it necessary to arrange my subjects in the order of time. Thus, for instance,—If speaking of the promises, I would begin with those which were suited to the earliest inquiries of a convinced soul; as pardon, assistance in prayer, wisdom, &c.; then go to those parts of Christian experience which are usually subsequent to the former; as promises of support in afflictions, deliverance from temptations, and perseverance in grace; closing with a review of those which speak of support in death, and final glory. Then all the varieties of description respecting the glory of heaven will follow in natural order; as, the enlargement of the understanding, purification of the affections, intercourse with saints, angels, and even Christ himself, which will be *eternal*: thus beginning with the lowest marks of grace, and ascending step by step, you arrive at last in the fruition of faith. This mode is most natural, and most pleasing to the hearers, as well as assisting to the preacher; for one idea gives birth to another, and he can hardly help going forward regularly and easily.

"Secondly, Labour to *render your ideas transparent to yourself*. Never offer to introduce a thought which you cannot *see through* before you enter the pulpit.—You have read in *Claude* that the best preparative to preach from a subject is to understand it; and I think Bishop Burnet says, 'No man properly understands any thing who cannot at *any time* represent it to others.'

"If your hesitation proceeds from a want of words, I should advise you—1. *To read good and easy authors; Dr. Watts especially.*—To write a great part of your sermons, and for a while get at least the leading ideas of every head of discourse by heart, enlarging only at the close of every thought.—3. Sometimes, as in the end of sermons, or when you preach in villages, *start off in preaching beyond all you have premeditated*. Fasten on some leading ideas; as the solemnity of death, the awfulness of judgment, the necessity of a change of heart, the willingness of Christ to save, &c. Never mind how far you ramble from the point, so as you do not lose sight of it; and if your heart be any way warm, you will find some expressions then fall from your lips which your imagination could not produce in an age of studious application.—4. *Divest yourself of all fear*. If you should break the rules of grammar, or put in or leave out a word, and recollect at the end of the sentence the impropriety, unless it makes nonsense, or bad divinity, never try to mend it, but let it pass. If so, perhaps only a few would notice it; but if you stammer in trying to mend it, you will expose yourself to all the congregation.

"In addition to all I have said, you know where to look, and from whom to seek that wisdom and strength which only God can give. To him I recommend you, my dear brother, assuring you of my real esteem for you, and requesting you will not fail to pray for the least of saints, but yours affectionately,
S. P."

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.

THE great ends of Christian biography are instruction and example. By faithfully describing the lives of men eminent for godliness, we not only embalm their memory, but furnish ourselves with fresh materials and motives for a holy life. It is abundantly more impressive to view the religion of Jesus as operating in a living character than to contemplate it abstractedly. For this reason we may suppose the Lord the Spirit has condescended to exhibit, first and principally, the life of Christ; and, after his, that of many of his eminent followers. And for this reason he by his holy influences still furnishes the church with now and then a singular example of godliness, which it is our duty to notice and record. There can be no reasonable doubt that the life of Mr. Pearce ought to be considered as one of these examples. May that same Divine Spirit who had manifestly so great a hand in forming his character teach us to derive from it both instruction and edification.

First, *In him we may see the holy efficacy, and by consequence the truth, of the Christian religion.*—It was long since asked, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he who believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” This question contained a challenge to men of all religions who were then upon the earth. Idolatry had a great diversity of species, every nation worshipping its own gods, and in modes peculiar to itself: philosophers also were divided into numerous sects, each flattering itself that it had found the truth: even the Jews had their divisions; their Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes: but, great as many of them were in deeds of divers kinds, an apostle could look them all in the face, and ask, “Who is he that overcometh the world?” The same question might be safely asked in every succeeding age. The various kinds of religion that still prevail, the pagan, Mahomedan, Jewish, papal, or protestant, may form the exteriors of man according to their respective models; but where is the man amongst them, save the true believer in Jesus, that overcometh the world? Men may cease from particular evils, and assume a very different character; may lay aside their drunkenness, blasphemies, or debaucheries, and take up with a kind of monkish austerity, and yet all may amount to nothing more than an exchange of vices. The lusts of the flesh will on many occasions give place to those of the mind; but to overcome the world is another thing. By embracing the doctrine of the cross, to feel not merely a dread of the consequences of sin, but a holy abhorrence of its nature—and, by conversing with invisible realities, to become regardless of the best, and fearless of the worst, that this world has to dispense—this is the effect of genuine Christianity, and this is a standing proof of its Divine original. Let the most inveterate enemy of revelation have witnessed the disinterested benevolence of a Paul, a Peter, or a John, and, whether he would own it or not, his conscience must have borne testimony that this is true religion. The same may be said of Samuel Pearce: whether the doctrine he preached found a place in the *hearts* of his hearers, or not, his spirit and life must have approved themselves to their *consciences*.

Secondly, *In him we see how much may be done for God in a little time.*—If his death had been foreknown by his friends, some might have hesitated whether it was worth while for him to engage in the work of the ministry for so short a period; yet if we take a view of his labours, perhaps there are few lives productive of a greater portion of good. That life is not always the longest which is spun out to the greatest extent of days. The best of

all lives amounted but to thirty-three years; and the most important works pertaining to that were wrought in the last three. There is undoubtedly a way of rendering a short life a long one, and a long life a short one, by filling or not filling it with proper materials. That time which is squandered away in sloth, or trifling pursuits, forms a kind of blank in human life: in looking it over there is nothing for the mind to rest upon; and a whole life so spent, whatever number of years it may contain, must appear upon reflection short and vacant, in comparison of one filled up with valuable acquisitions and holy actions. It is like the space between us and the sun, which though immensely greater than that which is traversed in a profitable journey, yet, being all empty space, the mind gets over it in much less time, and without any satisfaction. If "that life be long which answers life's great end," Mr. Pearce may assuredly be said to have come to his grave in a good old age. And might we not all do much more than we do, if our hearts were more in our work? Where this is wanting, or operates but in a small degree, difficulties are magnified into impossibilities; a lion is in the way of extraordinary exertion; or if we be induced to engage in something of this kind, it will be at the expense of a uniform attention to ordinary duties. But some will ask, How are our hearts to be in our work? Mr. Pearce's heart was habitually in his; and that which kept alive the sacred flame in him appears to have been—the constant habit of conversing with Divine truth, and walking with God in private.

Thirdly, In him we see, in clear and strong colours, *to what a degree of solid peace and joy true religion will raise us, even in the present world.*—A little religion, it has been justly said, will make us miserable; but a great deal will make us happy. The one will do little more than keep the conscience alive, while our numerous defects and inconsistencies are perpetually furnishing it with materials to scourge us; the other keeps the heart alive, and leads us to drink deep at the fountain of joy. Hence it is, in a great degree, that so much of the spirit of bondage, and so little of the spirit of adoption, prevails amongst Christians. Religious enjoyments with us are rather occasional than habitual; or if in some instances it be otherwise, we are ready to suspect that it is supported in part by the strange fire of enthusiasm, and not by the pure flame of Scriptural devotion. But in Mr. Pearce we saw a devotion ardent, steady, pure, and persevering: kindled, as we may say, at the altar of God, like the fire of the temple, it went not out by night nor by day. He seemed to have learnt that heavenly art, so conspicuous among the primitive Christians, of converting every thing he met with into materials for love, and joy, and praise. Hence he laboured, as he expresses it, "to exercise most love to God when suffering most severely;" and hence he so affectingly encountered the billows that overwhelmed his feeble frame, crying,

" Sweet affliction! sweet affliction!
Singing as I wade to heaven."

The constant happiness that he enjoyed in God was apparent in the effects of his sermons upon others. Whatever we feel ourselves we shall ordinarily communicate to our hearers; and it has been already noticed, that one of the most distinguishing properties of his discourses was—that they inspired the serious mind with the liveliest sensations of happiness. They descended upon the audience, not indeed like a transporting flood, but like a shower of dew, gently insinuating itself into the heart, insensibly dissipating its gloom, and gradually drawing forth the graces of faith, hope, love, and joy; while the countenance was brightened almost into a smile, tears of pleasure would rise, and glisten, and fall from the admiring eye.

What a practical confutation did his life afford of the slander so generally

cast upon the religion of Jesus, that it fills the mind with gloom and misery! No: leaving futurity out of the question, the whole world of unbelievers might be challenged to produce a character from among them who possessed half his enjoyments.

Fourthly, From his example we are furnished with *the greatest encouragement, while pursuing the path of duty, to place our trust in God.*—The situation in which he left his family, we have seen already, was not owing to an indifference to their interest, or an improvident disposition, or the want of opportunity to have provided for them; but to a steady and determined obedience to do what he accounted the will of God. He felt deeply for them, and we all felt with him, and longed to be able to assure him before his departure that they would be amply provided for; but, owing to circumstances which have already been mentioned, this was more than we could do. This was a point in which he was called to *die in faith*; and indeed so he did. He appears to have had no idea of that flood of kindness which, immediately after his decease, flowed from the religious public; but he believed in God, and cheerfully left all with him. “Oh that I could speak!” said he to Mrs. Pearce a little before his death, “I would tell a world to trust a faithful God. Sweet affliction! now it worketh glory, glory!” And when she told him the workings of her mind, he answered, “O trust the Lord! If he lift up the light of his countenance upon you, as he has done upon me this day, all your mountains will become molehills. I feel your situation: I feel your sorrows: but he who takes care of sparrows will care for you and my dear children.”

The liberal contributions which have since been made, though they do not warrant ministers in general to expect the same, and much less to neglect providing for their own families on such a presumption, yet they must needs be considered as a singular encouragement, when we are satisfied that we are in the path of duty, to be inordinately “careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to let our requests be made known unto God.”

Finally, In him we see that *the way to true excellence is not to affect eccentricity, nor to aspire after the performance of a few splendid actions; but to fill up our lives with a sober, modest, sincere, affectionate, assiduous, and uniform conduct.*—Real greatness attaches to character; and character arises from a *course of action*. The solid reputation of a merchant arises not from his having made his fortune by a few successful adventures; but from a course of wise economy and honourable industry, which gradually accumulating advances by pence to shillings, and by shillings to pounds. The most excellent philosophers are not those who have dealt chiefly in splendid speculation, and looked down upon the ordinary concerns of men as things beneath their notice; but those who have felt their interests united with the interests of mankind, and bent their principal attention to things of real and public utility. It is much the same in religion. We do not esteem a man for one, or two, or three good deeds, any further than as these deeds are indications of the real state of his mind. We do not estimate the character of Christ himself so much from his having given sight to the blind, or restored Lazarus from the grave, as from his *going about continually doing good*.

These single attempts at great things are frequently the efforts of a vain mind, which pants for fame and has not patience to wait for it, nor discernment to know the way in which it is obtained. One pursues the shade, and it flies from him; while another turns his back upon it, and it follows him. The one aims to climb the rock, but falls ere he reaches the summit; the other, in pursuit of a different object, ere he is aware, possesses it; seeking the approbation of his God, he finds with it that of his fellow Christians.

ESSAYS, LETTERS, ETC.

ON

ECCLESIASTICAL POLITY.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT IN MATTERS OF
RELIGION.

IN former times liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment in matters of religion were denied both by ecclesiastics and politicians. Of late they have been very generally admitted, and much has been said and written in their defence. But the nature and extent of these rights, in reference to religious society, have not been so clearly ascertained; and claims have been instituted which appear to be subversive of those very principles so often pleaded in their support.

The right of private judgment in matters of religion appears to be THE RIGHT WHICH EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS TO THINK AND TO AVOW HIS THOUGHTS ON THOSE SUBJECTS, WITHOUT BEING LIABLE TO ANY CIVIL INCONVENIENCE ON THAT ACCOUNT. The subject in this view has been successfully supported by writers of ability, and the principle has been acted upon by the great body of nonconformists and Dissenters of later times. There can scarcely be any doubt remaining with respect to the power of the civil magistrate to interfere with the religious sentiments and private judgment of the subject; this is now very generally and very justly exploded. But of late the subject has taken another turn, and men have pleaded not only an exemption from civil penalties on account of their religious principles, in which the very essence of persecution consists, but also that they are not subject to the control of a religious society with which they stand connected for any tenets which they may think proper to avow. The right of private judgment now frequently assumed, is *a right in every individual who may become a member of a Christian church to think and avow his thoughts, be they what they may, without being subject to exclusion or admonition, or the ill opinion of his brethren, on that account.* Any thing that is consistent with this is thought to be a species of spiritual tyranny, and repugnant to that "liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." But this appears to be highly extravagant, and is what no man can claim as a right. The following considerations are submitted to the reader.

First, The supposed right of the individual is *contrary to the principles on which Christian churches were originally founded.* Not only were those who disbelieved the gospel refused admission to a Christian church, but those who perverted the gospel, or maintained pernicious errors concerning it, were subject to admonition and exclusion. The apostle Paul directed that a heretic after the first and second admonition should be *rejected.* And, in his Epistle to the churches of Galatia, he expressed a wish that those who troubled them by subverting the gospel of Christ and introducing another gospel were "cut off." The church at Pergamos is reproved for having those *among them* who held the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans.

If the churches of Galatia complied with the apostle's desire, their false teachers might have exclaimed against them as invading the right of private judgment, and with as much justice as some in later times have done against the censures of their brethren. And had the church of Pergamos been formed on the principles above mentioned, they might have replied to the solemn message of our Lord in some such manner as the following: Why are we blamed for having those *among us* who hold the doctrine of Nicolas? It is sufficient for us as individuals to think for ourselves, and leave others to do the same. We cannot refuse these men without invading the right of private judgment?

If it be objected that inspiration rendered the judgment of the apostles infallible, and that therefore their conduct in this case is not a rule for us, it may be replied, that if the apostles were infallible, the churches were not so, and the blame is laid on *them* for having neglected to exclude the characters in question. Besides, this objection would tend to prove that primitive Christians, on account of the infallibility of the apostle, *did not possess the right of private judgment*; and that the right sprung up in the church in consequence of our being all equally fallible! But this is contrary to the declaration of the apostle: "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy." Hence it appears that admonishing or excluding from the primitive church those who held pernicious errors was not reckoned to be subversive of the right of private judgment; and the churches being exhorted to such discipline by the apostles was exercising no dominion over their faith.

Secondly, Not only is this supposed right of private judgment inconsistent with apostolic practice, but it is also *contrary to reason and the fitness of things*. All society is founded in mutual agreement. It is no less a dictate of common sense than of the word of God, that "two cannot walk together, except they be agreed." No society can subsist unless there be some specific principles in which they are united. In political societies, these principles will be of a political nature; in civil ones, of a civil kind; and in those of religion, of a religious nature. According to the degree of importance in which those principles are held by the parties associating, such will be their concern to maintain and act upon them; and the terms of admittance or continuance in such society must be regulated accordingly. If there be no definite principles in which it is necessary that a society should be agreed, but every member of it be at liberty to imbibe and propagate whatever notions he pleases, then all societies, civil, political, and religious, have hitherto been mistaken; for all of them have had in view the attainment of some specific object; and this is more especially the case with societies that are purely religious. A community must entirely renounce the name of a Christian church before it can act upon the principle here contended for; and those who entirely reject Christianity ought, nevertheless, to be admitted or retained in fellowship, if they *choose it*; seeing they have only exercised the right of private judgment!

Further, If a Christian society has no right to withdraw from an individual whose principles they consider as false and injurious, neither has an individual any right to withdraw from a society in a similar case; and then there is an end to all religious liberty at once.

Whether it be right for us to think the worse of any person on account of his erroneous principles must depend on a previous question; namely, whether he *be* either better or worse for the principles which he imbibes? If he be not, then it must be allowed that we ought not to think so of him; but if he be, undoubtedly we ought to think of one another according to truth. To say that no person is better or worse in a moral view, whatever

be his principles, is to say that principles themselves have no influence on the heart and life; and that amounts to the same thing as their being of no importance. But if so, all those scriptures which represent truth as a means of sanctification ought to be discarded; and all the labours of good men to discover truth, and of the apostles to disseminate it—yea, and those of the Son of God himself, who came into the world to bear witness to the truth—were totally in vain.

CREEDS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS.

IT has been very common, among a certain class of writers, to exclaim against creeds and systems in religion as inconsistent with Christian liberty and the rights of conscience; but surely they must be understood as objecting to those creeds only which they dislike, and not to creeds in general; for no doubt, unless they be worse than the worst of beings, they have a creed of their own. The man who has no creed has no belief; which is the same thing as being an unbeliever; and he whose belief is not formed into a system has only a few loose, unconnected thoughts, without entering into the harmony and glory of the gospel. Every well-informed and consistent believer, therefore, must have a creed—a system which he supposes to contain the leading principles of Divine revelation.

It may be pleaded that the objection does not lie so much against our having creeds or systems as against our imposing them on others as the condition of Christian fellowship. If, indeed, a subscription to articles of faith were required without examination, or enforced by civil penalties, it would be an unwarrantable imposition on the rights of conscience; but if an explicit agreement in what may be deemed fundamental principles be judged essential to fellowship, this is only requiring that a man appear to be a Christian before he can have a right to be treated as such. Suppose it were required of a Jew or an infidel, before he is admitted to the Lord's supper, (which either might be disposed to solicit for some worldly purpose,) that he must previously become a believer; should we thereby impose Christianity upon him? He might claim the right of private judgment, and deem such a requisition incompatible with its admission; but it is evident that he could not be entitled to Christian regard, and that, while he exclaimed against the imposition of creeds and systems, he himself would be guilty of an imposition of the grossest kind, utterly inconsistent with the rights of voluntary and social compact, as well as of Christian liberty.

In order to be a little more explicit on the subject, it may be necessary to offer the following remarks:—

First, It is admitted that no society has a right to make laws where Christ has made none.—Whoever attempts this, whether in an individual or social capacity, is guilty of substituting for doctrines the commandments of men, and making void the law of God by his traditions.

Secondly, The fallibility of all human judgment is fully allowed. A Christian society, as well as an individual, is liable to err in judging what are the doctrines and precepts of Christ. Whatever articles of faith and practice, therefore, are introduced into a community, they ought, no doubt, to be open to correction or amendment, whenever those who subscribe them shall perceive their inconsistency with the will of Christ.

Thirdly, Whatever may be said on the propriety of human systems of faith, they are not to be considered as the proper ground on which to rest our

religious sentiments.—The word of God, and that alone, ought to be the ground of both faith and practice. But all this does not prove that it would be wrong for an individual to judge of the meaning of the Divine word, nor for a number of individuals, who agree in their judgments, to express that agreement in explicit terms, and consider themselves as bound to walk by the same rule.

Fourthly, Whether the united sentiments of a Christian society be expressed in writing or not is immaterial, provided they be mutually understood and avowed.—Some societies have no written articles of faith or discipline; but with them, as with others that have, it is always understood that there are certain principles a professed belief of which is deemed necessary to communion.

The substance of the inquiry therefore would be, whether a body of Christians have a right to judge of the meaning of the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, and to act accordingly? That an individual has a right so to judge, and to form his connexions with those whose views are most congenial with his own, will not be disputed; but if so, why have not a society the same right? If Christ has given both doctrines and precepts, some of which are more immediately addressed to Christians in their social capacity, they must not only possess such a right, but are under obligation to exercise it. *If the righteous nation which keep the truth* be the only proper characters for entering into gospel fellowship, those who have the charge of their admission are obliged to form a judgment on what is truth, and what is righteousness; without which they must be wholly unqualified for their office.

If a Christian society have no right to judge what is *truth*, and to render an agreement with them in certain points a term of communion, then neither have they a right to judge what is *righteousness*, nor to render an agreement in matters of practical right and wrong a term of communion.

There is a great diversity of sentiment in the world concerning morality, as well as doctrine; and if it be an unscriptural imposition to agree to any articles whatever, it must be to exclude any one for immorality, or even to admonish him on that account; for it might be alleged that he only thinks for himself, and acts accordingly. Nor would it stop here: almost every species of immorality has been defended and may be disguised, and thus, under the pretence of a right of private judgment, the church of God would become like the mother of harlots—“*the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*”

It is a trite and frivolous objection which some have made against subscriptions and articles of faith—that it is setting bounds to the freedom of inquiry, and requiring a conformity of sentiment that is incompatible with the various opportunities and capacities of different persons. The same objection might be urged against the covenanting of the Israelites (Neh. x. 29) and all laws in society. If a religious community agree to specify some leading principles which they consider as derived from the word of God, and judge the belief of them to be necessary in order to any person's becoming or continuing a member with them, it does not follow that those principles should be equally understood, or that all their brethren must have the same degree of knowledge, nor yet that they should understand and believe nothing else. The powers and capacities of different persons are various; one may comprehend more of the same truth than another, and have his views more enlarged by an exceedingly great variety of kindred ideas; and yet the substance of their belief may still be the same. The object of articles is to keep at a distance, not those who are weak in the faith, but such as are its avowed enemies. Supposing a church covenant to be so general as not to

specify one principle or duty, but barely an engagement to adhere to the Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice, the objection would still apply; and it might be said, One man is capable of understanding much more of the Scriptures than another, and persons of more enlarged minds may discover a great deal of truth relating to science which the Scriptures do not pretend to teach: why, therefore, do we frame articles to limit the freedom of inquiry, or which require a conformity of sentiment incompatible with the opportunities and capacities of persons so differently circumstanced? The objection, therefore, if admitted, would prove too much. The powers of the mind will probably vary in a future world; one will be capable of comprehending much more of truth than another; yet the redeemed will all be of one mind, and of one heart.

Every one feels the importance of articles, or laws, in civil society; and yet these are nothing less than expositions or particular applications of the great principle of universal equity. General or universal equity is that to civil laws which the Bible is to articles of faith; it is the source from which they are all professedly derived, and the standard to which they ought all to be submitted. The one is as liable to swerve from general equity as the other from the word of God; and where this is proved to be the case in either instance, such errors require to be corrected. But as no person of common sense would on this account inveigh against laws being made, and insist that we ought only to covenant in general to walk according to equity, without agreeing in any leading principles, or determining wherein that equity consists; neither ought he to inveigh against articles of faith and practice in religious matters, provided that they comport with the mind of God in his word. If the articles of faith be opposed to the authority of Scripture, or substituted in the place of such authority, they become objectionable and injurious; but if they simply express the united judgment of those who voluntarily subscribe them, they are incapable of any such kind of imputation.

THOUGHTS ON THE PRINCIPLES

ON WHICH THE APOSTLES PROCEEDED, IN FORMING AND ORGANIZING CHRISTIAN CHURCHES, AND REGULATING VARIOUS RELIGIOUS DUTIES.

[Written in April, 1804, for the use of the Brethren at Serampore.]

VARIOUS disputes have arisen among Christians respecting the form, the order, and the organization of the church of Christ. It is from different apprehensions on these subjects that most of our religious denominations have arisen. Having been often called upon to give advice in certain cases, and to ground it on Scriptural authority, I have been led to examine with some attention what the Scriptures teach us concerning them.

It has appeared to me that some, in looking for scriptural authority for whatever is done in Christian churches, expect too much; while, on the contrary, others expect too little. It is a fact, which must strike every attentive reader, that the manner in which the greater part of the worship and forms of the New Testament is prescribed is very different from that of the Old Testament. Moses was commanded to do all things according to the "pattern" showed him in the mount; but no such pattern is given us in the gospel respecting the form and order of Christian worship. All, or nearly

all, we know of the matter is from the narrative of facts, as stated in the Acts of the Apostles, and from certain counsels addressed to ministers and churches, in the apostolic Epistles.

In each of these, several things are *incidentally* brought to light; but express injunctions, like those under the law, are rarely to be found. We have no particular account, for instance, of the original formation of a single church, nor of an ordination service, nor in what order the primitive worship was generally conducted. What then shall we say to these things? Shall we infer that all forms of worship and church government are indifferent, and left to be accommodated to time, place, and other circumstances? This would open a door to human inventions, and to all the corruptions which have defaced the church of Christ. Nevertheless, this we may infer—that to attempt to draw up a formula of church government, worship, and discipline, which shall include any thing more than *general outlines*, and to establish it expressly on New Testament authority, is to attempt what is utterly impracticable.

The general outlines or principles of things may be collected, and these will apply to particular cases. This, I apprehend, is all that we are warranted to expect. If, for example, we look for either precept or precedent for the removal of a Christian pastor from one situation to another, we shall find none. But we are taught that, for the church to “grow unto a holy temple in the Lord,” it requires to be “fitly framed together,” Eph. ii. 21. The want of *fitness* therefore, in a connexion, especially if it impede the growth of the spiritual temple, may justify the removal of a minister. Or if there be no want of fitness, yet if the material be adapted to occupy a more important station in the building, this may also justify its removal. Such a principle may be *misapplied* to ambitious and interested purposes; but if the increase of the temple be kept in view, it is lawful, and in many cases attended with great and good effects.

This example, instead of a hundred, may suffice to show, if I mistake not, that the form and order of the Christian church, much more than that of the Jewish church, are founded on *the reason and fitness of things*. Under the former dispensation, the duties of religion were mostly *positive*; and were of course prescribed with the nicest precision, and the most exact minuteness. Under the gospel they are chiefly *moral*, and, consequently, require only the suggestion of general principles. In conforming to the one, it was necessary that men should keep their eye incessantly upon the *rule*; but, in complying with the other, there is more occasion for fixing it upon the *end*.

The form and order of the Christian church appear to be no other than what men, possessed of “the wisdom which is from above,” would at any time very naturally fall into, even though no other direction were offered them. That the apostles were supernaturally directed is true; but that direction consisted not in their being furnished with a “pattern,” in the manner of that given to Moses; but in enduing them with holy wisdom, to discern and pursue on all occasions what was good and right. The Jewish church was an army of soldiers under preparatory discipline; the Christian church is an army going forth to battle. The members of the one were taught punctilious obedience, and led with great formality through a variety of religious evolutions. Those of the other, though they also must keep their ranks and act in obedience to command, yet are not required to be so attentive to the mechanical as to the mental, not so much to the minute observance of forms as to their spirit and design. The obedience of the former was that of children; the latter that of sons arrived at maturer age.

I have said that the form and order of the Christian church are *chiefly* moral, or founded in the fitness of things, as those of the Jewish church

were *chiefly* positive; for neither the one nor the other will hold true universally. Some things pertaining to the organization of the latter were settled on the same principles as those of the former. The seventy elders, ordained to assist Moses, bore a near resemblance to the seven deacons chosen to assist the apostles (Numb. xi.; Acts vi.): both originated in the necessity of the case, and as such were approved of God. On the other hand, there are some things pertaining to the Christian church which are entirely *positive*; and, being clearly revealed, require to be obeyed with the same punctilious regard to the "pattern" given as was observed by Moses in constructing the tabernacle. Such are baptism and the Lord's supper. They were "ordinances" of God, and required to be kept "as they were delivered," Matt. iii. 15; Luke i. 6; 1 Cor. xi. 2. But in many things pertaining to order and discipline, though we are furnished with nothing more than general outlines, and are obliged to keep within them, yet in the filling up there is room left for the exercise of discretion and forbearance.

But, it may be asked, will not the considering of these things as *moral*, rather than positive, open a way for the introduction of human inventions into the church of God. Why should it? Though the greater part of what belongs to the organization and discipline of the church be founded in the fitness of things, yet the human mind in its present imperfect and depraved state is not of itself, and without Divine direction, sufficient to perceive it. We have so much of the wisdom that is "from beneath" dwelling in us that we should be continually erring, if left to ourselves. It is not necessary indeed, in things of this nature, that we should be furnished with precepts or examples with the same minuteness as in positive institutions; but without so much of one or other of them as shall mark the outlines of our conduct, we shall be certain to wander. If we were left without a revelation from Heaven, our ideas of the universal rule of right and wrong would be very defective and erroneous. In whatsoever therefore the Lord hath condescended to instruct us, we are not at liberty to prefer *what may appear fit and right to us*; but, in like circumstances, are bound to follow it. If I plead for discretion and forbearance, it is only where the Scriptures do not decide; and where, consequently, it was thought sufficient by the Holy Spirit to put us in possession of general principles.

I. THAT THE FORM AND ORDER OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH WERE FOUNDED IN THE FITNESS OF THINGS WILL APPEAR, I PRESUME, FROM THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS.

1. The general principles expressly mentioned by the apostles as the rule of Christian conduct. "Let all things be done to *edifying*.—Let all things be done *decently*, and *in order*," 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40. Whatever measures tended to build up the church of God, and individuals, in their most holy faith, these were adopted as the rule of their conduct, and rendered binding on them by the authority of Christ.—Moreover, whatever measures approved themselves to minds endued, as those of the apostles were, with the wisdom from above, as fit and lovely, and calculated to render the whole church effective (like that of good discipline to an army) in the propagation of the gospel; these are the rules by which the primitive Christians were governed. And however worldly minds may have abused them, by introducing will-worship and vain customs, under pretence of their *decency*, these, understood in their simple and original sense, must still be the test of good order and Christian discipline.

2. The way in which the apostles actually proceeded, in the forming and organizing of churches, is a proof that they were guided by a sense of fitness and propriety.—When a number of Christians agreed to walk together in the faith and order of the gospel, they became a Christian church. But at

first they had no *deacons*, and probably no *pastors*, except the apostles; and if the *reason* of things had not required it, they might have continued to have none. But in the course of events they found new service rise upon their hands, and therefore must have new *servants*;* for, said the apostles, "it is not *reason* that we should leave the word of God to serve tables: *wherefore* look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business," Acts vi. 2, 3. In this process we see nothing like a punctilious attention to a positive institute, but the conduct of men who were endued with heavenly wisdom. All things are done "decently and in order," and all "to edifying." In the course of events, the apostles, who had supplied the place of pastors, would be called to travel into other parts of the world; and then, it is likely, the church at Jerusalem would have a resident pastor or pastors of their own.

And as servants were appointed when actual service demanded, so the *number* of them would be regulated by the same rule. A large church or congregation, where much service was to be done, required *seven* deacons; and where they abounded not only in numbers, but also in spiritual gifts, they commonly, if not always, seem to have had a plurality of bishops or elders.—With respect to us, where the *reason* of the thing exists—that is, where there are churches whose numbers require it, and whose gifts admit of it—it is well to follow this part of their example; but for a small church to have more pastors than one appears to be as unnecessary as to have "seven" deacons. Such a rule would favour idleness, and prevent useful ministers from extending their labours. To appoint two or three to a station which might be filled by one must have a tendency to leave many other places unoccupied, and so contract instead of enlarging the kingdom of Christ.

3. The principles on which the apostles proceeded may appear by tracing the analogy between them and a company of Christian missionaries in the present day.—The term "apostle" signifies one that is *sent*. If we subtract the ideas of being sent immediately by Christ, of being endowed with extraordinary gifts and authority, suited to the special purposes of primitive times, he will, for aught I see, be merely a Christian missionary. Let us then suppose a church, or society of Christians, to have in contemplation a mission to the heathen. One of the first things demanding their attention would be the selection of a number of suitable missionaries. Next, they would instruct them in the things necessary to their undertaking; and, after this, send them forth to preach the gospel.—Such was precisely the conduct of our Lord towards his disciples. He first selected them; then instructed them, during his personal ministry; and, after his resurrection, gave them their commission and a rich effusion of the Holy Spirit to qualify them for the undertaking.

The missionaries, arriving at the scene of action, would first unite in social prayer and Christian fellowship; and this would constitute the first *church*. Thus the apostles, and those who adhered to them, first met in an upper room for prayer, preparatory to their attack on the world of the ungodly; and this little band of "one hundred and twenty" formed the first Christian church. And when sinners were converted, and joined them, they are represented as being "added to the church," Acts ii. 41–47.

Again, The first missionaries to a heathen country could not be chosen to the work by those to whom they were sent, but by him or them who sent them; nor would their influence be confined to a single congregation, but extend to all the societies that might be raised by means of their labours. It would be different with succeeding pastors, who might be raised up from

* A deacon signifies a *servant*.

among the converts. They would of course be chosen by their brethren, and their authority would be confined to the churches which elected them. Thus the primitive missionaries were not constituted apostles by the churches, but by receiving their appointment immediately from Christ; nor was their authority limited to any particular church, but extended alike to all. In this they differ from ordinary pastors, who are elected by the churches they are intended to serve, and whose authority is confined to that particular department.

Again, The first missionaries to a heathen country would be employed in the *planting* of churches, wherever proper materials were found for the purpose; and if the work so increased upon their hands as to be too much for them, they would depute others, like-minded with themselves, whom God would qualify with gifts and graces to render them assistance. Some one person at least of this description would be present, in the formation and organization of every church, to see that "all things were done decently and in order." And if there were any other churches in the neighbourhood of that in which such an organization took place, their elders and messengers would doubtless be present; and, to express their brotherly concurrence, would join in it.

Thus the apostles planted churches; and when elders were to be ordained, the people chose them, and they by the solemn laying on of hands invested them with the office, Acts vi. 3; xiv. 23. And when the work still increased upon their hands, they appointed such men as Timothy and Titus as evangelists to "set things in order" in their stead, Tit. i. 5. In these ordinations and arrangements, a Paul or a Titus would preside. The other elders of the church, and probably of the sister churches, would unite in brotherly concurrence, and in imploring a blessing on the parties; and hence there would be the "laying on of the hands of the presbytery," or elders, 1 Tim. iv. 14.

But as the missionaries would die a question would arise: Who should be their successors; or, rather, on whom should the *general* concerns of the churches devolve?—Strictly speaking, *there might be no necessity for any successors*. The Christian religion being planted by them might be continued by the native pastors, whom God would successively raise up; and who, if "faithful men," would not only be concerned to edify and watch over their own respective charges, but would extend the knowledge of the truth, and plant new churches around them. In cases of difficulty, especially those of common concern, they would call in the advice of their brethren, as the first missionaries had done before them (Acts xv.); judging in all things not as lords over a heritage, but as men who must finally give an account.

That this would be the case is more probable when it is considered, that though the first missionaries had an authority and an influence which no succeeding pastors would possess, yet it was exercised *only in things which it would be lawful for others to do as well as themselves*. They had no power but what required to be exercised in subserviency to the will of Christ, and for the edification of the churches; and if this rule be retained, and this end answered, it is of no account whether it be done by them or by the native pastors after their decease. If the former planted churches, set them in order, and presided at the ordination of elders over them, it was not because the same things would not have been *valid* if done without them, but because they would not have been done at all. Let but churches be planted, set in order, and scripturally organized, and whether it be by the primitive missionaries, or succeeding pastors, all is good, and acceptable to Christ.

Such, I conceive, is the state of things with respect to the apostles and

succeeding pastors. There never were any men, or set of men whatsoever, that were, properly speaking, *their successors*. Nor was it necessary that there should, seeing every thing which they did (excepting what was *extraordinary*, in which respect none *can* succeed them) was lawful for every pastor to do in his immediate charge.

If a necessity existed for any superior office or offices, it must be for the purpose of inspecting and preserving the general interest of the whole body; but even this would be more likely to be answered by occasional conferences among the elders.

II. THE FOLLOWING ARGUMENTS ARE OFFERED IN PROOF THAT THE OFFICE OF A SUPERIOR, OR OF A GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, IS BOTH UNLAWFUL AND UNNECESSARY.

1. A bishop is the first permanent office in the Christian church. It was the highest title assumed for many ages after the apostles. But a bishop is no other than a presbyter, an elder, or overseer of a single congregation; as is evident from each of these names being given to the elders of the church at Ephesus, who met Paul at Miletus, Acts xx. 17, 28. Any office, therefore, in the present day, which claims the oversight of bishops, must be antisciptural.

2. It accords with the genius of Christianity that the churches be governed, and all their affairs adjusted, by mutual consultation and persuasion, rather than by coercion. But where the power has been vested in one or more superior officers, it has commonly degenerated into a lording it over the heritage, and the people have gradually lost all interest in it. If Christ's kingdom were of this world, its officers might require to be invested with worldly honour, pageantry, and authority. Its members also must be governed "like the horse and the mule, which have no understanding." But the great Head of the church has told his servants, "It shall not be so amongst you." On this ground there might be danger in what you propose in your letters, of having European missionaries as *superintendents* of the native pastors. You should indeed superintend them, but not so as to make it an *office*, or to set an example of lordly domination in future times among themselves.

3. The apostles in the exercise of their authority did not act separately from other elders, but in conjunction with them; by which means they gradually inured them to the discharge of the same duties among themselves after their decease. Paul laid his hands on Timothy, yet not as an individual, in the manner practised by diocesan bishops, but as an elder among other elders,—2 Tim. i. 6, compared with 1 Tim. iv. 14.

In the planting and organizing of churches, the same things which were done by them were done by others appointed by them; and had they been done by elders whom they had *not* appointed, provided the will of Christ had been properly regarded, they would not, I presume, have objected to their *validity*. This is certainly true, at least, in some particulars; and I see no reason why it should not be the same in all. Paul left Timothy at Ephesus, that he might "charge some to teach no other doctrine." But if the Ephesian elders had been of themselves attached to the truth, neither Paul nor Timothy would have been offended with them for superseding the exercise of their authority.

The apostle also left Titus in Crete to "set in order the things that were wanting, and to ordain elders in every city." But if the Cretans themselves had had sufficient wisdom and virtue to have regulated their own affairs by the word of God, would their "order" have been reckoned disorder? And had there been "elders" already ordained amongst them, who were competent to assist in the ordination of others, if we may judge from the tenor of apostolic practice, instead of objecting to the validity of their proceedings,

both Paul and Titus would, "though absent in the flesh, have been with them in the spirit, joying, and beholding their order, and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ."

III. I CONCLUDE THESE BRIEF REMARKS WITH A FEW REFLECTIONS ON SOME PARTICULAR DUTIES.

If such be the principles on which the primitive churches were founded, is it not more becoming for us to inquire into the *spirit*, *reason*, or *design* of various precepts, and adhere to it, than to be always disputing and dividing about the letter of them?

1. There are various precepts in our Lord's sermon on the mount, which I am persuaded *were never designed to be taken literally*. For example, we are commanded to "swear not at all," Matt. v. 33-37. Hence many good men have objected to the lawfulness of an oath before a magistrate; yet such oaths were not only allowed, but commanded by the law of Moses, Deut. vi. 13. And our Lord declared that it was not his design, in any thing he here said, to destroy or set aside the law, Matt. v. 17, 18. None of his answers were aimed against the law, but against the glosses of the Pharisees upon it. But, to understand him as condemning all kinds of oaths, is to make him condemn the law. Nor is this all; it would go to condemn many things in his apostles which are written under Divine inspiration, as in the following instances. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever," said Paul, "knoweth that I lie not."—"I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth."—"God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers," 2 Cor. xi. 31; i. 23; Rom. i. 9. Each of these is a solemn oath; yet we never think of their being sinful. The swearing which our Lord forbids relates to our ordinary "communications," which should be "yea, yea, or nay, nay." It is this which is forbidden by the apostle James, when he says, "Above all things, my brethren, swear not, lest ye fall into condemnation," James v. 12. Though a barren and profane vice, it was very common among the Jews, and is equally so among many who call themselves Christians.

Again, Instead of avenging ourselves, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," we are commanded "not to resist evil." Did our Saviour mean by this to censure the law, as appointed of God, (Exod. xxi. 24-27,) and as administered by the civil magistrate? That would be to "destroy the law," and not to fulfil it. His design was doubtless to forbid private retaliation and revenge, which the Jews had attempted to justify by a perversion of the Divine command. He did not complain of the law in the hands of the magistrate, nor forbid his followers appealing to it where public justice was concerned; but they must do nothing from a principle of revenge, or for the sake of retaliation.

If the command "not to resist evil" were understood literally, and without any restriction, and we were literally obliged "when smitten on one cheek to turn the other also," our Saviour himself would have erred in not setting the example, when he was smitten before Pilate; for instead of submission he remonstrated: "If I have spoken well, why smitest thou me?" Luke vi. 29; John xviii. 23. But though our Lord's command is not to be taken literally, yet if we attend to the spirit of it, we shall find it to contain a very important lesson; it teaches us that we had better suffer insults and injuries, and even the repetition of them, than undertake to avenge ourselves. It is the principle, rather than the act, which he means to enforce; yet there are cases in which the act itself would be right and praiseworthy.

Unbelievers affect to ridicule this precept; yet who ridicules the conduct of Themistocles, the Athenian general, who in a council of war had the

cane of Eurybiades shaken over his head; and who, instead of resenting it, exclaimed, "Strike, but hear me!" This instance of magnanimous patience saved his country. And may not a Christian have a still greater end in view? If by his patience he should save his soul from death, however infidels may sneer, he will have a weightier crown awarded him another day than what was decreed for the noble Athenian. The cheerful sufferings of the holy martyrs in all ages have exemplified this principle. While they sought the salvation of mankind, the world hated them; but instead of rendering evil for evil, they practically said—Strike, but hear us!

Again, If our Lord's precepts on almsgiving and prayer were understood literally, (Matt. vi. 1-6,) they would prove it unlawful to join in any public contributions for the poor, and to engage in public prayer; but it is not the *act* which our Lord has principally in view, but the *principle* or motive. His object was to condemn a spirit of ostentation, in the same way as we should understand another prohibition: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," Matt. vi. 19. Some Christians have concluded from hence that all accumulation of property is contrary to the command of Christ. The ill consequences of such interpretation do not lie in their rendering men careless about the world, for there is but little danger of persons who have opportunities of acquiring wealth erring on that side; but the mischief is, they make men guilty of hypocrisy, in setting them to devise methods by which they may go on in business like their neighbours, and yet find some salvo for their consciences by which to impose upon themselves. If it were the design of Christ to forbid all accumulation of property, why were the primitive Christians directed to "lay up something for the poor every first day of the week, according as God had prospered them," 1 Cor. xvi. 2. It will hardly be pleaded that they were to lay by for this purpose the whole of their gains; but if not, they must have been allowed to labour and trade like other men. Moreover, if they were forbidden to increase wealth, why are they exhorted to diligence, "that they may have whereof to give to him that needeth?" Eph. iv. 28. On this principle also it would be wrong for parents to provide any thing for their children, which both reason and Scripture allow, 2 Cor. xii. 14.

Finally, If these words require to be taken literally, why should not others of a similar import be understood in the same way? "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink."—"Sell what ye have, and give alms," Matt. vi. 25; Luke xii. 33. Yet if such a literal interpretation were reduced to general practice, it would destroy all distinction of property, and so of rich and poor. This, however, was not our Lord's design, or he would not have addressed men, much less good men, under the character of rich and poor, James i. 9, 10. The accumulation of property, if arising from the blessing of God on our lawful occupations, and considered as a trust to be laid out for him, has nothing wrong in it. The danger is, what our Lord inveighs against, that of making a "treasure" of it, or setting our hearts upon it as an idol in the place of God, instead of considering all as his, and as requiring all to be employed for him, according to his revealed will. It is the desire to be great, to shine, and to indulge in the pride of life, that is destructive to men's souls. This is the evil every where described by such language as the following:—"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."—"They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition," James iv. 3; 1 Tim. vi. 9.

2. I observe *the reason of some duties ceases in a greater or less degree by a change of circumstances.*—This remark, I am aware, is liable to great

abuse. Some, under the pretence of accommodating Christianity to times and circumstances, may render it a mere temporizing system, to be just what its professors may find it their interest or their inclination to have it be. Yet, after all, the fact cannot be called in question; and if men will abuse it, they must take the consequence.

It is a fact, that for a man in the times of the apostles to have had "his head covered" in public worship was reckoned to be "dishonouring his head;" for, by the custom which then prevailed, in was a sign of subjection, 1 Cor. xi. 4-7. But in our times the reverse is true; a being *uncovered* is the sign of subjection, and the being covered indicates some kind of superiority. Men are now generally uncovered in the time of worship, not for the purpose of maintaining their dignity, or superiority over the women; but, on the contrary, for avoiding the appearance of assuming too much in the presence of God, by seeming to refuse that honour to him which is paid to our superiors among men. The woman, on the other hand, was then required to be covered, as by the custom of those times it was a token of her subjection to the man. But though our females still cover the head in public worship, it is not for this purpose, nor does it convey any such idea.

For the same purpose the hair of the man was shorn, and that of the woman worn at length. Each by the custom of the time and place was considered as distinctive of the sexes, which various important purposes in society, and even nature itself, required to be preserved. When the apostle asks, "Doth not even nature itself teach you that if a man have long hair it is a shame unto him? but if a woman have long hair it is a glory to her," (1 Cor. xi. 14, 15,) some have thought that, "by nature," he means no more than custom. This I apprehend is a mistake. President Edwards has happily expressed what appears to be the true meaning of this passage in the following words:—"It is custom which establishes any outward sign as a token of inward sentiment; therefore, when it had established the wearing of long hair as the sign of a female, 'nature itself' taught that it was a shame for a man to appear in the known garb of a woman." The truth is, I apprehend, if the proper distinction of the sexes be preserved, by each appearing in that habit which the custom of the age and country makes the distinctive marks of them, the end aimed at by the apostle is fully answered.*

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE PRINCIPLES OF DISSENT.

FROM the first establishment of the Church of England on its present basis, to this day, there have been dissenters from it; but as all dissent is expressive rather of what is disapproved than of what is embraced, it is natural to suppose that the objects of disapprobation will be different in different persons. The English Dissenters are commonly distinguished into three denominations; *Presbyterians*, *Independents*, and *Baptists*: but there exists, as has existed nearly from the beginning, a distinction of greater importance, and more descriptive of their respective grounds of dissent, by which also they are reducible to three classes:—viz.

* The remainder of this Essay, principally relating to the connexion between baptism and the Lord's supper, is supposed to be lost. Some of the following treatises will, however, convey the author's sentiments on this subject.

Nearly allied to the subject of the preceding Essay is a treatise *On Moral and Positive Obedience*, and another *On the Discipline of the Primitive Churches*. See *Circular Letters of the Northamptonshire Association*.

Those who have disapproved of the *doctrine* of the National Church—those who approved of its doctrine, but were dissatisfied with the *degree of its Reformation*—and those who also approved of its doctrine, but disapproved not only of particular parts but of the *very principle of its constitution*.

Of the *first* description, there were individuals from the time of the Reformation in the reign of Edward the Sixth, to the revolution of 1688, several of whom were put to death for their principles; but till the eighteenth century their numbers appear to have been few. Whatever we may think of the doctrines which these people imbibed, no person who respects the right of private judgment, and the authority of Him who reproved his own disciples when they would have called for fire from heaven upon his enemies, declaring that he “came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them,” can forbear to regret that the Reformation should at so early a period have been stained with blood.

Of the *second* description were the greater part of the *puritans* and *non-conformists*. They were Presbyterians. They did not object to a national establishment of religion; but rather wished to be comprehended in it; provided it had been framed after the model of other reformed churches, which they accounted more agreeable to the Scriptures. Hence, when they left the Church, it was with reluctance, complaining of the terms of conformity, to which they could not conscientiously subscribe. The several attempts for compromising the differences, and admitting them into the National Church, during the reigns of James the First and Charles the Second, respected Dissenters of this description.

The *third* and last class of Dissenters, differed not from the Established Church in the main as to their doctrine, though they might not approve of being sworn to the belief of every particular in a human composition, especially of so large an extent as the *Thirty-nine Articles*. But with respect to its constitution, government, and discipline, their objections were far greater than those of their brethren. Its being an ally, and as it were a branch of the state, and comprehending the body of the nation, good and bad, appeared to them utterly inconsistent with the nature of “Christ’s kingdom,” which “is not of this world;” and of a Christian church, which in its own Articles is said to be “a congregation of faithful men.”

They had no antipathy to Churchmen, but considered many of them as persons eminent in godliness; nor to this Church in distinction from others, though there might be in them different degrees of good and evil; but their grand objection was to the Church *considered as national*. The temporal power of bishops, the imposition of ministers, to the exclusion of the free election of the people, the mixture of godly and manifestly ungodly characters at the Lord’s table, the corruption of worship, the total want of discipline, and all other deviations from primitive Christianity, appeared to them to be no more than might be expected, if circumstances admitted it, to grow out of a national establishment. They, therefore, peaceably withdrew from its communion, with the view of forming churches on the plan of the New Testament. But the leaders in the Establishment considering themselves as *the* true church, and all who dissented from them as guilty of schism, being jealous whereunto this might grow, and having the civil power on their side, thought good to prevent them. In the reign of the famed Elizabeth, in the year 1593, several of them were actually executed on gibbets—not for any contempt of *civil* authority, for to this they professed and yielded all due obedience; nor for any *matter of wrong, or wicked lawfulness*, for their lives were unblamable; but for following what they believed to be the mind of Christ, regardless of *ecclesiastical* restraints. The rest fled to Holland for safety.

Among these exiles was Mr. John Robinson, a man who, for gentleness, modesty, firmness, and solid wisdom, has been rarely excelled. He and his companions in tribulation were permitted to form a congregational church at Leyden, which is said to have consisted of *three hundred members*. About twenty-seven years after their residence in Holland, namely, in 1620, about a hundred of the younger members of the church went over to North America, and formed the settlement of New Plymouth; and as every previous attempt to colonize that country had failed, they may properly be considered as the founders of the American empire.

Another of these exiles was the famous Mr. Henry Ainsworth, author of the "Commentary on the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Song of Songs." He was a teacher of another congregational church at Amsterdam.*

To this *third* class belong the greater part of the English Dissenters, who in the present day are denominated *Independents* and *Baptists*. It is true they have much relaxed in various points of church government and discipline; some, perhaps, to their honour, and some to their dishonour; but the *principle* on which their churches are formed is congregational. The *latter* denomination have one additional reason for their dissent from the Established Church above their brethren, namely, their disapprobation of infant baptism; and in which they also dissent from *them*.

Those who separate from the Established Church on this ground, cannot, consistently with their principles, *complain* of the terms of conformity as being either too narrow or too wide for them; neither can they become *competitors* with it for worldly power. If the government should even offer to make theirs the established religion, however they might be obliged to them for their kindness, they could not accept it without relinquishing their first principles relative to church government.

Neither can they, without relinquishing the first principles of the system by which they are distinguished from other Christians, *persecute* any man for his religion, whatever that religion be. They may think and speak of men according to their true character; they may refuse all religious connexion with them; they may expose their principles to just abhorrence; *but their hand must not be upon them*. They can neither call in the aid of the civil power, nor in any way deprive them of their rights; and this, not because they consider error as innocent, but as a species of guilt which is not cognizable by an earthly tribunal.

It has been remarked by American historians, that there was a manifest difference, in respect of forbearance, between the government and colony of New Plymouth, who retained the principles of their beloved Robinson, and those of Massachusetts Bay, which consisted chiefly of Dissenters of the *second* description, and who went over at different times, between the years 1624 and 1633. Other denominations had great cause to complain of the persecuting spirit of the latter, even though they themselves had fled from the persecutions of the English prelates; but of the former no such complaints were heard. Far be it from us, however, to insinuate of any one of these descriptions of Dissenters of the present age that they are friendly to persecution. They, and we hope the most respectable part of Episcopalians, have since learned that, in matters of religion, "to our own Master we must stand or fall."

Once more: Dissenters of this description cannot, consistently with their original principles, be factious, turbulent, disaffected, or in any way inimical to the well-being of the *state*. It is a maxim familiar with their fathers,

* Two of his Treatises, the one entitled *The Communion of Saints*, and the other *An Arrow against Idolatry*, have within a few years been reprinted at Edinburgh; to which are prefixed some account of the life and writings of the author.

"Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Obedience, in all civil matters, "to the powers that were," was an essential article of their creed. In this obedience they did not, indeed, include an *approbation* of every particular measure; but neither did they so explain it away as to make it consist in a merely forced compliance with the laws, for fear of consequences; but in a voluntary, cordial, loyal, and dutiful demeanour. By how much they are impressed also with the truth that "Christ's kingdom is not of this world," by so much will they become dead to struggles for worldly power; leaving restless spirits to deal in cabals and intrigues, they will "seek peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Such, as far as we understand them, are the genuine principles of congregational dissent. We do not pretend to say that all congregationalists have uniformly acted up to them. Many do not understand the principles which they profess, and others act inconsistently with them. Our object is to exhibit them, not merely for the information of other denominations, but for the conviction of our own.

If the love of civil and religious liberty (which under God is the only security they have) has had too great a hold on some of their minds; and, in cases where they have conceived it to be in danger, has betrayed them into language and behaviour which, in the hour of serious reflection, they must condemn as unchristian; yet it is not in the power of their worst enemies to prove that they have ever entered into any of those conspiracies which appear to have existed of late years to overturn the government and constitution of the country. There may, indeed, have been individuals who have done this; for bad men are known to mingle in all societies: but even of such we have scarcely heard an instance.

There are certain violent men, who appear to be galled by the wholesome restraints of the state upon their persecuting spirit, and who are no less averse to the best, most laborious, and most useful clergymen in the nation, than they are to us, that make it their business to rake together every idle story, and to persuade their readers that Dissenters, as a body, are enemies to the state. From such quarters *village preaching* has been ascribed to *political* motives; and even *Sunday schools*, as they are called, denounced as the seminaries of sedition. To all these charges we answer by asking for *proof*. In so large a body of men we cannot undertake to say there are no bad men; neither can our accusers say so of the Established Church. Nay, more, we cannot undertake to vindicate all the conduct of those whom we may account good men. Only let it be *proved* of any village preacher, or schoolmaster, or catechist, that he diffuses a spirit of disaffection to government among those whom he instructs, and if he be not discarded, or at least reprov'd, by his connexions, as soon as they know it, let them bear the blame for ever.

"It may be objected," says Justin Martyr, in his Apology, "that some Christians have been convicted as evil-doers. Well, I will grant the objection, and more; not only that some, but many, and at different times, have been thus duly convicted upon a fair trial; but then I must tell you again that you condemned not the persons aforesaid as criminals, but as Christians. Moreover, we confess that, as all the sects in general among the Greeks went under the common name of philosophers, though extremely different in opinion, so truly among us the professors of this new wisdom, whether in reality or appearance only, go all by the same title, and are denominated Christians. Wherefore we pray that all those who are indicted by the name of Christian may be examined as to their actions; and that every person convicted may suffer as an evil-doer, and not as a Christian."

Such is our prayer as Dissenters. If any man, or society of men, be guilty, let them bear their burden; but let them suffer as evil-doers, and not as Dissenters.

VINDICATION OF PROTESTANT DISSENT.*

THE oppositions which have of late years been made to Christianity have happily induced its friends, of all denominations, to come to a better understanding with each other; forbearing contentions of less moment, they have joined their efforts in defending the common salvation. On this ground, evangelical Dissenters, though their opinion of a national establishment of religion is the same as before, yet, from a regard to the doctrine, character, and usefulness of many of its ministers, have sincerely rejoiced in their labours. Evangelical Episcopalians have also many of them laid aside smaller differences; and, whatever they might think of dissent, have esteemed the serious part of Dissenters. Thus far the malignant influence of infidelity has not only been counteracted, but made to defeat itself.

But things have not operated in this way in every instance. In various late publications, by evangelical Churchmen, great stress is laid on "regularity," by which seems to be meant, not only a strict regard to the forms and orders of the Establishment, but the standing aloof from all Dissenters, as "sectaries and schismatics." A piece in "The Christian Observer," said to be written by Mr. R., an aged and respectable clergyman in the north of England, goes so far as to dissuade ministers of his description from having any acquaintance with them. Such Dissenters as Watts, Doddridge, and Guyse received "*great advantage*," it seems, from their acquaintance with certain clergymen; and employed it in recruiting their congregations at the expense of the Church!—Vol. I. No. III. p. 162.

It would seem from such insinuations as these, to be dangerous for Dissenters, however distinguished by talents or character, to come near these dignified men; for if in their lifetime they be treated with civility, they may expect to be reproached for it after they are dead! The celebrated work of Mr. Overton makes quite enough of this "regularity," and bears hard upon Dissenters. "Sectaries and schismatics" are names pretty liberally bestowed upon them. The same may be said of the "Address of Mr. Robinson." Whether these gentlemen judge it *prudent* to take such measures, as feeling their Churchmanship suspected by their irreligious brethren, and wish to establish it at our expense, or whatever be the reason, they seem of late, some of them at least, to be not a little desirous of renewing hostilities.

Before I proceed any further, I desire it may be noticed that I have no personal antipathy to any one of these ministers; that I have the happiness to be acquainted with several of them, who, I am persuaded, are men of another spirit; that even those on whom I take the liberty of animadverting are esteemed by me, and many other Dissenters, for their work's sake; that I have no desire to impeach their integrity, in adhering to the Church; that I utterly dislike all such personal reflections, leaving the judgment of motives to God only; and, finally, that, whatever objections I may have to particular parts of the Church, they are but little, compared to my aversion from its

* Written in reply to the charges of the Rev. Thomas Robinson, M. A., Vicar of St. Mary's, Leicester, in a pamphlet entitled, "A Serious Call to a Constant and Devout Attendance on the Stated Services of the Church of England."

grand principle—that is, its being *national*, and *established*, and *directed by civil authority*.

I have no desire to “reproach or calumniate” Mr. R. for what he has written; nor do I blame him for defending the Church as far as he is able, and trying, by fair argument and Christian persuasion, to induce his hearers, who have deserted her communion, to return: only let him not complain if others claim the right of examining the justice of what he advances. He speaks of “a host of disputants” appearing, when he, or any of his brethren, defend their own principles. To me it appears that, for a considerable time, Dissenters have been nearly silent on these subjects; and that what has been written has been chiefly on the other side.

Mr. R. declares his “principal concern is with the persons who have left his ministry; that he desires to stir up no contention with others; that he casts no reflections on those who, from conscientious motives, separate from the Church; and will enter into no altercations, nor answer the idle cavils of those who delight in strife,”—p. 5. Yet he stigmatizes Dissenters in general as “sectaries,” and charges them with “schism.” It may be said, however, that this is only a necessary consequence of his being a Churchman on conviction; and that whether he dealt in such language or not, he must, to be consistent, entertain such thoughts of them. Admitting this apology, then, I will conclude Mr. R.’s aversion is not to *persons*, but *things*, and, on this ground, will cheerfully join issue with him.

With respect to the persons addressed in Mr. R.’s pamphlet, I do not know that they should complain of him, unless it be for their “conscientiousness” being tacitly called in question. Their minister expostulates with them, and it becomes them to hear him candidly, especially when he professes to address them with “argument and exhortation, rather than with menace or reproof; assigning what appear to him the strongest reasons for conformity, and leaving them to their mature deliberation, entreating that they may regulate their conduct only so far as they perceive their strength and importance.” This is fair and manly.

Mr. R. has done well also, before he exhibits the charge of “schism,” to undertake the *proof* of the Church of England being “truly apostolical.” *If it be so*, and the justice of its claim on all Christians within the realm to consider themselves as its members can be substantiated, Dissenters must, of course, be “sectaries and schismatics;” and though the state, from political clemency, may tolerate them, yet will they not be acquitted before a higher tribunal. If, on the other hand, *it be not so*; or, though it be, yet if it have no exclusive claim, either from God or man, to the membership of all Christians within the realm, it will follow that the names signify nothing more than they did in the mouths of the ancient enemies of the Christians, who stigmatized them as “the sect of the Nazarenes;” and that the only difference between those who call themselves *the Church* and other Christians is, that, being of the sect which happens to be favoured by the state, they are more particularly exposed to the temptation of assuming supercilious airs, and looking down upon their brethren with contempt.

I have said, If the Church of England *be* truly apostolical in the main, yet, if it have no *exclusive claim* to the membership of all Christians within the realm, it may not follow that all Dissenters are guilty of “schism,” or that they are any more deserving of the name of “sectaries” than Episcopalians are, in countries where theirs is not the established religion. If the Church of England were allowed to be “a part of the church of Christ,” (p. 28,) why may not other churches be another part? Is it provable that any of the primitive churches laid claim to the membership of all Christians within a certain tract of country?

But though, for argument's sake, I have granted this, yet I do not allow it. I am persuaded the Church of England is *not* "a true apostolical church," and have no objection to rest the lawfulness of dissent upon the issue of this question.

Mr. R.'s first argument for it is, "It conforms to apostolical example in the different *orders* of its ministers,"—p. 5. It might have been expected that, under this head, we should have been referred to *Scripture proofs*. If Mr. R. could have told us in what parts of the New Testament we might find the offices of *arch-bishop, arch-deacons, deans, priests, &c. &c. &c.*, there is little doubt but he would; but this he has wisely declined. Or, though the *names* cannot be found, yet if what is done corresponded with what was done in the primitive churches, it might be said that the *spirit* of things is preserved; but the proof of this is not attempted. Or if the work of bishops and deacons in the Church of England, whose names are found in the Scriptures, could be proved to be the same as that which pertained to those offices originally, it would be in its favour, so far as it went; but neither is this attempted. Finally, If it had been proved that one set of pastors were subject to the control of another, who invested them with office and deprived them of it as occasion required, something had been accomplished; but neither is this attempted. Nor is a single passage of Scripture referred to on the subject, except 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40, "*Let all things be done to edifying,*"—"Let all things be done decently, and in order,"—which prove just as much in favour of popery as of modern episcopacy, and have been as often quoted for that purpose as for this.

What is it then that Mr. R. alleges in proof of his assertion? Hear him. "The subordination established among the clergy, and the share of power it has assigned to some of them over others, are REASONABLE AND EXPEDIENT, and such as ought not to be objected to, UNLESS THEY CAN BE PROVED TO BE CONTRARY TO DIVINE INJUNCTION." Mr. R. feels himself unable to prove them to be *any part of what God hath enjoined*; but thinks to come off with referring it to his opponents to prove them *forbidden*! Two-thirds of the superstitions of popery and paganism might thus be vindicated. The baptizing of bells is no more *contrary* to express Divine injunction than the things for which Mr. R. contends.

"It is CONGENIAL WITH THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION." One would hope then it would be allowed not to be an essential *part of it*; for that would be making a thing to be congenial with itself. We admire the British constitution as a monument of human wisdom in civil affairs, and are thankful to live under its shadow; but we do not think it a model after which Jesus Christ formed the government of his church!

"The distinction of ministers into bishops, priests, and deacons—the general scheme of Episcopal ordination and Episcopal government, prevailed VERY EARLY IN THE CHURCH." How much of truth, or of untruth, there may be in this assertion, I shall not inquire: it is sufficient for my argument that this does not prove it to be "apostolical."

Were the primitive bishops *overseers* of other ministers, or of the flock of God? Were they *chosen* by a dean and chapter, on being nominated by the civil magistrate, or by the suffrage of the people? Did their authority extend over a country, including a number of congregations; or was it confined to one; or, at most, to that and the branches that pertained to it? When bishops became corrupt, did the purer part of the churches appeal to superior authority to get them removed; or did they only inform the apostles, and the apostles themselves appeal to the churches? These questions must be resolved, before the Church of England can be proved to be apostolical, even with respect to her officers.

If Mr. R. had been chosen to his present office by the suffrage of the congregation, instead of being presented to *the living* by a patron, he would have had an argument to plead with those who have deserted him which now he has not. As it is, he can only say, "I have solemnly pledged *myself* to attend to your spiritual concerns!"—p. I.

Mr. R. opposes the *ordination* of the Episcopal clergy to that of *self-sent* individuals among the sectaries,—p. 8, 10. But he must know this is not a general practice among us; and he might know that no communion is ordinarily held with such characters. If this practice were half as general among us, as what he wishes to be considered "accidental" in the church, there might be some appearance of justice in what he alleges.

In short, all Mr. R.'s arguments for the Church of England being "apostolical," have hitherto been such as would equally apply to that of Rome. An advocate for that holy and apostolical Church, as she also calls herself, could allege that she has her bishops, priests, and deacons; that the subordination of the people to the clergy, the clergy to the bishops, and the bishops to the pope, is "REASONABLE AND EXPEDIENT;" that all which "is essential" to the system is the appointment of one man of "*eminent sanctity and sufficiency*, to have the care of all the churches;" that this, and many other "decent and edifying" things, ought not to be objected to, unless they can be proved to be *contrary to express Divine injunction!* Christian reader! does any thing belonging to true religion require to be thus supported? Is this any other than *setting up men's threshold by God's thresholds, and their post by his posts?*

It may appear singular to some that, in proving the Church of England to be apostolical, Mr. R. begins with the "order of her ministers," entirely passing over what the Church is *in itself*. A church, we are told in the Articles, is "a congregation of faithful men," &c. Why then did he not undertake to prove that such was the Church of England? that it was a *congregation* assembling together like that at Corinth, *in one place*; and a congregation of *faithful men*, gathered out of an unbelieving world, and sufficiently distinguished from it? These things Mr. R. has not undertaken to prove, but confines himself to *the order of its ministers*. The *gold* of this temple seems *greater*, in his account, *than the temple itself*. What should we think of a lady, who should pretend to be queen of the realm; but, instead of proving that she was the bride, the king's consort, she alleges the order and subordination of her servants? Would she not be told that this was a circumstance which might attach to a pretender as well as to the queen, and therefore proved nothing?

To the order of her ministers, Mr. R. adds the purity of her *doctrine*. Here I am willing to allow that, so far as respects *the written forms* of the Church, it is in the main evangelical. I allow also that doctrine is an article of a thousand times greater importance than the orders of ministers, be they what they may. It is on this account that we heartily wish all who believe and preach these doctrines success.

There are two things, however, which require to be noticed under this head:—

First, It is impossible to magnify articles of faith, of human composition, to the dishonour of the Scriptures, from their agreement with which arises all their value. It is not enough that what we believe is truth, but that we believe it *as a revelation from God*. To be attached to a set of doctrines, be they ever so true, because the church has taught them, is to put the church in the place of Christ. Our faith, in this case, would stand in the wisdom of man, and not in the power of God; and will be of no account to us, either here or hereafter.

Secondly, The articles of faith drawn up for the Church are not *the Church*, nor can it be collected from them, as Mr. R. says it can, "what those grand doctrines are in which *the Church* would have all her members instructed and established,"—p. 11. They might, and doubtless did, express what the Church of England that *once was* would have; but not that which *now is*. It is not true that the Church of England that now is would have any such thing. The church, if a church it be, is the great body of the bishops, clergy, and people: and they manifestly wish for the reverse of what the Reformers did; and could they but fairly get rid of the Articles, would reckon it a most desirable thing. Yet by confounding the formularies of the Church with the Church itself, Mr. R. can go on to tell us what she believes, and what she teaches; though, if we except a comparatively small number of her clergy and members, she neither does the one nor the other.

To make this matter more plain, let us suppose one of our dissenting churches, which a century ago subscribed, as articles of faith, the substance of the Assembly's Catechism; but within the last fifty years (though the articles are still retained, and, for the sake of certain emoluments left to the Calvinistic interest in the place, are still subscribed) the minister and the body of the members are actually become Socinians—would Mr. R. allow of their being a sound and apostolical church, with regard to doctrine, on the mere ground of the retention and subscription of the articles? And should a Calvinistic individual, fondly attached to the old place, stand up in it with the articles in his hand and boast in this manner, "Possessed as she is of such a treasure as this of Divine truth, who shall calumniate or oppose her?" (p. 14,) would not Mr. R. pity his weakness, and feel indignant at the delusion by which he imposed upon himself and laboured to impose upon others? It is not what a community retains in its books, but what is retained in the minds of its members, that determines what it is. "The body without the spirit is dead."

Thus we have seen the substance of what Mr. R. has to offer in proof of the Church of England's being "apostolical." What follows chiefly consists of commendations of her forms and objections to those of Dissenters. We will, however, proceed to examine the whole.

"The form of *Common Prayer*," he says, "in which you are called to join is truly excellent,"—p. 14. There are doubtless many good things in it, but it is too much to pronounce upon it in this manner. To mention only one instance, if the *burial service* were abolished, and what should be said of the deceased were left to the dictates and feelings of Mr. R.'s own mind, I question whether he would utter what is there uttered, however "excellent" he may now profess to think it. But it is not my design to point out the faults of this book. If a liturgy must be used, it may answer the end, upon the whole, as well as another: if a church must be composed of a whole nation, and consequently the great body of its clergy as well as members be prayerless men, it may be necessary to frame prayers for them; and if to prayers were added sermons or homilies, it might be still better: but "a congregation of faithful men" needs not such securities. Mr. R. himself, when he meets with people of this description, and sometimes in public worship, can deal in "extemporaneous effusions," however contemptuously he can allow himself to speak of them in others. It is sufficient also for my argument, that Mr. R. does not undertake to prove that the use of a liturgy formed any part of "apostolic" practice.

He proceeds, "We owe it to our country to comply with all its ordinances which are *not contrary* to a good conscience." By this Mr. R. must mean all ordinances relative to faith and worship, else it is nothing to his purpose. But on what authority is this position built? Christians were commanded

to be "subject to every ordinance of man," even when under heathen governments, "for the Lord's sake," 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14. But surely it cannot be imagined that these ordinances respected the modelling of Christian faith and worship. The apostle could not mean to give heathen magistrates any such authority, nor to subject Christians to it. The ordinances of man are explained in the context, of things civil and moral, which undoubtedly ought, in all ages and circumstances, to be obeyed by Christians, and that from a religious motive, or "for the Lord's sake;" but to apply it to the regulation of faith and worship is dishonourable to the only Lawgiver of the church. A church itself has no right to *make* ordinances of this kind, but merely to *interpret* and *declare* what they apprehend to be the mind of Christ, and such interpretations and declarations ought ever to be open to revision and correction, when judged to be at variance with his revealed will. To worship God "by the commandments of men" is itself forbidden in the Scriptures, (Matt. xv. 6; Mark vii. 7,) and therefore is contrary to a good conscience. The interposition of human authority, in Divine things, generally corrupts them; but if not, yet it affects the nature of conformity to them. To believe a doctrine or conform to a mode of worship, even though each may in itself be right, *on account of its being ordained of men*, renders it merely human religion, destroying the very principle of Christian obedience.

If the apostles in planting Christianity had acted upon Mr. R.'s principle, they would not have ordained the same things "in all churches;" but have framed a different formulary of worship in different countries. Their first business would have been to examine how much of the old materials of heathen superstition, many parts of which might not be contradicted by express Divine injunction, would do to work over again; and what was the civil constitution of the country, that they might as far as possible accommodate things to the public mind. I do not wonder that Mr. R. should be partial to this principle; it is that of his Church and of the Church of Rome before her. Why is it that episcopacy has in it so much of popery, and popery of heathenism? The reason in both is the same. They each undertook to convert men *by nations*. Now, to bring a nation over to a new religion requires that as few alterations be introduced as possible, that old things be retained under new names, and that great sacrifices be made to popular humour. Thus popery, in numerous instances, was only heathenism in a Christian garb, and episcopacy was no other than popery purged of its grosser evils.—But thus did not Paul. Wherever he established Christianity "old things passed away, and all things became new;" or, if not, it was the fault of the people, unauthorized by him. He taught Christians to consider themselves as *complete* in Christ; so as to need neither the *additions* of heathen philosophy, nor those of Jewish ceremony; though each would doubtless recommend itself on the score of "decency," as not contrary to Divine injunction, and as that which would give Christianity a respectable appearance,—Col. ii.

Mr. R.'s whole scheme rests upon *supposition*; namely, the *supposed* "eminent sanctity and sufficiency of bishops," and the *supposed* "solicitousness of civil governments to promote the interest of real Christianity,"—pp. viii. 20. They are both of them, no doubt, supposable cases; such as have occurred, and may occur; but woe to the system that rests upon their being generally true! Far be it from me to think ill of men in the higher spheres of office, whether civil or ecclesiastical: the former I revere, as ordained of God; and towards the latter I desire to cherish all due benevolence; but, to suppose of either that which is not generally true, is deceiving both ourselves and them. Surely there is a medium between a spirit of "insubordination" to civil government, and inviting our rulers to frame laws and ordinances

for the government of Christ's kingdom within their realm, and then flattering them for their pious intentions.

The Episcopalians of this country have not been wanting in zeal for what has affected *their own interests and privileges*. When James II. published his declaration for liberty of conscience, thinking to introduce popery, and commanded the clergy to read it in all their churches, the great body of them refused. By this they said in effect, It appertaineth not unto thee, O king, to dispossess us of our privileges, and to give them to the ecclesiastics of Rome!—I hope then we may be excused if we feel equally zealous for the *interest and exclusive authority of Jesus Christ*. If a government be solicitous to promote the interest of real Christianity, it should not be by making ordinances where Christ has not made them; but by protecting men in the exercise of a good conscience, and encouraging them to obey the ordinances already made in the Holy Scriptures.

Mr. R. holds up the *piety* of the Reformers: and we could hold up the piety of thousands who have refused conforming to their rules, as not answering to the model of the New Testament; and who were persecuted in almost every form on this account, and that by men who should have been "eminent for sanctity and sufficiency."

Mr. R. has hitherto argued chiefly in a way of *defence*; but, imboldened by his success, he now commences an *attack*. "Many strong objections," he says, "may be urged against a different ecclesiastical constitution,"—p. 25. Let us hear them. "If you be solicited to depart from us, it will become you previously to consider whither you should go." Very good. "Would any solid advantage be gained by the desertion of our ordinances, by the demolition of our Establishment, and by the appointment of another system?—Ah! what incalculable evils would ensue!—How injurious to society and religion!" Mr. R., by "another system," must mean that of infidelity; and does he call this a "different ecclesiastical constitution?" I hope the persons whom he wishes to retain in communion are not inclined to this. "Insubordination and excessive profligacy" are consequences of leaving *Christian worship*, and not merely that of the *Episcopal church*.

But allowing the best, that they thought of being *Dissenters*, "What is that plan of worship," he asks, "what the government and principles of that religious society you are invited to join?" Very good;—what are they?

"They," Dissenters, I suppose he means, "differ from each other as much as they do from the Church,"—p. 26. If by "the Church" were meant her doctrinal articles, he might have added, *and much more*.—But those things should not be alleged against Dissenters which are common to all parties.—It is marvellous that Churchmen should pretend to be of one mind, and that at a time when the most ardent contentions divide them; one party maintaining that the Articles mean this, another that, and a third that they have no meaning, but are merely articles of peace.* Have we Arminians?—So have they:—Arians?—So have they:—Socinians?—So have they:—Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of their own selves?—So have they. The only difference is, our churches being *independent* of each other, we have no general bond of connexion, so as to compel us to hold communion with such people; but *they have*. We can, if so disposed, stand aloof from all these evils, and so escape the charge of being partakers of other men's sins: but *they cannot*; for the church is one, and indivisible, including all descriptions of men who choose to frequent her assemblies. Her barriers, which protect the sacred symbols of our Saviour's death themselves against interested infidelity and profligacy, are well known to be very feeble, and such

* See Overton's *True Churchman*.

as must, in various instances, give way to worldly expediency. If, indeed, a particular parish church, wherein a godly clergyman officiates, were secluded from the rest of the nation, and he were not accountable for any thing which is done beyond the limits of his own immediate charge, the evil might be considerably lessened; but it is not so. *He that sweareth by this altar, sweareth by it and all things thereon*; actually holding fellowship with all the avowed Arminians, and disguised Arians, Socinians, and infidels, who in different parts of the land are admitted without scruple to communion.

It is further objected that we "almost all agree in giving the supreme direction and control to the people." It seems, then, we are *agreed* in something; in an article too, in which, as ministers, we cannot well be accused of "*lording it over God's heritage.*" Whether the power of admitting members be as safe in the hands of the people, in conjunction with their pastor, as in those of the pastor alone, or not, surely that of excluding offenders, by a solemn act of the whole body, is as consistent with apostolical order as prosecuting them for their sins in a spiritual court!—See 1 Cor. v. 4, 5; 2 Cor. ii. 6.

"They abolish all subscriptions to articles of faith." It is true we do not require our ministers to *swear* to them; looking upon the word of a Christian man to be as his oath. But it is not true of perhaps the major part of Dissenters that they subscribe no articles.

Our public *catechisms*, which are used in instructing our children, and which, were they but established by *civil authority*, would be accounted to contain as great a treasure as the Church Articles, are much more believed and regarded among us than the latter are among them. But, besides these, many of our churches express their leading principles in writing, to which not merely the minister, as in the Established Church, but every member, subscribes his name. And where this is *not* done, many of them are so attached to the Scriptures, and so well acquainted with one another, that no *practical* inconvenience arises from it. It is a fact that ought for ever to silence our accusers, that the ministers and members of the Church of England, with all their boasted security against error in virtue of their Articles, are become so degenerate that scarcely one in ten believes them; whereas Dissenters, with all their want of security, do, two out of three at least, believe the doctrines contained in them! The Church has more believers of her doctrines among Dissenters than among her own members; and that notwithstanding the proportion of the former to the latter is probably less than as one to seven!

Yet "a society of Christians thus constituted, without *establishing* any test of orthodoxy, or forms of public devotion, though at their first union they may be sound in the faith, upright in their views, and exemplary in their conduct, is likely to degenerate." *The word of Christ dwelling richly in them*, then, is no competent security, unless it be reduced to proper forms, and established by authority! It is true that, "from the corrupt tendency of the human mind," we are always in danger of degenerating; but that Mr. R. should confine it to Dissenters, and talk of its being "confirmed by indubitable facts," is passing strange. The Church of England, owing to her excellent means of preservation, is in *no* danger, it seems, of degeneracy! The descendants of the first Reformers have *not* departed from their purity, either in faith or practice! The subscription of the Articles by the clergy, though scarcely one in ten believes them, has preserved not only themselves, but the people, who do not subscribe them, from error! And buildings—I should have said "temples"—which have once been appropriated to the promotion of evangelical religion, are never known among them to be applied to opposite purposes!

"They leave the minister at large to offer up prayer and praise, according to the dictates and feelings of his own mind." Just so; and thus, for any thing that appears in the New Testament to the contrary, were the primitive ministers left. Where men are destitute of a praying spirit, it may not be safe to leave them "at large;" perhaps the more closely they are confined the better: but they that fear God have no need of being so treated. Those forms which Mr. R. so highly extols were originally the dictates and feelings of fallible individuals; and if it be, as he suggests, that "much evil results from such a mode," why does he himself practise it? Are the dictates and feelings of his mind, being "a man under authority," different from those of other ministers?

But the course of things among us tends to encourage "pride and contention." That these evils are too prevalent in our churches we shall not deny; they were so in the primitive churches, which also had their Diotrophes as well as we. And is there no danger of clerical pride, and of many an official Diotrophes, in the Church? It deserves to be considered, whether the *peace* of which the Church has to boast among her members, instead of being the fruit of meekness and brotherly love, be not rather the ease of indifference, and the stillness of ecclesiastical despotism. Where one man is all, the rest are nothing at all.

What is urged under Mr. R.'s last head is built entirely upon the validity of what was advanced before it. If the Church of England be *not* truly apostolical—if her doctrines be neither believed nor taught by the great body of her clergy—if her forms be not binding on men's consciences, and ought not to be made so—if the ordinances of man, to which we are obliged to be subject, be confined to things of a civil and moral nature—the charge of "schism" falls to the ground.

I doubt not but that there are many of the people of God in the Church of England; and perhaps Mr. R. will admit there may be some in the Church of Rome; and that it is their duty to "come out of her, that they partake not of her sins, and receive not of her plagues." It is far from my desire to attack the National Church, or to interfere with its concerns, any further than is necessary to vindicate the practice of dissent from the reproaches heaped upon it by such writers as Mr. Robinson. I will not, like some non-conformists, complain of her hard terms of admission; for if they were easier, or even abolished, I have no idea, at present, that I should covet to enter in. I regret not the loss of any advantages which I might there possess. Whatever be the articles and forms, or even the belief of a community, yet if it put itself under the control of the civil power in religious matters, for the sake of outward advantages, and acquiesce in the disposal of those advantages by interested patronage, *this itself* is a sufficient ground for separation. For where things are thus conducted, "the souls of men" are become an article of merchandise; and the Church is little other than an instrument of power and aggrandisement in the hands of worldly men. This would have been an insuperable objection to me, had I lived, and possessed my present views, in the purest times of the Reformation. Such a constitution must of necessity confound the church and the world. All the difference between those times and these is, they sowed the seeds, and we have seen the harvest. We see in the great body of the members of this community, not *saints, and faithful in Christ Jesus*, such as were the members of the primitive churches; but men of the world; men who would be ashamed to be thought "saints," and who scruple not to deride all spiritual religion. A community of this description is not a "congregation of faithful men;" and so, by the confession of the Church itself, is not a church of Christ.

Whatever may be said of "schisms," or divisions, among Christians, they are things very different from *separations from the world*. From the latter we are commanded to "*withdraw ourselves*;" not "*altogether*" indeed from men who make no pretence to religion; for then we must needs go out of the world; but from those who are *called brethren*, or profess to know God, but in works deny him. From such it is our duty to stand aloof, even in our ordinary intercourse; and much more in solemn communion at the table of the Lord, 1 Cor. v. 9-13.

In separating from the Church of England we conform to the Divine precept, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"—"Wherefore come out from among them, *and be ye separate, saith the Lord*; and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Not that we consider the whole body as unbelievers; but if the greater part be such, and the principles on which they hold communion make no provision for excluding them, it amounts to the same thing in effect as if they were all such. If a part of the people of God themselves resolve to hold communion with unbelievers, we ought to *withdraw* from them, lest we be partakers of other men's sins. In so doing, we do not divide from them as *Christians*, but as "*brethren who walk disorderly*," refusing to follow them off their proper ground, or to assist them in breaking down the fences of the church, and so confounding it with the world.

If it be objected, that the practice forbidden to the Corinthians was not their admitting unbelievers to commune with them in Christian ordinances, but their going to commune with unbelievers at heathen ordinances, this is granted; but the latter practice is forbidden on *principles* which equally forbid the former. The *impossibility* of Christian communion subsisting between them, and their being called to be *separate*, are each as applicable to the one as to the other.

If it be further objected, that where men *profess* Christianity, we have no right to sit in judgment upon their hearts, but ought charitably to consider and treat them as *believers*,—I answer, If the thing professed were genuine personal Christianity, and there were nothing in the spirit and conduct of the party that rendered his profession incredible, this objection were valid; but where no pretence is made to any other than traditional assent, which in Turkey would have made them Mahomedans, and in China pagans; where faith is manifestly *dead*, being alone, or, what is worse, accompanied by the works of the flesh; where the very idea of being "*born of God*" is derided, and all spiritual religion regarded with contempt; to consider such persons as believers is an abuse of charity, and to treat them as such is to foster them in self-deception.

The *principles*, moreover, on which the Corinthians were forbidden to commune with unbelievers in theory, equally forbid our communing with unbelievers in practice. There can be no Christian communion in the one case, any more than in the other. "*Light and darkness, righteousness and unrighteousness*," are as impossible to be united here as there; and a *separation* from the world is as impracticable in the latter case as in the former. The *reason* also given for the Divine precept applies in both instances. The apostle intimates that associations with the world, in religious matters, *straiten* believers, whom he wishes to be *enlarged*. Thus a lively animal is straitened in his efforts, by being unequally yoked with one that is tardy; and thus Christians are restrained from holy freedom, and the proper exertion of themselves in the cause of Christ, by their connexion with worldly

men, who will always be throwing difficulties in the way of those pursuits in which they have no delight.

Finally, Notwithstanding what is constantly alleged of the *usefulness* of good men by continuing in the National Church, (and if there they must be, I wish them to be a hundred times more useful than they are,) I am persuaded it will be found that it is hereby not a little impeded. If the people of God, while they proved themselves to be the cordial friends of civil government and good order in society, could be scripturally *separated* from the world, and act together like a band of men whose hearts God had touched, their usefulness would far surpass any thing that we have hitherto seen.

Infidels would not then have to reproach Christianity with being an engine of state, nor to object that the principal supporters of it were too deeply interested in its temporal advantages for their testimony to be regarded as impartial. This is the reason why the writings of a WILBERFORCE, and others who are called laymen, make so deep an impression upon the public mind, in comparison of those of dignified clergymen. Many among the evangelical clergy, I acknowledge, have proved themselves to be very disinterested. They are far from making so much of their time and talents as they might do in other pursuits. But the Church of which they boast is as much a place of merchandise as the Royal Exchange. The disinterested testimony of a few people, who are united together, not by a sectarian, but a truly catholic spirit, and whose life comports with their doctrine, speaks a thousand times louder in the consciences of men than the decrees of a council, enforced by all the authority, ecclesiastical or civil, which the greatest nation, or all the nations of the earth, can muster up. The army of the Lamb, by which he will overcome his enemies, is not described as connected with the states of the respective kingdoms of the earth; but as a select band, acting immediately under his authority. *He is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.*

THE PRESENCE OF JUDAS AT THE LORD'S SUPPER.

AFTER carefully reading the account of this matter by the four evangelists, it appears to me that Judas was *not* present at the Lord's supper, but went out immediately after the celebration of the passover; and that, if the contrary were allowed, it would not affect the order of the dissenting churches.

With respect to the former of these positions, MATTHEW speaks of Judas as being present at the paschal supper, but says nothing of his being present at the Lord's supper, chap. xxii. 19-30. The whole of what he writes is perfectly *consistent* with his leaving the company immediately after the former, and before the commencement of the latter; but it makes no mention of it.

The same may be said of the account given by MARK, chap. xiv. 16-26. JOHN is more particular. He tells us that, "having received the *sop*, he went *immediately* out," chap. xiii. 30. Now the act of dipping the bread in wine, and so eating it, pertained not to the Lord's supper, but to the passover. The bread and the wine were each distributed separately in the former, as is manifest from every account we have of it; but in the latter it was not so, as is clear from Matt. xxvi. 23; Mark xiv. 20. John's testimony, therefore, is very express, that the time of Judas's going out was immediately *after* the passover, and *before* the Lord's supper.

The only difficulty arises from the account of LUKE, who, after narrating the administration of the Lord's supper, says, "But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is *with me on the table*," chap. xxii. 21. The whole force of the argument taken from this arises not from any thing *in the words themselves*; for "the table" may as well signify the paschal table as the Lord's table; but merely from *the order* in which they are placed in the narration. And as to this, Calvin, who entertained the opinion that Judas *was* present, acknowledges nevertheless that, "though Luke hath set down this saying of Christ *after* the celebration of his supper, yet the order of time cannot be certainly gathered thereby, which we know was often neglected by the evangelists."

But whether Judas was present at the Lord's supper or not, it does not, as I conceive, affect the order of dissenting churches. It is no part of that order to sit in judgment upon the hearts of communicants, any further than as they are manifest by their words and actions. It is as making a credible profession of Christianity that we are bound to admit them, and not on the ground of any private opinion that this profession is sincere. Should we feel in any case a secret dissatisfaction, owing to a want of that union of spirit which a profession of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ ordinarily inspires; yet if what is professed be true religion, and we know of nothing that discredits the sincerity of the party, we are not at liberty to reject. Now such a communicant was Judas, allowing him to have been one. It appears by the other apostles applying the warning, given by Christ, to themselves in a way of inquiry, that they had no particular suspicion of him. And as to his character being known to Christ as the searcher of hearts, he did not act upon that ground in his treatment of men, but upon the ground of what they manifested themselves to be by their words and actions. If Christ's knowledge of Judas's character warrants the admission of unbelievers and known hypocrites into the church, it must also warrant the admission of them to the highest offices in the church; for "Jesus knew *from the beginning* who it was that believed not, and who should betray him."

DISSENT.

THE longer a Christian lives, and the more he observes of what is passing before him, the more reason he will see for preferring a candid and impartial judgment of men and things. All parties in their turn declaim against prejudice and party zeal, but it is not from declamation that we must form our judgment. If we wish to know the truth, we must read those who think differently from us, who, whether they be impartial towards us or not, will be much more likely to detect our faults than we are to detect them ourselves.

These remarks have been occasioned by reading a critique on "The History of Dissenters," by Messrs. Bogue and Bennett, and some other kindred pieces, in "The Quarterly Review for October, 1813." This article, though manifestly written by one who is no more a friend to the puritans and non-conformists than he is to the present race of Dissenters, and probably no more friendly to evangelical religion in the Church than out of it, yet contains a considerable portion of impartiality towards individuals, and even his censures are often worthy of our attention. From reading this Review, as well as from perusing the volumes reviewed, there is one truth of which I

am fully convinced; which is, that both eulogy and censure are commonly bestowed with too little discrimination, and often applied to communities where they ought to be confined to individuals. If a few men excel in a community, such is the vanity of human nature that the whole must arrogate to themselves the praise; or if a few be guilty of impropriety, such is the invidiousness of party zeal that the whole must be censured on their account. Could we be more discriminate, both in our praises and censures, we should be much nearer the truth, and what we write would be far more likely to do good. We can consent for every man to have his due, and to bear his own burden; but are disgusted with those who are continually eulogizing their fathers that they may exalt themselves, and stigmatizing other men's fathers that they may depreciate their neighbours.

In reading the lives of the puritans and nonconformists, I read the lives of men of whom, with all their faults, the world was not worthy; but if I be impartial, I shall find many of the excellent of the earth who did not rank with either of them; and among those who did, I shall find many whose principles and conduct it will not be in my power to vindicate. Hardly as the puritans were treated, if I had been one of them, and had held those intolerant principles which many of them avowed and carried with them into the new world, I do not perceive how I could have expected different treatment from others who were in power. I might have been treated more rigorously than I should have treated them, had I been in their place and they in mine; but the principle of intolerance is the same. That for which I should have suffered might also have been truth, while that for which I should have caused others to suffer might be pernicious error; but in a question of this nature, I should have had no right to take this for granted, seeing it would have been judging in my own cause. My rule ought rather to have been, to "do unto others as I would they should do unto me."

I am not able to vindicate Messrs. Bogue and Bennett, whose praises and censures are both, as it appears to me, much too indiscriminate; but I can perceive that their reviewer, while chastising them, is continually exposing himself to censure for the same things.

He seldom detects a fault in his authors without endeavouring to fix it upon the whole body, by ascribing it to their *dissent*. Speaking of divisions and separations among Dissenters, he says, "This evil grows out of the principle of dissent. The minister of an establishment has no temptation from vanity, or the love of singularity, or any mere worldly motive, to labour in insignificant distinctions; but amongst Dissenters the right of private judgment is so injudiciously inculcated, that the men who are trained amongst them learn not unfrequently to despise all judgment except their own." To say nothing of the temptations which the minister of an establishment *has*, though he may not have these, it is sufficient to reply,—If unlovely separations arise from an injudicious inculcation of the right of private judgment, let them be traced to that cause, and not to dissent; let them be ascribed to the *abuse* of the right of private judgment, but not to the principle itself, or to any necessary step in order to obtain it. An advocate for despotic government might object to the disorders of our popular elections, and to the violence of our parliamentary debates, and might tell us that in certain countries there is no temptation to such disorder and such violence; but we should readily answer,—They have temptations as bad, or worse, of another kind, and the right of choosing our representatives, and that of free parliamentary debate, are of such importance to the well-being of the nation, that the evils which they occasion are as nothing when compared with it. The right of private judgment in matters of religion is of such account, that we cannot part with it without *making shipwreck of faith*,

and of a good conscience. As to the abuses of it, whoever is guilty of them, let him bear his own burden. The "schism which took place in the Evangelical Magazine" should not have been lugged in by this writer for an example, without having first made himself acquainted with the *true* cause of it.

If I dissent from antipathy to a particular clergyman, or for the sake of gratifying my own will, or to feed my own vanity, I am what this reviewer considers me—a *sectarian*; but if I dissent for the sake of obtaining liberty to follow what I verily believe to be the mind of Christ, I am not a sectarian in the ill sense of the term, nor in any sense except that in which Paul avowed himself to be one. By this writer's own account, if I continue in the Established Church, I must make no "profession." That is, I must not profess to repent of my sins, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation: if I do, he will construe it into "a profession of being better than my neighbours," which he tells me "is inconsistent with Christian humility," and insinuates that the whole is "Pharisaical hypocrisy." This is certainly speaking out; and standing, as it does, in direct opposition to the Divine command of "coming out from among unbelievers, and being separate from them," renders it easy to determine the path of duty.

The writer censures Messrs. Bogue and Bennett for ascribing almost every thing vicious and persecuting to Churchmen; yet he himself ascribes almost every thing sour, litigious, and splenetic to Dissenters. He represents the intolerance of the puritans as if it were universal, and as if all that settled in America were of the same spirit. But (to say nothing of Roger Williams, whom he himself not only acquits, but applauds, as "the man whose name, if all men had their due, would stand as high as that of William Penn, as having begun the first civil government upon earth that gave equal liberty of conscience") there was a broad line of distinction between those puritans who founded the colony of New Plymouth, in 1620, and those who a few years after founded that of Massachusetts Bay. The former were the members of Mr. John Robinson, who had peaceably separated from the Church of England, and with his friends retired to Holland, for the sake of liberty of conscience; but the Massachusetts people had never relinquished the principle of national churches, and the authority of the magistrate in matters of faith and worship. And it was among these people, and owing to this principle, that the persecutions in America were carried on. Of this there is a full account given in "Backus's History of the American Baptists," Vol. I.; and as the Baptists bore a large part of those persecutions, they may well be supposed to know who were their persecutors, and what were their avowed principles.

The work of Messrs. Bogue and Bennett is considered by this writer as a fair specimen of dissenting principles in the present day, or as "representing the general temper of those to whom it is addressed." But, so far as I have had the means of judging, it is considered among Dissenters in a very different light. Some few may admire it; but all that I have heard speak of it consider it as deeply tinged with party zeal and revolutionary politics, and as being rather a eulogy on their own denomination than a "History of Dissenters." I am not aware that the French revolution has promoted the cause of dissent; and if it were so, an increase on such principles is of no value. Men may leave the National Church, not on account of what is wrong in it, but of what is right, in which case dissent itself must be wicked. Dissent is not a *cause* for a Christian to rejoice in, any further than as it includes the cause of Christ. It is ground on which may be erected a temple of God or a synagogue of Satan.

That there are many among Dissenters who feel that "moral expatriation"

which the reviewer laments is admitted ; but the same is true of Churchmen. The numbers, however, of both, have of late years considerably diminished. Dissenters must ever be friends to civil and religious liberty, as it is their only security ; but they may be this without turbulence, or envy, or spleen, or any of those unamiable qualities which this writer attaches to dissent. I believe it will be found that, from the beginning, those Dissenters who have separated from the Church of England for the purpose of forming churches according to what they consider as the mind of Christ, have been of a much more pacific spirit than those who, retaining the principles of national churches and the authority of the magistrates in matters of faith and worship, were always lingering after a comprehension in the Establishment, and finding fault with particular ceremonies and forms that kept them out of it. That this was the case among the first settlers in America has been already noticed ; and, so far as my observation extends, it is the case to this day. Those who dissent for the sake of being at liberty to follow up their convictions in promoting the kingdom of Christ will not be averse to the *civil* institutions of their country ; and as to the *ecclesiastical*, unless called to defend themselves against the charge of schism, and such others as are heaped upon them, they would cherish no hostility. Being allowed to follow the dictates of their own consciences, they are willing that others should do the same. They dissent, not so much from antipathy to what they desert as from love to what they embrace ; and they love and pray for the government that protects them in the enjoyment of it.

They cannot approve of making the political prosperity of their country the *supreme* object of their pursuit, nor consent that the religion of Christ should be rendered *subservient* to it ; and this, in the esteem of those who are otherwise minded, will often be ascribed to the want of patriotism ; but a wise and good government will know how to distinguish a contumelious behaviour towards them from a conscientious obedience to God ; and, while they properly resent the former, will not fail to respect the latter.

STATE OF DISSENTING DISCIPLINE.

It may be difficult to determine whether the apostles of our Lord, in the first planting of Christianity, were more intent on the conversion of unbelievers or the building up of believers in their most holy faith. It is certain that both these objects engaged their attention.

In our times they have been thought to be too much divided. Towards the middle of the last century, several eminent men were raised up in the Established Church, whose labours were singularly useful in turning sinners to God ; but whether it was from the advantages of their situation as Churchmen, or whatever was the cause, they and others, who since their times have been a kind of half Dissenters, have generally been considered as neglecting to form their societies after the model of the New Testament. And congregations of this description having considerably increased, apprehensions have been entertained that the order and discipline of the Scriptures would in time fall into general disuse.

From a somewhat earlier date, many amongst Protestant Dissenters, too much attentive perhaps to the points on which they separated from the Church and from one another, began to neglect the common salvation, and to render the general theme of their ministrations something other than Christ crucified. Even many of those who retained the doctrines of their forefathers

preached them in so cold and formal a way, that the spirit of vital religion seemed to be fled. Hence many serious people forsook them in favour of a more lively and evangelical ministry, even though unaccompanied with the discipline and government to which they had been used. Hence arose mutual jealousies, and the distinction of *regular* and *irregular* Dissenters.

Such, alas! is the contractedness of the human mind, that, while attending to one thing, it is ever in danger of neglecting others of equal if not superior importance. It is a fact which cannot be denied, that many, who have exhibited the common salvation with great success to the unconverted, have at the same time been sadly negligent in enforcing the legislative authority of Christ upon their hearers; nor is it less manifest that others, who have been the most tenacious of the forms of church government and discipline, have at the same time been wofully deficient in preaching the gospel to the unconverted.

But is it not possible to *unite* these important objects, at least in a good degree, in the manner in which they were united in the primitive times? One should think it were as natural for a minister, and a people, where God is pleased to bless the word to the conversion of sinners, to be anxious for their edification, as for parents who are blessed with a numerous offspring to be concerned to have them properly fed, and clothed, and educated. It is not enough that a company of Christians unite in a preacher, and make a point of going once or twice in the week to hear him, and after having exchanged compliments with him, and a few of the people, depart till another sabbath. That bids fair to be the true Scriptural form of church government which tends most to promote brotherly love, which brings the members into the closest religious contact, and which is accompanied with the greatest faithfulness one towards another.

DISCIPLINE OF THE ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH BAPTIST CHURCHES.

[Extracts from two letters to Mr. M^rLean, in 1796.]

As to our churches, it would be very wrong to plead on their behalf that they come up to the primitive model. It is our great endeavour as ministers (and we are joined by a good number of private Christians) to form them in doctrine, in discipline, in spirit, and in conduct, after the example of Christ and his apostles. But after all that we can do, if reviewed by the great Head of the church, and perhaps by some of his servants who may be unconnected with us, there would be a few, or rather not "a few things against us."

Till of late, I conceive, there was such a portion of erroneous *doctrine* and false religion amongst us, that if we had carried matters a little further, we should have been a very dunghill in society. Nor can this leaven be expected to be yet purged out, though I hope it is in a fair way of being so.

In *discipline* there is a great propensity, in some churches especially, to be lax and negligent. In our annual associations we have been necessitated to remonstrate against this negligence, and to declare that, unless, they would execute the laws of Christ upon disorderly walkers, we would withdraw from all connexion with them; and such remonstrances from the associated churches have produced a good effect. It is not our practice, however, lightly to separate from churches or individuals. We consider the churches of Corinth and Galatia, and the great patience of the apostle amidst

the most scandalous disorders; labouring to reclaim those whom others of less patience would have given up, and separated from; and wish as far as possible to follow the example.

Your observations on the difficulty of reforming an old church are very just, and on its being better in some cases to begin by a new formation. In this way we have proceeded in some places. Carey, for example, when he went to Leicester, found them a very corrupt people. The very officers of the church had indulged in drunkenness, and the rest were discouraged; and so discipline was wholly neglected. After advising with his brethren in the ministry, brother Carey and the majority of the church agreed to renew covenant. Accordingly they appointed a day in which they would consider their former relation as extinct, and the church book should be open for the signatures of all who had heretofore been members, but upon this condition, that they subscribed at the same time a solemn declaration,—That they would in future execute and be subject to a strict and faithful discipline.

This measure had its effect. Almost all their loose characters stood out; or, if any signed, they were subject to a close watch in future. By these means the church was purged; and Carey, before he went to India, saw the good effects of it. A considerable revival in religion ensued, and many were added. Hence you may account for his language afterwards to the church at Leicester.*

It is a great fault in some of our churches that they seem afraid to execute faithful discipline upon men of opulence. “The *cause*, they say, cannot be supported without them.” To this I have more than once replied, That a cause which requires to be thus supported cannot be the cause of Christ; and your business is not to support the ark with unhallowed hands. If by executing Christ’s laws *your* cause sinks, so be it; he will never blame you for that.

Another evil akin to this is a partiality for men of opulence, in the choice of *deacons*. I consider not property, but the use that is made of it, as entitling to religious regard. We do not fail publicly and privately to inculcate these things; but habits of this kind are not instantly, nor easily, eradicated.

You observe that “the commission of Christ is not fully executed, unless the converts are taught to observe ‘all things, whatsoever he hath commanded;’ and are brought into such a state of separation from the world, and of union and order among themselves, after the model of the apostolic churches, as puts them in a capacity for doing so.”

To the whole of this I freely subscribe, whether we have attained to such a state of things or not. My views, and those of my brethren, are much the same as are expressed in Mr. Booth’s “Essay on the Kingdom of Christ.” I am not conscious but that it is my aim to inculcate and practise “all things, whatsoever the Lord hath commanded.” Some of Christ’s commands, however, I suppose, we interpret differently from you. If I am rightly informed, you consider “the washing of feet, the kiss of charity,” &c., as formally binding on all Christians: we do not. We consider neither of them as *religious* institutes, but merely civil customs, though used by Christ and his apostles to a religious end, as whatsoever they did, they did all to the glory of God. They were in use both among Jews and heathens, long before the coming of Christ. The one was a necessary service, the other a mode of expressing kindness. We conceive it was the design of Christ by these forms to enjoin a natural interchange of kind and beneficent offices, even

* Periodical Accounts of the Baptist Mission, vol. I. p. 132.

so as "by love to serve one another." The usual forms of expressing this temper of mind were at that time, and in those countries, washing the feet, &c. Christ therefore made use of these forms, much the same as he made use of the customary language of a country, to convey his doctrines and precepts. But as neither of these forms is ordinarily used in our age and country, to express the ideas for which it was originally enjoined, the ground or reason of the injunction ceases; a literal compliance with them would not now answer the original design, but would operate, we conceive, in a very different way. It seems to us, therefore, not only lawful, but incumbent, to substitute such signs and forms as are adapted to convey the *spirit* of the injunction, rather than to abide by the letter, since that is become as it were "a dead letter;" as much so as to disuse the original language of Scripture, and translate it into a language that can be understood. Herein we think we follow Christ's example; he used the forms and customs of his country to express kindness and humility; and we do the same. Whether we understand these commands, however, or not according to the mind of Christ, I hope, and for myself am certain, that we do not live in the known violation of them.

The grounds on which *you* plead for the washing of feet, I should have no objection to. If you will come and see me, and it be any refreshment to you, I will cheerfully wash yours; and not yours only, but if the meanest Christian needed it, I do not feel that it would at all hurt my pride to gratify him. I have pride, as well as other sins, but I think it does not operate in that way. My objection to the kiss of charity is not that it is become so obsolete that people would not understand it as a token of affection, but being confined in England to express the affection of relations, or of the sexes, it would be understood accordingly. Let such salutations therefore be ever so pure in themselves, we should not be able to "abstain from the appearance of evil;" and many scandals and reproaches would be raised.

I have carefully, and, if I know my own spirit, candidly, examined the New Testament concerning the *time* of administering the Lord's supper. The result is, that I consider it as wholly *discretionary*, as much so as the times for various other duties. Such is the form of institution, as repeated by Paul, 1 Cor. xi. 25, 26, "This do ye, *as oft* as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For *as often* as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." If any thing can be gathered from Acts ii. 42, which says that the disciples "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and *in breaking of bread*, and in prayers," it is that it was done as often as they met together for worship; but this was much *oftener* than once a week; for they "continued *daily* with one accord in the temple, and the Lord added to them *daily* such as should be saved," ver. 46, 47. From Acts xx. 7, we learn that "the disciples came together to break bread on the *first* day of the week;" but it does not follow that this was their practice on every such first day. It might be so; but as Christ left the matter open, I suppose they acted accordingly. At Jerusalem, soon after the pentecost, it seems to me that they did it *oftener* than once a week; afterwards they *might* do it once a week. But if Christ has not fixed it, neither should we, lest we go beyond the rule appointed us.

I think few can have a greater dislike to *titles* than I have among ministers. That of "brother" is most agreeable to me. My brother Ryland, without his own knowledge, desire, or consent, had a D. D. next to forced upon him. It was announced by Rippon in his Register, and then people would call him by it; but I am persuaded he would much rather not have had it. He is a very humble, godly man, and he now submits to it, because

he would not always be employed in resisting a piece of insignificance. For my part, I think with you, but do not know whether any of my brethren think with me, that it is contrary to our Lord's prohibition: "Be ye not called Rabbi."

As to academical education, the far greater part of our ministers have it not.* Carey was a shoemaker years after he engaged in the ministry, and I was a farmer. I have sometimes however regretted my want of learning. On the other hand, brother Sutcliff, and brother Pearce, have both been at Bristol. We all live in love, without any distinction in these matters. We do not consider an academy as any qualification for membership or preaching, any further than as a person may there improve his talents. Those who go to our academies must be members of a church, and recommended to them as possessing gifts adapted to the ministry. They preach about the neighbourhood all the time, and their going is considered in no other light than as a young minister might apply to an aged one for improvement. Since brother Ryland has been at Bristol, I think he has been a great blessing in forming the principles and spirit of the young men. I allow, however, that the contrary is often the case in academies, and that when it is so they prove very injurious to the churches of Christ.

STATE OF THE BAPTIST CHURCHES IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE. [1814.]

1. Out of the twenty-three churches in this county, nineteen are in villages, and four in market towns. Eleven are in connexion with the Northamptonshire and Leicestershire association; the other twelve are in no association. The average number of members in each church is about seventy, and of hearers about three hundred.

2. There are no two of them which meet for worship in the same village or town in consequence of any division among themselves. Such things may be borne with in some instances rather than worse; but they are not among the things which are lovely and of good report. Such things have existed among these churches, but they exist no longer.

3. There are only three which meet for worship in towns where there are Independent congregations, or any other preaching which is ordinarily considered as evangelical; and those are places so populous as to furnish no just ground of complaint on the score of opposition. If our object therefore had been to increase our number from other evangelical connexions, rather than by conversions from the world, we have acted very unwisely in fixing on the places where we should take our stand. It is acknowledged that many members of pedobaptist churches have joined us in consequence of their being convinced of believers' baptism being the only baptism taught and exemplified in the Scriptures; and that many of our members owe their first religious impressions to the labours of a Hervey, a Maddox, and other evangelical clergymen, whose names are dear to them and to us all. But the number of persons of both these descriptions fall short of that of persons who have been in the habit of attending our worship, or have come over to us from the ranks of the irreligious.

4. Of those who are not in the association, three or four are what are called high Calvinists, holding the doctrines of election and predestination

This is far from being the case in the present day.—Ed.

in such a way as to exclude exhortations and invitations to the ungodly to believe in Christ for salvation. The *rest*, whether in or out of the association, consider these doctrines as consistent with exhortations and invitations, as the means by which the predestined ends are accomplished. There are individuals of a different mind in the other churches; for we distinguish between high Calvinists and Antinomians: with the former we do not refuse communion, but with the latter we do.

5. The greater part of these churches are not of very long standing. In 1689, when a meeting of the elders and messengers of more than one hundred Baptist churches was held in London, there were no messengers from this county. It does not follow that there were no Baptist churches in the county, but they certainly were very few and small. Half the present number at least have been raised within the last fifty years, and many of those which were raised before, have much more than doubled their number since that period. The average clear increase of those churches in the county which are in the association during the above period is about seventy-five; and probably the clear increase of the churches not associated would be much the same. Several of those which are now flourishing churches were formerly small societies; some of them branches of other churches, supplied principally by gifted brethren not wholly devoted to the ministry, but labouring with their hands for their own maintenance, and that of their families.

6. If such has been the progress of things during the last fifty years, what may we not hope for in fifty years to come? Were the number of these churches even to continue stationary during that period—and were nothing reckoned on but a diligent perseverance in the stated means of grace, only including occasional labours in adjacent villages, reckoning three generations to a century—a testimony will have been borne in each of them to a thousand, and in all of them to three-and-twenty thousand souls. And if on an average they may be supposed to contain fifty truly Christian people—for though we admit none but those who profess and appear to be such, yet it cannot be expected that all are what they profess to be—each church will have reared seventy-five, and altogether seventeen hundred and twenty-five plants for the heavenly paradise.

But surely we need not calculate on their remaining stationary. If genuine Christianity does but live among them, it will both “grow and multiply.” If it multiply only in the same proportion as it has done in the last half century, in respect to the number of churches, and of members in each church, it will increase considerably more than fourfold; and if from each of these churches should proceed only three or four faithful and useful ministers of the gospel—if especially there should arise among them only now and then “a fruitful bough”—say a Thomas, a Carey, a Marshman, a Ward, a Chamberlain, or a Chater—“whose branches run over the wall” of Christendom itself; who can calculate the fruits? From a part of these churches, connected in association with others in the adjacent counties, within the last twenty years, has “sounded forth the word of the Lord,” into the very heart of heathen and Mahomedan Asia; and as the times foretold in prophecy, when “a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation,” appear to be fast approaching, it behoves us not only to “attempt,” but also to “expect great things.”

Our chief concern should be that we may not disqualify ourselves for possessing these lively hopes by a relinquishment of the doctrine, the worship, the discipline, the spirit, or the practice of vital Christianity. That God’s “way may be known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations,” our prayer should be, “God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause thy face to shine upon us.” We cannot impart that which we do not possess.

I have seen, in those churches with which I have been most intimately connected, many things which have endeared them to me. Particularly, a lively interest in evangelical, faithful, practical, and pungent preaching; an attention to things more than to words; a taste for the affectionate more than for the curious; a disposition to read and think rather than dispute; a spirit to promote the kingdom of Christ; in fine, a modesty, gentleness, and kindness of behaviour. I have been thirty years pastor of one of them; and if there has ever been an instance of unkind or unchristian behaviour towards me, I have forgotten it.

These things I have seen in some of our churches, and would fain consider them as the general feature. But truth obliges me to add, I have also seen things of another description. I have seen discipline neglected, apparently lest it should injure the subscription; and if exercised, it has seemed to be more from regard to reputation in the eyes of men than from the fear of God. I have seen an evil in the choice of ministers; too much attention has been paid to the superficial qualification of a ready, off-hand address, calculated to fill the place, and too little to those solid qualities that constitute the man of God, and the serious, faithful, and affectionate pastor. I have also seen, or thought I have seen, in the choice of deacons, more regard paid to opulence than to those qualifications required by the New Testament. I have seen too much of a worldly spirit, and a conformity to the maxims by which worldly men are wont to regulate their conduct.

I do not know that such things are more prevalent in these than in other churches; but, wherever they prevail, they will be a worm at the root of the gourd. It becomes us as ministers to inquire whether a large portion of these evils may not originate amongst us. If we were more spiritual, evangelical, and zealous in the work of God, things would be different with the people. We are apt to think, that if we have but made up our minds on the leading points of controversy afloat in the world, and taken the side of truth, we are safe; but it is not so. If we walk not with God, we shall almost be certain in some way to get aside from the gospel, and then the work of God will not prosper in our hands. Ingenious discourses may be delivered, and nothing advanced inconsistent with the gospel, while yet the gospel itself is not preached. We may preach *about* Christ himself, and yet not "preach Christ." We may pride ourselves in our orthodoxy, and yet be far from the doctrine of the New Testament; may hold with exhortations and invitations to the unconverted, and yet not "persuade men;" may plead for sound doctrine, and yet overlook the things that "become sound doctrine." Finally, we may advocate the cause of holiness, while we ourselves are unholy.

DECLINE OF THE DISSENTING INTEREST.

PART THE FIRST

ON looking over some of the late numbers of the Protestant Dissenter's Magazine, I observed a complaint of the dissenting interest being on the decline. It is true it was not the first time nor the only place in which I had met with this complaint; I never before, however, found my thoughts so much engaged by this subject, or my mind equally inclined to make inquiry into it.

That the dissenting interest has declined in many places I have no doubt;

but whether this be the case with *the general body* is the question. If it be, it becomes us to make ourselves acquainted with it, and with its causes, that if possible the malady may be lessened, if not entirely healed. Yea, though it should not be the case with the general body, but only with a considerable number of Dissenters, yet as "one member cannot suffer without the whole body suffering with it," it is an object well worthy of attention.

The present inquiry is naturally divided into two parts; one respects the *fact* itself, and the other the *reasons* of it. The present piece will be devoted to the former of these inquiries, which will be followed with a second, if it meets with approbation.

Is it then a fact that the dissenting interest, taken in the whole, has, suppose I say for the last five-and-twenty years, been upon the decline?

I do not pretend but that the subject has its difficulties, and it is very possible that I may be mistaken. The following observations are however submitted to the consideration of the reader:—

1. It cannot be doubted by persons of observation that the generality of the clergy of this country have of late years lost ground in the estimation of the common people. To say nothing of their ignorance of religion, (the people being equally benighted may prevent their discovering this,) the oppressive disposition of great numbers of them in the article of *tithes*, their imperious carriage, and great inattention to morals, are matters that all men understand. On these accounts they enjoy but a small portion of the esteem of the people; and hence perhaps, in part, arises a disposition to hear dissenting preaching in almost every place where it is introduced. Whether it arises however from this cause or not, so far as my observation reaches, it is a fact that *there is a far greater disposition to hear dissenting preaching than there formerly was*. I have for some time been in the habit of preaching, on the Lord's day evening, in eight or ten villages round my situation, and never met with any interruption in so doing. The people attend with great decorum, from fifty to five hundred in number; and I have no doubt but such congregations might be obtained in a hundred villages as well as ten, provided ministers could be found that would go and preach to them. Popular prejudice, it is true, was kindled against the Dissenters a few years ago, by the disputes concerning the repeal of the *Corporation and Test Acts*; but this has now very nearly subsided. Men who enter deeply into party prejudices may continue much the same, but the common people think little or nothing about it.

2. That part of the clergy usually termed *evangelical* may be said to be more in a state of competition with the Dissenters than any other; and the number both of preachers and hearers of this description has of late years much increased. Instead of considering this circumstance however as a matter of regret, many thinking people have rejoiced in it; and that not only on account of its being favourable to the salvation of sinners, but as that which will ultimately, and which does already in measure, befriend the dissenting interest. They collect large auditories it is true; but they are very rarely composed of persons who leave our congregations. This is not the case however in the country. Their people are generally, and almost entirely, made up of persons who were always in the habit of going to the established places of worship, excepting some who attended no where. So far then we lose nothing by them. On the other hand, considerable numbers have been gained by their instrumentality, however contrary it may have been to their inclinations. As the situation of such clergymen is not determined by the choice of the people, it often falls out that, after they have laboured in a place for a series of years, they are removed, and succeeded by others of a very different character. The consequence in almost all such

cases is that *the people turn Dissenters*. There may be some difference as to the operation of these causes between large cities and country towns and villages. On the removal of an evangelical clergyman from a parish church situate in the former, the people may not be under the like necessity to become Dissenters as in the latter, seeing they can repair to others in the same city; and where this is the case, they may be more likely to form a party, and keep up a kind of competition with the Dissenters. But this is the case chiefly, if not entirely, in London, and a few other populous places. In the country, which includes the far greater proportion of Dissenters, it is otherwise. I am acquainted with several dissenting churches, some of which have principally been raised, and others greatly increased, by persons coming from under what is termed evangelical preaching in the Church of England.

Similar observations might be made on *the Wesleyan and other Methodists*. It is rare that they gather materials at the expense of the Dissenters. But as their hearers become truly religious, and begin to read and think for themselves, they are frequently known, either for the sake of better instruction or a purer discipline, to come off from their societies to ours. If I were inclined to act merely on the principles of a partizan, (which God forbid I should,) I would neither fret myself at their prosperity, nor use any underhand means of persuasion to bring them over. There is no need of either; they will come of their own accord, if they are only treated by us as we wish to be treated by them; and the same might be said of the adherents of the evangelical clergy.

3. It may be difficult to ascertain, with any tolerable degree of precision, the increase or decrease of Dissenters throughout the nation. I am not competent to decide upon the state of things respecting them, especially in the city of London. Of the country, however, that part of it in particular which falls under my own immediate observation, and still more of my own denomination, I think I can form a pretty accurate judgment. In the county where I reside, there are at this time, of one only of the three denominations of Dissenters, twenty-four congregations. Twenty-five years ago, as far as my information extends, there were but seventeen. Three of these have since become extinct, but they consented to dissolve, and afterwards united with other dissenting congregations in the same towns; they are not lost therefore to the dissenting body. In their place ten new congregations have risen up. Respecting the other fourteen, I believe that none of them have, upon the whole, decreased, and seven of them have doubled, and some of them much more than doubled their number, during the above period.

I do not mention this as a specimen of the whole kingdom. It may not be so in all places. If it were, the increase of the dissenting interest would be very considerable; but I do suppose that nearly the same things might be said of several other counties, as well as of that where I reside. I cannot give a minute account of any one of them, but I know of many new and large congregations in some neighbouring counties. A respectable minister, of a different denomination from myself, who resides in one of them, lately assured me that he believed the number of Dissenters in their county had within the last nine years increased a thousand.

4. If any estimate might be taken from *the number of places of worship* which have been raised within the last five-and-twenty years, I suppose there must be a considerable increase. It is true they have not all been new congregations, but a considerable number of them have. It is not by these as it is by an increase of buildings in general, in large cities and trading places.

These may be accounted for without supposing an increasing population. An increase of wealth, though there should be no alteration as to the number of the people, will produce an increase of buildings. Add to this, that the *enclosing* system having been carried to a greater extent during the present reign than in any former period, multitudes have been driven from the occupation of husbandry, and other employments dependent upon it, to settle in cities, or large trading and manufacturing towns; by means of which the buildings in those places are of course increased. I know of no causes which will equally account for the increase of places of worship, and therefore am inclined to think it implies an increase of the number of worshippers.

These are a few, and possibly but a few, of the mediums by which we may judge of the *fact*. Persons of more extensive information may perhaps add to their number, and throw additional light upon the subject. Yet even from these alone, I am strongly inclined to think that *the dissenting interest, upon the whole, is not on the decline.*

PART THE SECOND.

IN a former paper I offered a few reasons for doubting whether the dissenting interest be upon the whole in a state of decline. I admit, however, that some part of it is so; and the design of this paper is to inquire into the reasons or causes of it.

I have carefully looked over a sketch of a sermon on this subject which appeared in June last, and greatly approve many of the remarks of the worthy author. Indeed there is nothing in his performance but what I do approve, except his passing over matters of a doctrinal nature, and confining his recommendations merely to those of conduct. What I have therefore to offer may be considered as an addition to his remarks.

"I am not such an enemy to innovation," any more than your correspondent, "as to think every principle false which does not exactly accord with the creed of our forefathers; but can easily conceive that in the course of several years, in which this kingdom has been favoured with the use of the sacred writings, some light may have been thrown upon some controverted points." Neither do I think that, because various points have been disputed since their time, we must needs be nearer the truth than they were; but, on the contrary, that it is very possible we may, by such blasts as have been suffered to blow upon the church, have moved in a degree from the purity of the gospel.

Though we have a right to deviate from our ancestors, provided we can prove them to have been in the wrong; yet if the dissenting interest prospered in their hands, and has declined in ours, it affords a presumption, at least, that they were not in the wrong, and that a change of principle has been made to a disadvantage. It is a fact sufficiently notorious, that the leading doctrines of the great body of the puritans and nonconformists were,—the fall and depravity of human nature, the Deity and atonement of Christ, justification by faith in his righteousness, and regeneration and sanctification by the agency of the Holy Spirit.—Now it is not for the sake of "retailing the calumnies of our enemies," but from a serious concern for the welfare of the dissenting interest, that I ask, *Is it not a fact equally notorious that a large proportion of those dissenting congregations which are evidently in a state of declension, have either deserted the foregoing doctrines, or hold communion with those who have?* I hope I need not repeat, what has so often been said by others, that there is something in these doctrines which interests the hearts and consciences of men, very differently from a mere

harangue on the beauty, excellency, and advantages of virtue; or from any other kind of preaching where they are admitted.

What is the reason that the generality of the parish churches are so thinly attended? Is it any violation of Christian charity to answer, because the generality of the clergy do not preach the doctrine of the cross? There is nothing in their preaching that interests the hearts, or reaches the consciences of the people. They have "rejected the knowledge of God, and God hath rejected them from being priests to him," Hos. iv. 6. They are unconcerned about the souls of the people, and the people perceive it, and are not concerned to attend upon their ministry. The same causes will produce the same effects, whether out of the Establishment or in it.

If we have rejected the *atonement* of Christ, it is not difficult to prove that we reject the doctrine of the cross, which is the grand doctrine that God hath blessed, and will bless, to the salvation of men. If we reject the *Deity* of Christ, besides relinquishing the worship of him, which was manifestly a primitive practice, and withdrawing all well-founded *trust* in him for the salvation of our souls, we reject the only ground upon which an atonement can be supported, and by resting all its efficacy upon Divine appointment, render it "*possible* that the blood of bulls or of goats, or the ashes of a heifer, might have taken away sin," Heb. x. 4. If we reject the doctrine of "justification by faith" in the righteousness of Christ, we are on a footing with those Jews who "attained not to the law of righteousness, because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone." And if we reject the doctrine of *regeneration* and sanctification by the Holy Spirit, we need not expect him to set his seal to our labours.

There are some amongst us who do not reject these doctrines, but who nevertheless *hold Christian fellowship with those that do*; and this, if I mistake not, will tend greatly to undermine their spiritual prosperity. Let no man be persecuted for his religious sentiments, not even an infidel or an atheist; but persecution is one thing, and declining to hold Christian communion with them is another. Socinians are more consistent than some who would be accounted moderate Calvinists. They plead for a separate communion; and a separate communion they ought to have. The ills which arise from a contrary practice are more than a few. If you admit into your communion, say four or five individuals, who reject the foregoing doctrines, you cannot, without appearing to insult those whom you have acknowledged as Christian brethren, dwell upon them in the ordinary course of your ministry. Generally speaking, there will be a bar to pulpit freedom; and you must either displease your friends, or hold the leading principles of the gospel as though you held them not.

I have no desire that any doctrine should be insisted upon in a litigious manner, or so as to supersede any other doctrine or duty of Christianity. But there are principles which ought to form the prominent feature of, I had almost said, all our discourses. It is a poor excuse for a Christian minister to make for his omitting in some way or other to introduce Christ that *his subject did not lead to it*. There is not an important subject in divinity, either doctrinal or practical, but what bears an intimate relation to him. And I must say, if any of these important doctrines are withheld, as being of little importance, or because there are individuals in the congregation who disapprove of them, a blast will assuredly follow our labours.

Much has been said in favour of what is termed *liberality*, and enlargedness of heart; but perhaps it may not have occurred to some, that the Christian doctrine of enlargement differs widely from that which is generally inculcated in the present age. "O ye Corinthians," says the apostle, "our

mouth is open to you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. Now for a recompense in the same—be ye also enlarged.” And to what means does the apostle direct, for the accomplishment of so desirable an object? Does he desire them to extend their communion? Not so; but to contract it.—“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? and what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” 2 Cor. vi. 11–15.

This direction may to some persons appear highly paradoxical, yet it is founded in the reason and nature of things. For—(1.) Christian enlargement depends upon “fellowship, communion, concord,” and a mutual participation of spiritual interests. If only a single stranger enter into a society, there is at once a bar to freedom; and if a number of them be admitted, a general silence, or what is next to silence, ensues. The company may be enlarged, but their communion is “straitened.”—(2.) A union in Christian fellowship with improper persons tends to impede the progress of good men in the Divine life. It is, as the apostle supposes, like the “yoking” of a sprightly horse to a tardy ass: the latter will be certain to obstruct the activity and usefulness of the former.—(3.) By such unions good men are frequently drawn into a sinful conformity to the world. The company we keep will ever have an influence upon our minds and affections, and will tend to transform us in a measure into the same likeness.

It may be objected that the apostle does not here forbid them to have fellowship with professed Christians of different sentiments, but with avowed unbelievers, or “infidels.” This is true; but the general principle upon which he proceeds is applicable not merely to fellowship with professed unbelievers, but with nominal Christians of certain descriptions. This principle is, *that Christian enlargement is not accomplished by extending our connexions, but by confining them to persons with whom we can have fellowship, communion, concord, and a mutual participation of spiritual interests.* There are few persons of serious reflection but who have seen and lamented the effects of a union between certain good men in the National Establishment, and others of a very different character, with whom, on account of their continuing in the church, they are in the habit of associating. They are all professed Christians, and all unite together at the Lord’s supper; but there is no more foundation for Christian fellowship than if the one were what they are, and the other avowed infidels. Some of these good men, it is true, withdraw from all intimate acquaintance with persons even in their own communion who do not discover a love to the gospel, and form their acquaintance with those who do; but others have been carried away and drawn into measures highly dishonourable to their Christian character, and injurious to their usefulness in the cause of God. Now the same reasoning will hold good out of the church as well as in it. If we form religious connexions with persons in whom there is no proper foundation for “fellowship, communion, concord,” and a mutual participation of spiritual interests, we in so doing become “straitened” rather than “enlarged.”

Much has been said in favour of *unity of affection without a unity in principle*. But such affection, if it can exist, is very different from any thing inculcated by the gospel. Christian affection is “for the truth’s sake that dwelleth in us.” It does not appear to me, however, that it can exist. From any thing that I have felt in myself, or observed in others, I cannot perceive any such thing as unity amongst men, except in proportion as they possess a congeniality of principles and pursuits. It is not possible in the nature of things that “two can walk together except they be agreed.” They

may not indeed be agreed in *all things*; but so far as they disagree, so far there is a want of union; and the ground of affection between them is not those things wherein they are at variance, but those things wherein they are agreed. It argues great inattention to the human mind and its operations to suppose that there can be affection, unless it be merely that of good-will, where there is no agreement. Those who plead for such affection are as much united in society by agreement in sentiment as other people, only *that* sentiment may be of a different kind. They may set aside an agreement in the great principles of the gospel as a ground of union, but they are certain to substitute something else in their place. They have their fundamentals and circumstantialia as well as other people. Whatever things they are which deeply interest the mind, whether they be things evangelical or things political, things which relate to doctrine or things which affect the order, form, and discipline of the church, these are our fundamentals, and in these we shall ever require an agreement, while other things are dispensed with as matters of less importance.

I am a Dissenter, and a rigid regard to Christ's kingly authority is in my esteem a sacred thing. For all the honours and emoluments in the Establishment, I would not pollute my conscience by subscribing to its Common Prayer, or conforming to its unscriptural ceremonies. Yet I do not consider my dissent as the chief thing in religion. So to consider it would in my judgment be making it an idol; and if this were general, the dissenting interest would cease to be the interest of Christ. But I am persuaded that at present this is not the case. May those things which are amiss amongst us be the objects of our attention, that we may not only repent, and do our first works, but strengthen the things which remain, and which are ready to die.

AGREEMENT IN SENTIMENT THE BOND OF CHRISTIAN UNION.

[Letter to the Rev. Samuel Palmer, of Hackney, in 1796.]

I HAVE no partiality, certainly, for the Established Church. I believe it will come down, because it is inimical to the kingdom of Christ; yet I respect many Churchmen, and shall not refuse preaching in their pulpits, provided I may go on in my own way. Mr. Eyre pressed me to preach for him; and, by complying with his request, I materially served the mission.

As to *Dissenters*, I consider a dissent from the Church of England, or any other church, as affording no proper ground of religious union. The thing itself is merely negative. As Dissenters we are not necessarily united in any thing, except that *we do not approve of the Church Establishment*. We may be enemies to the government of God, and the gospel of Christ; yea, we may be avowed infidels; and yet hold this. I therefore have no notion of throwing what little weight I may possess into the dissenting scale, merely *as such*; though, if other things were equal, I should certainly do so. These remarks have no respect to my conduct at Hackney, but are in answer to what you say on that subject in general.

The doubts which I expressed respecting your sentiments arose from no one's insinuations, but from reading a pamphlet which you published some years ago. It may now be fourteen years since I read it; but I then thought too much in favour of indifference to what I esteemed important truth.

Since then, you know, we have conversed together; and, from the whole, I was inclined to hope that your regard to what I accounted evangelical sentiments was greater than I had supposed it to be. And the general approbation which you have since bestowed upon my Letters on Socinianism left me no reason to doubt that, whatever might be your speculations on the modus of the Divine subsistence, you did not reject either the atonement of Christ or his proper Divinity. If I had reason to believe of any man that he did not call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, or rely upon his atoning sacrifice for acceptance with God, I could not acknowledge him as a Christian brother, or pay him any respect in a religious way. But, by whomsoever these great truths are cordially admitted, I trust it will ever be the desire of my heart to pray on their behalf with the apostle, Grace and peace be with them!

Now, however, you inform me that you "*reject* no doctrine from any dislike to it." But if I were satisfied that the worship of Christ is idolatry, I think I ought to reject it with abhorrence. I imagine however you mean that, supposing you are mistaken in any of these matters, it is not from any bias of heart, but from mere mistake. I own that I dare not say so respecting any mistakes of which I may be the subject. I reckon that such is the perspicuity of God's word, that if I err on any important truth or precept, it must be owing to some evil bias to which I am subject, though I am unhappily blinded to it.

You have "no precise ideas of the person of Christ, and you suppose that I have none." We may neither of us fully comprehend that mysterious subject; yet you will admit that there is a material difference between the ideas of one who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus and one who does not, but considers him as merely a fellow creature.

You "despise the man who cannot maintain a brotherly connexion with another, because he thinks for himself." I wish every man to think for himself, and also to act for himself; but if in the exercise of this right he thinks the Son of God an impostor, and his doctrine a lie, or lives in the violation of his commands, I think myself not only entitled, but bound, to withhold all brotherly connexion with him of a religious nature; not because he thinks or acts *for himself*, but because in my judgment (and *my* judgment must be the rule of *my* conduct) he thinks and acts *wrong*. We may think and act for ourselves, and yet do both in such a way as shall subject us to the just abhorrence of every friend of truth and righteousness. The worst of beings thinks for himself: "when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh *of his own*."

You "do not desire the friendship of any one who makes a similarity of opinion the condition of it." I am not fond of calling the great articles of my faith "opinions." Faith and opinion are different things. If you mean *sentiment*, I acknowledge I *do* desire the friendship of many who make a similarity in the one the condition of the other, and am willing they should ask me any question they think proper concerning my faith. Nay, I may say further, I wish to be on terms of religious friendship with no man, unless he be a friend to what I consider the first principles of the oracles of God. Nor can I persuade myself that you, notwithstanding your strong language, will "despise" me on that account. If it be so, however, I must bear it as well as I can.

Christian love appears to me to be, "for the truth's sake that dwelleth in us." Every kind of union that has not truth for its bond is of no value in the sight of God, and ought to be of none in ours.

You tell me there are "those who consider *me* as unsound in other doctrines, but this does not diminish your regard for me." Perhaps not: it were rather singular to suppose it should. You have too much good sense, sir, to disregard me for what *other people think of me*. But if you *yourself*

thought me unsound, you would; or at least, I should say, you ought; and perhaps it may make you smile if I add, I should think the worse of you if you did not. As to *others*, who may think me unsound, I imagine they do not as such regard me; nay, I hope for their sakes that so far they disregard me. I may think they misjudge me, and may wish to set them right. I may think ill of their sentiments, as they do of mine; but, while they judge me unsound, I neither expect nor desire their approbation. I had rather they should disesteem me than pretend to esteem me in a religious way, irrespective of my religious principles. All the esteem that I desire of you, sir, or of any man, towards me, is for the truth that in your judgment dwelleth in me, and operateth in a way of righteousness.

I have heard a great deal of *union without sentiment*; but I can neither feel nor perceive any such thing, either in myself or others. All the union that I can feel or perceive arises from *a similarity of views and pursuits*. No two persons may think exactly alike; but so far as they are unlike, so far there is a want of union. We are united to God himself by becoming of one mind and one heart with him. Consider the force and design of Amos iii. 3, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" You might live neighbourly with Dr. Priestley, but you would not feel so united with him in heart as if he had been of your sentiments, nor he with you as if you had been of his. You may esteem a Churchman, if he agree with you in doctrine, and be of an amiable disposition; but you would feel much more united with him if in addition to this he were a Dissenter. You may regard some men who are rigid Calvinists, on some considerations; but you would regard them more if they were what you account more liberal in their views, and more moderate towards others who differ from them; that is, if they were *of your mind* upon the doctrine of Christian forbearance.

Men of one age may have quarrelled about religious differences and have persecuted one another, as papists and protestants have done in France; and the same descriptions of men in another age may despise these litigations, as the French have lately done, and not care at all whether a man be papist or protestant, provided he enters heartily into revolutionary principles. But all this arises from their having substituted the importance of an agreement in a political creed in the place of one that is religious. Agreement in sentiment and pursuit is still the bond of union.—Even those who unite in church fellowship upon the principle of what they term *free inquiry*, or universal toleration, are in *that* principle agreed; and this is the bond of their union. They consider this as the all in all, and consent to exercise forbearance towards each other in every thing else. Such a communion, I confess, appears to me just as scriptural and as rational as if a number of persons should agree to worship together, but consent that every one should be at liberty to *act* as he thought proper, and so admit the universal toleration of every species of immorality. Nevertheless, even here, a similarity of sentiments would be the bond of union.

You can unite with men "who are not exactly of your sentiments."—So can I.—But that in which I unite with them is not any thing in which sentiment has no concern. It is *that wherein we are agreed* that is the bond of our union; and those things wherein we differ are considered as objects of *forbearance*, on account of human imperfection. Such forbearance ought undoubtedly to be exercised in a degree, especially in things which both sides must admit to be not clearly revealed, which are properly called opinions, and are little other than mere speculations. And even in things which in our judgment *are* clearly revealed, there ought to be a degree of forbearance; much in the same way as we forbear with each other's imper-

fections of a practical nature, where the essential principles of morality are not affected.

You are "not a party man, and hope you never shall be, to please any set of people whatever." I hope so too; but I wish inflexibly to adhere to the side of truth and righteousness, so far as I understand them, in every punctilio, in order to please God.

"A decided judgment on some points," you consider as "unimportant, and think there is room for mutual candour." If those points are unrevealed, I say so too; but I do not consider either the Deity or the atonement of Christ as coming under this description, and I hope you think the same. Without the former, we cannot with any consistency call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, which is the characteristic of a primitive believer; and without the latter, I need not say to you, sir, that the gospel is rendered of none effect. As to "candour," it is due to all men, even infidels and atheists; but candour will not lead me to treat them as objects of Divine favour, but to speak the truth to them in love.

Possibly you may think it unfair to reason as I have done from practices to principles, and that we ought to make a wide difference between the one and the other. But the difference, as it appears to me, is only as the difference between root and branch. Faith is not a mere speculation of the understanding, nor unbelief a mere mistake in judgment. They are both of a moral nature, or salvation would not be connected with the former, and final condemnation with the latter.

I ought perhaps to apologize for having written so much, in the manner I have done; but I think you will not take it amiss. The collision of thoughts from persons who have been in different habits and connexions is sometimes of mutual advantage. If you should disapprove of my remarks, try and set me right, and you will be entitled to my grateful acknowledgments.

ORDINATION.

RE-ORDINATION, AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS.

[To the Editor of the Biblical Magazine.]

IT having been the practice of some dissenting ministers to receive ordination but once, it became a question at a meeting lately held in the country whether a pastor removing to another church should be *re*-ordained. The ministers about to engage in such a service, considering ordination not as a designation *to the work of the ministry*, (of which they find no examples in the New Testament,) but as a solemn appointment *to office in a Christian church*, were of opinion that a previous ordination had no influence on an appointment to office in another church. They allowed that re-ordination is unprecedented in the New Testament; and so also is the removal of a pastor from one church to another: if the latter were found, they supposed the former would accompany it.

Some conversation took place at the same meeting also on the scriptural grounds for *the laying on of hands* in ordination. In favour of this practice it was alleged—1. That it appears to have been used in all ages of the church, where persons were set apart to sacred work, Numb. xxvii. 18-20. That though often connected with the communication of extraordinary gifts,

yet it was not *always* so. It is not certain that it was for this purpose that hands were laid upon the seven deacons of the church at Jerusalem (Acts vi. 6); and it is certain that when the church at Antioch laid hands on Saul and Barnabas (Acts xiii. 3) it was not for this purpose, seeing they were possessed of extraordinary gifts already. In this case, they were ordinary persons who laid hands upon the extraordinary.—3. That when the laying on of hands was accompanied with the conferring of extraordinary gifts, it is doubtful whether they were imposed for that specific purpose only; see Acts viii. 17–19; xix. 5, 6. 4. That ordination is expressed by laying on of hands: “Lay hands suddenly on no man,” &c. But that which is used to express or describe a practice, would seem to be an important, if not an essential part of it.

Two of your correspondents have honoured me with their remarks on the above hints on ordination. If I add a few more, it is with no design to enter into any thing like contention on the subject. “Mr. Howe” was a great and good man; and, while he considered ordination as a *designation to the Christian ministry*, it is no wonder he should answer as he did. But I see no evidence deducible from Acts xiv. 23 that this is the scriptural idea of it. Paul and his companions, having formed these believers into Christian churches, proceeded to organize them with proper officers. These elders or presbyters who were ordained by the suffrage of the churches were *officers in those churches*, and not merely Christian ministers appointed to preach the gospel wherever a door might be opened. Your correspondent C. speaks of “other passages which he forbears to quote.” If he can produce an instance of ordination being a *designation to the Christian ministry as such*, his argument will be established, but not else.

Candour requires me to acknowledge, in reply to *Amicus*, that from what he has remarked on Acts xiii. 3, I suspect myself to have been under a mistake in supposing that the laying on of hands in that instance was *by the church*. My reason for thinking so was that the exercises of *fasting* and *prayer* were not likely to be confined to the prophets and teachers, and therefore not that of laying on of hands; but upon a review of the subject I incline to think that the latter was done by the prophets and teachers in the name of the church. The point however which was there attempted to be proved is not affected by this mistake. This was, that the laying on of hands was not always for the purpose of conveying extraordinary gifts; but whoever they were that laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, it could not be for this purpose, since it is pretty evident that they were possessed of them before. I may add, I do not consider this as an instance of *ordination*, but of the designation of two Christian *missionaries* to the Gentiles.

Amicus speaks of “Saul not being yet ordained an apostle.” Surely he is here greatly beside the mark. Is not an apostle one *immediately sent of Christ without any human authority*? Did not Saul receive ordination to that office at the time of his conversion?—See Acts xxvi. 16–18, compared with Gal. i. 1, 12–17, and 1 Cor. xi. 1.

With respect to the general question, on what grounds the practice of ordination rests among congregational churches, and wherein the essence of it consists, I am not prepared to enter into “a complete investigation of the subject;” a close examination of the Acts and the Epistles with this point in view might possibly correct some of my ideas. At present I can only offer a few brief hints.

Viewing the subject as I do, namely, as *a designation of a person to an office in a Christian church*, I find that in such cases the church made the election, and the apostles and other elders set him apart with prayer (as I suppose) and the laying on of hands, Acts vi. 3; xiv. 23; Tit. i. 5. Such is the general ground of my practice when I engage in an ordination. In doing this, I claim not to be a successor of the apostles, any otherwise than as every faithful pastor is such; nor pretend to constitute the party ordained a Christian minister, for this he was as being a *teacher* antecedent to his being ordained a pastor; nor to impart power or “authority to administer gospel ordinances.” It appears to me that every approved teacher of God’s word, whether ordained the pastor of a particular church or not, is authorized to *baptize*; and with respect to the *Lord’s supper*, though I should think it disorderly for a young man who is only a probationer, and not an ordained pastor, to administer that ordinance, yet I see nothing objectionable, if, when a church is destitute of a pastor, it were administered by a deacon or an aged brother; I know of no scriptural authority for confining it to ministers. Nay, I do not recollect any mention in the Scriptures of a minister being employed in it, unless we reckon our Lord one. I do not question but that the primitive pastors, whose office it was to preside in all spiritual affairs, *did* administer that ordinance as well as receive and exclude members; but as a church when destitute of a pastor is competent to appoint a deacon or aged brother to officiate in these cases, I know of no reason to be gathered from the Scriptures why they should not be the same in the other.

The only end for which I join in an ordination, is to unite with the elders of that and other churches in *expressing my brotherly concurrence in the election, which, if it fell on what I accounted an unsound or unworthy character, I should withhold*. Though churches are so far independent of each other as that no one has a right to interfere in the concerns of another without their consent, unless it be as we all have a right to exhort and admonish one another, yet there is a common union required to subsist between them, for the good of the whole; and so far as the ordination of a pastor affects this common or general interest, it is fit that there should be a general concurrence in it. It was on this principle, I conceive, rather than as an exercise of authority, that the apostles, whose office was general, took the lead in the primitive ordinations. When the churches increased, they appointed such men as Timothy and Titus to do what they would have done themselves, had they been present; and when all extraordinary officers ceased, the same *general* object would be answered by the concurrence of the elders of the surrounding churches. Though the apostles and other extraordinary officers in the church had an *authority* which no ordinary pastor, or company of pastors, possess; yet in many things *they did no more than what would be lawful for others to do, if they could and would do it*. If they planted churches, set them in order, and ordained elders over them, it was not because the same things would not have been *valid* if done without them, but because they would not have *been done*. Let but churches be planted, set in order, and scripturally organized; and whether it be by apostles, evangelists, or ordinary pastors, all is good and acceptable to Christ. Paul left Timothy at Ephesus that he might “charge some that they taught no other doctrine.” But if the Ephesian teachers had been of themselves attached to the truth, neither Paul nor Timothy would have been offended for their interference being rendered unnecessary. Titus was left in Crete, “to set in order the things that were wanting, and to ordain elders in every city;” but if things were but set in order, and proper elders ordained in the churches of Crete, it were no matter whether Paul the apostle, Titus the evangelist, or the wisest

of their own elders, take the lead in it. Let them but have had wisdom and virtue enough in the island to have accomplished these ends, and Paul would have "rejoiced in beholding their order, and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ."

VALIDITY OF LAY ORDINATION.

WHILE I was at Aberdeen, I was waited upon by a deputation, consisting of the pastor, a deacon, and another member of a little Baptist church, lately formed at New Byth, near Old Deer, Aberdeenshire. A Baptist minister, now in Norfolk,* was the Episcopal minister at Old Deer, till the year 1799. At that time his views were altered concerning baptism; and he went to London, and was baptized by Mr. Booth. Soon after a Baptist church of ten members, out of his former congregation, was formed in the neighbourhood. The church then proceeded to choose one of their members to be their pastor; and on March 26, 1803, they set him apart to that office by prayer. Some of the members however were not satisfied as to the validity of his ordination, seeing there were no pastor or pastors from other churches present to join in it. A few of them had communed together at the Lord's table; but the rest stood aloof, merely on this account. Their errand to me was to request my judgment on the validity of his ordination; and, if I thought it invalid, that I would come and ordain him.

I told them, if there had been any other pastors of churches within their reach, it would have been proper to request their concurrence and assistance; and that, if I had been there at the time, I should have had no objection to join in prayer, and in the laying on of hands. But as things were, I could not see how they could have acted otherwise than they had done. And as to my now ordaining him, I could do no such thing; partly because it would imply that I thought him not yet their pastor, which was not true; and partly because it would convey an idea of my having to impart to another minister some power or authority, of which I had no conception. My advice was that they should all be satisfied with what was done.

ADMINISTERING THE LORD'S SUPPER WITHOUT ORDINATION.

[Addressed to a young Minister.]

RELATIVE to your question, I must say, it appears to me very wrong to administer the Lord's supper without ordination, as it goes to render void that ordinance. Ordination of elders, in every church, was a practice of the first churches, (Acts xiv. 23,) and we should not make light of it. It is calculated to keep out unworthy characters from the churches.

There was a Mr. —, that would have settled at —, if we, as ministers, would have been at his ordination; but we knew the man to be of a bad character, and refused it. The consequence was, he stopped awhile, and then left, and went into —, where he made great havoc of some of their churches.

Ordination seems originally intended for guarding against bad characters

* Rev. W. Ward, M. A., Diss.—B.

(1 Tim. v. 22); I have, therefore, been much concerned to see the practice of administering the Lord's supper obtain prior to it; which tends to set it aside; and will, I am persuaded, be a source of many mischiefs in the churches.

I am told of a very respectable church, which has lately fallen a prey to a designing man, whom they have ordained. As none of the neighbouring ministers would attend, they determined to do without them. The consequence, I doubt not, will be mischiefs incalculable.—I do not suppose these would occur in your case; but you should not make light of an ordinance of Christ, and which, in other cases, may be of great importance.

ADMINISTERING THE LORD'S SUPPER WITHOUT A MINISTER.

[Substance of the reply given (in 1805) to a Baptist church in Edinburgh, who, being destitute of a pastor, had communicated at the Lord's table without the assistance of a minister, and requested the author's opinion of the validity of their practice.]

I TOLD them that probably there were few of my brethren who might be of my mind; but I had long been of opinion that there was no scriptural authority for confining the administration of the Lord's supper to a minister. I had no doubt but that the primitive pastors *did* preside at the Lord's table, as well as in the reception and exclusion of members, and in short in all the proceedings of the church; and that, where there was a pastor, it was proper that he should continue to do so. But that when a pastor died, or was removed, the church was not obliged to desist from commemorating the Lord's death, any more than from receiving or excluding members; and that it was as lawful for them to appoint a deacon, or any senior member, to preside in the one case as in the other.

Neither did I recollect that any minister is said to have administered the Lord's supper, unless we consider our Saviour as sustaining that character at the time of its institution; and this silence of the Scriptures concerning the administration appeared to me to prove that it was a matter of indifference. Finally, I told them that it was not the practice of our English churches; that they, many of them, would send for the pastors of other churches to perform this office; and that I for one had often complied with such requests. I could wish however it were otherwise, and that every church, when destitute of a pastor, would attend to the Lord's supper *among themselves*.

It is the practice of this and all the Baptist churches in Scotland to commemorate the Lord's death *every* Lord's day. I do not think this to be *binding*, but am persuaded there can be nothing wrong in it, and that *probably* it was the practice of the primitive churches.

COUNSELS TO A YOUNG MINISTER IN PROSPECT OF
ORDINATION.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Kettering, Aug. 30, 1810.

As it is very doubtful whether I shall be able to attend your ordination, you will allow me to fill up the sheet with brotherly counsel.

You are about to enter, my brother, on the solemn work of a pastor; and I heartily wish you God speed. I have seldom engaged in an ordination of late in which I have had to address a younger brother, without thinking of the apostle's words in 2 Tim. iv. 5, 6, in reference to myself and others, who are going off the stage.—“Make full proof of *thy* ministry: for *I* am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand!” Your charge at present is small; but if God bless you, it may be expected to increase, and of course your labours and cares will increase with it. If you would preserve spirituality, purity, peace, and good order in the church, you must live near to God yourself, and be diligent to feed the flock of God with evangelical truth. Without these nothing good will be done. Love your brethren, and be familiar with them; not, however, with that kind of familiarity which breeds disrespect, by which some have degraded themselves in the eyes of the people, and invited the opposition of the contentious part of them; but that which will endear your fellowship, and render all your meetings a delight. Never avail yourself of your independence of the people in respect of support to carry matters with a high hand amongst them. Teach them so to conduct themselves as a church, that, if you were to die, they might continue a wise, holy, and understanding people. The great secret of ruling a church is to convince them that you love them, and say and do every thing for their good. Love, however, requires to be mingled with faithfulness, as well as faithfulness with love. Expect to find defects and faults in your members, and give them to expect free and faithful dealing while connected with you: allow them, also, to be free and faithful towards you in return. There will be many faults which they should be taught and encouraged to correct in one another; others will be proper subjects of pastoral admonition; and some must be brought before the church. But do not degrade the dignity of a church by employing it to sit in judgment on the shape of a cap, or a bonnet; or on squabbles between individuals, which had better be healed by the interposition of a common friend. The church should be taught, like a regiment of soldiers, to attend to discipline, when called to it, in a proper spirit; not with ebullitions of anger against an offender, but with fear and trembling, considering themselves, lest they also be tempted. Let no one say to another, Overlook my fault to-day, and I will overlook yours to-morrow;—but, rather, Deal faithfully with me to-day, and I will deal faithfully with you to-morrow.

I have always found it good to have an understanding with the deacons upon every case before it is brought before the church. Neither they nor the members have always been of my opinion; and where this has been the case I have not attempted to carry a measure against them, but have yielded, and this not merely from prudence, but as knowing that others have understanding as well as I, and may therefore be in the right. In this way I have been pastor of the church which I now serve for nearly thirty years, without a single difference.

A young man, in your circumstances, will have an advantage in beginning

a church on a small scale. It will be like cultivating a garden before you undertake a field. You may also form them in many respects to your own mind; but if your mind be not the mind of Christ, it will, after all, be of no use. Labour to form them after Christ's mind, and you will find your own peace and happiness in it.

Merely and truth attend you and the partner of your cares!

I am, &c.,

A. FULLER.

THE APOSTOLIC OFFICE.

EUBULUS, in what he has written upon the apostolic office, having expressed a wish for the subject to be examined, I take the liberty of suggesting a few hints to his consideration.

Allowing the word *apostle* to signify a *missionary*, it does not seem to follow that calling an ordinary preacher, who is sent to publish the gospel among the heathen, by the latter name, is improper or "unscriptural."

The word *διακονειν*, which is used of the office of a *deacon*, signifies to minister to the wants of others, or to serve. A deacon was a servant; but it does not follow that the application of the word servant to other persons as well as deacons is improper or unscriptural. A deacon was a servant of a *particular kind*; and such is the idea which the word conveys; but the term servant is more generic, and therefore is properly applied to persons who serve in other capacities as well as this. Every deacon was a servant, but every servant was not a deacon.

It should seem that the same may be said of *αποστολος*, the term used to express the office of an apostle. It signifies a *messenger* or *missionary*; but it does not follow that the application of either of these terms to other persons as well as apostles is improper or unscriptural. An apostle was a messenger, or missionary, of a *particular kind*; and such is the idea which the word conveys; but the terms *messenger* and *missionary* are more generic, and therefore are properly applied to any persons who are sent with a message to a distance. Every apostle was a messenger and a missionary, but every messenger and missionary was not an apostle. Epaphroditus was the *αποστολος*, or messenger to the Philippians to Paul (Phil. ii. 25); and those who are called in our translation "the messengers of the churches" (2 Cor. viii. 23) are denominated by the same name, *αποστολοι*. The word also that is used for the sending out of ordinary preachers of the gospel among the heathen, properly means to *send on a mission*; and is the same (with only the difference of the verb and the noun) as that which is rendered *an apostle*. "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except *αποσταλῶσι*, *they be sent*?" Rom. x. 14, 15.

Upon the whole, I hope EUBULUS will reconsider his censure of the translators, for naturalizing the term *αποστολοι*, when applied to those messengers immediately commissioned by Christ, by rendering it *apostles*, rather than translating it *messengers* or *missionaries*. The naturalization complained of resembles, in this instance at least, that of the common name by which we denominate the Holy Scriptures, calling them *the Bible*, from *βιβλος*, *the book*. To have translated this, and called it *the book*, would not have distinguished it from certain *parts* of it, which also bear that name, Matt. i. 1.

But to call it *the Bible* suggests the very idea required; that is, the book by way of eminence, the book of books. So *αποστολοι*, if translated messengers, or missionaries, would not have distinguished the twelve disciples from other messengers, or missionaries; but, rendered *apostles*, it conveys the true idea; namely, that of messengers of an *extraordinary kind*, or messengers *by way of eminence*.

TERMS OF COMMUNION.

REMARKS ON INFANT BAPTISM AND INFANT COMMUNION.

[In reply to some papers written by the Rev. S. Newton, of Norwich.]

THE piece by "An Old Congregationalist" seems to invite an answer from both Baptists and Pædobaptists. If the following remarks be acceptable on behalf of the former, they are at your service.

Whether or not I can convince your respectable correspondent, (with whom, if I am not mistaken, I have some acquaintance,) I hope he will allow what I advance to be "friendly," and as free from "the air of angry controversy" as he can desire.

That the plea for infant communion is equally valid with that of infant baptism you will not expect me to dispute. If I could be convinced of the one, I see no reason why I should scruple the other. If one of your Pædobaptist correspondents should think proper to answer in behalf of his brethren, it will belong to him to point out the grounds for admitting the former while he rejects the latter. My share of the answer is merely to notice the arguments for infant communion taken from the Scriptures, or from other acknowledged duties.

We are accused at the outset of having, "without a Divine precept, separated the children of believers from the church of God." To this I answer—1. Allowing them to have been *in the church* under the Old Testament, it does not follow that they should be members of churches under the New Testament. "A Congregationalist" must admit of a very material difference in the constitution of the church under these different dispensations; so material as that the laws of admission to the one are no rule by which to judge of the other. If he will not, however, he must consider as members of the church, not only his own children, but all that are born in his house, or bought with his money. Or if he refuse this consequence, he brings upon himself his own charge, of separating the poor servants from the church of God, without a Divine precept. Should he in this case allege that there is no precept or example in the New Testament for admitting them, he would furnish an answer which is no less applicable to the other.—2. But before the charge of separating the children of believers from the church of God had been preferred, it should have been *proved* that they, *as such, were ever in it*. Unless the whole Israelitish nation were believers, it could not be *as* the children of believers that their descendants were admitted to Divine ordinances. If "the habits and practices of the Jews" prove any thing, they will prove too much, at least for a "Congregationalist." They will not only require the admission of servants born in the house, or bought with money, but the very constitution of the church must be national. Their children and servants must not only be admitted in infancy, but continue in full communion when adults, though there should be no proof of their being any other than graceless characters.

But we agree, it is said, "to take our children to family and public worship; to teach them to read the Bible with seriousness and attention, instruct them in catechisms and in private prayer; for all which they have no more understanding than for the Lord's supper." It is not however for want of *understanding* that we object to it, but the want of Scripture precept or example. If God had required it, or the first churches practised it, we should think ourselves as much obliged to bring our children to the Lord's supper as the Israelites were to bring theirs to the passover. It appears to me that great mistakes have arisen from confounding *moral obligations* with *positive institutes*. The former are binding on all mankind, and therefore require to be inculcated on every one within the reach of our influence; the latter are limited to a part of mankind, usually described in the institutions themselves. The one being founded in our relation to God and one another, and approving themselves to the conscience, require neither precept nor precedent, but merely a general principle which shall comprehend them; the other, having their origin merely in the sovereign will of God, require a punctilious adherence to what is revealed concerning them. While we engage in what is purely moral, and what is therefore right for every one to engage in, we incur no relative guilt, whatever be the motives or even the manifest characters of those who unite with us, any more than in contributing with an irreligious man to the relief of the poor; but in what is positive, if the parties with whom we unite be virtually excluded by the institution, we are accessory to their doing what, in their present state of mind, they have no right to do. For want of attending to this plain distinction, some have gone so far as to refuse to engage in public prayer in a promiscuous assembly, and even to join in family worship, if any were present whom they accounted unbelievers. Proceeding on the same principle, the "Congregationalist" appears to me to err in the opposite extreme; arguing from our joining in what is right for all men that we ought to join in what the Scriptures limit to certain characters.

The appeal is next made to the New Testament. Here it becomes us to be all attention. "Were not the first churches composed of households?" That there were some households in them is clear; and we have some in many of our churches. But why did not the "Congregationalist" *prove* that some of them at least were infants? If he could have done this, all his other arguments might have been spared. It might indeed be supposed that households will ordinarily consist of some of this description; and if we were not given to understand the contrary in these instances, the presumption might appear in favour of this supposition. But it so happens that each of these households appears from the Scripture accounts to have been composed of believers, Acts xvi. 34-40; 1 Cor. i. 16; xvi. 15.

"Were not parents told, if they believed, they and their *house* should be saved?" The head of one family was thus addressed: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." But surely the meaning of this is, that if he and his house believed, they should all be saved. If Paul and Silas meant to say his house should be saved, though *he only* believed, why is it added in the next verse, "And they spoke unto him the word of the Lord, *and to all that were in his house?*" The Pharisees seemed desirous of establishing their claim on the ground of having Abraham to their father; but John the Baptist did not allow of it, but intimated that the axe was now laid to the root of the tree, and that every tree which brought not forth good fruit should be hewn down and cast into the fire. Who would have thought that "An Old Congregationalist" could have pleaded, not merely for the admission of children to Christian ordinances in virtue of the faith of their parents, but for their being actually *saved*? I have heard

of certain professors of religion in the fens of Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire who hold this opinion with great earnestness, and who on the ground of their forefathers' faith rest assured of salvation, whatever be their own characters; but I should not have expected such a notion to have found an advocate in your worthy correspondent.

"Is there an instance of an adult descendant of a believer that was admitted into the church throughout the whole of the New Testament?" Yes, several. All the households before mentioned were adults, and some of them were doubtless descendants from the heads of those families. But I suppose your correspondent means there is no instance of there being admitted *at a distance of time after their parents*. And this I believe is true. But it is equally true that there is no instance of a wife, a husband, or a child, being *converted after their partners or their parents*; cases which nevertheless, no doubt, frequently occurred. The truth is, the New Testament is a history of the first planting of the church, and not of its progress. If such evidence as this amounts to "a moral certainty" that children were received into the church with their parents, I am at a loss what to denominate uncertainty.

The Scriptures inculcate a strict and holy discipline, both in the church and in the family; and I cannot but consider it as a strong presumption against the practice for which your correspondent pleads, that the command to "bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" is addressed not to ministers or churches, but to *parents*. Nor is there, that I recollect, in all that is said in the apostolic Epistles, to parents or children, a word which implies the latter to have stood in the relation of church members.

There is some ingenuity in what is said in answer to *objections*; and if moral and positive duties must be confounded, and we are driven to reason from analogy on the one as well as the other, there may be some force in it. But if positive institutes require Scripture precept or example, the want of these must needs be the grand, and, I suspect, the insurmountable objection.

STRICTURES

ON THE REV. JOHN CARTER'S "THOUGHTS ON BAPTISM AND MIXED COMMUNION, IN THREE LETTERS TO A FRIEND; IN WHICH SOME ANIMADVERSIONS ARE MADE ON THE REV. ABRAHAM BOOTH'S APOLOGY."

THE "Pædobaptist" addresses his pamphlet to a Baptist. The first letter gives the author's reasons for his own practice. The two others are in favour of a mixed communion between Baptists and Pædobaptists at the Lord's table. We pass over that part of his piece which relates merely to baptism, with only observing that the author in pleading for sprinkling is not so convinced of it as to think his own side "exclusively right." In the second and third letters, where he pleads for mixed communion, it is observable too that he admits the principle of the strict Baptists; namely, *that baptism is an indispensable prerequisite to fellowship at the Lord's table*. But he thinks that each may acknowledge the validity of the other's baptism, and endeavours to persuade his correspondent that he ought not, unless he can establish his claim to infallibility, to consider himself as *exclusively* right; that is, he would have him allow that those who have been sprinkled in infancy are baptized, though it may be in his judgment not in so scriptural a manner

as himself. He censures Mr. Booth with some severity for assuming in his "Apology" that Pædobaptists are *unbaptized*, and that their thinking themselves otherwise is a *false persuasion*. Finally, he disclaims any dominion over the faith of the Baptists, and thinks the Baptists ought to claim none over his.

To the above reasoning we suppose a strict Baptist, it may be his correspondent, would answer nearly as follows: I feel obliged to you, dear sir, for your kindly inviting me and my brethren to unite with you in commemorating the death of our common Lord. I give you full credit for the brotherly affection by which you are influenced, and should be happy if this wall of separation could be removed, without our dispensing with an ordinance of Christ. As the ground of our union, you propose to me a principle which, if it could be admitted, would, I acknowledge, accomplish the end. But do you not perceive that, in admitting it, I must relinquish not merely my practice of strict communion, but my principles as a *Baptist*, or, if you please, as an *Antipædobaptist*, and either refuse to baptize any in future who have been sprinkled in their infancy, which the far greater part have been, or, when I do so, be guilty of rebaptizing them, and thus become in reality, what I have hitherto disowned with abhorrence, an *Anabaptist*?

In your last letter you say, "It is certainly just and right that each should act on his own principles." And no doubt if a union were accomplished, it must proceed on this ground. But your second and third letters require us to relinquish what is essential to our being *Antipædobaptists*, and insist, as I just now said, on our either giving up the practice of baptizing those who have been sprinkled in their infancy, or becoming avowed Anabaptists. If indeed our principles as Antipædobaptists be unscriptural, they ought to be relinquished; but I do not perceive, from any thing you have advanced, that they are so; and, in pleading for mixed communion, it is not your professed object to prove them so.

I make no pretence to being *infallibly* right, neither do you, I dare say, in any of your religious sentiments; yet there are many things in which you certainly consider yourself, and those of your mind, as *exclusively* so. In the same light I consider my views of baptism. You express astonishment and offence at Mr. Booth's saying that *in our judgment* you are unbaptized. But I am no less astonished that you, who have known so much of us, should yet have to learn that it is not possible for a Baptist to consider you in any other light. The moment he does so he ceases to be a Baptist. Yes, sir, in *our judgment* you are unbaptized; and our judgment must decide our practice. You have doubtless a right to judge for yourselves, and far be it from us to wish to deprive you of any part of that inalienable privilege; but in a question of communion, in every thing necessary to it, *which you allow baptism to be*, our judgment and yours must coincide.

If Mr. Booth had been reasoning with *you*, he would not have taken it for granted that you were baptized. But when reasoning with the *Baptists*, he had a right to do so; nor is there any cause for you to be offended at it. There would be an end to argumentation, if what is allowed on both sides of a controversy to be false may not be called so.

Admitting the validity of our baptism, you are willing to receive us to communion; while we cannot admit the validity of yours, and so cannot consent to commune with you. This you seem to think hard, and consider our conduct as claiming dominion over your faith. But on what ground is it that you admit the validity of our baptism? Is it merely because *we think ourselves* baptized? No; we are baptized in *your judgment*, as well as in our own. In receiving us, therefore, you are not obliged to act contrary to your principles. But the case is otherwise with us. We verily

believe you to be unbaptized, not merely as being only sprinkled, but as receiving it at a time when you could not actively "put on Christ," which "as many as were baptized" in primitive ages did, Gal. iii. 27. In receiving you, therefore, we must of necessity act contrary to our principles, by uniting with those at the Lord's table whom we believe to be unbaptized. The result is—the dispute between us on mixed communion is at an end. If we err, it is as Baptists, by considering infant baptism as invalid.

You have no hope it seems of our ever coming together, unless we could allow your baptism to be valid; that is, unless we could retract the principles of antipædobaptism. There is one other way left, however, and that is, by your retracting those of pædobaptism; and why should we not hope for the one as well as you for the other?

The controversy on strict and mixed communion, in respect of baptism, is reducible to three questions.—(1.) Is baptism necessary to communion at the Lord's table? (2.) Is a being immersed on a profession of faith necessary to baptism? (3.) On whom does the duty of judging what is baptism devolve—on the party baptized, or on the church, or on both?

The *first* was denied by John Bunyan; but, being generally admitted by Pædobaptists, they are not entitled to his arguments. Those who follow Bunyan are chiefly Baptists who admit of mixed communion; and Bunyan himself was of this denomination. Against these Mr. Booth's Apology is chiefly directed.

The denial of the *second* is ground proper for Pædobaptists. But if they make it good against the Baptists, they convict them of error as *Baptists* rather than as *strict Baptists*.

Of the *third* much has been said by the friends of mixed communion, both among Baptists and Pædobaptists. None, we apprehend, will plead for a church being the judge of what is baptism, to the exclusion of the candidate. The question is therefore reduced to this: Is it for the candidate exclusively to judge what is baptism; or is it necessary that his judgment and that of the church should coincide upon the subject?

If baptism be *not* necessary to communion; or, though it be, yet if immersion on a profession of faith be *not* necessary to baptism; or, though it be, yet if the candidate for communion be the *only* party with whom it rests to judge what is baptism; then *the strict communion of the Baptists seems to be wrong*.

But if baptism *be* necessary to church communion, and immersion on a profession of faith *be* necessary to baptism, and it *be* the duty of a church to judge of this as well as of every other prerequisite in its candidates, then *the strict communion of the Baptists seems to be right*.

THOUGHTS ON OPEN COMMUNION,

IN A LETTER TO THE REV. W. WARD, MISSIONARY AT SERAMPORE, DATED SEPT. 21, 1800.

"The colours with which wit or eloquence may have adorned a *false system* will gradually die away, sophistry be detected, and every thing estimated, at length, according to its true value."—*Hall's Apology for the Freedom of the Press*.

IN answer to your question, "*Do not the bounds of Scriptural communion extend to all who are real Christians, except their practice is immoral, or they have embraced dangerous heresies?*"

There are three different grounds on which mixed communion is defended:

—1. That baptism is not essential to church communion. 2. That, if it be, adult immersion is not essential to baptism. 3. That, if neither of these be true, yet the right of judging what is and what is not baptism lies in the individual, and not in the community. The statement of your question proceeds upon the *first* of these grounds; to this, therefore, I shall confine my answer.

I observe you do not plead for communion with saints *as saints*; for, if so, you could not refuse it to any one, unless you thought him a wicked man: whereas your question allows that real Christians, if they are guilty of immorality, or if they have embraced dangerous heresies, ought to be excluded. This they doubtless ought to be, and that partly for the honour of God, and partly for their own conviction. They are a kind of lepers, whom the people of God should require to be without the camp.

You admit that there are cases in which it is right for good men to be kept from church communion; but you conceive that this should be limited to cases of immorality and dangerous heresy. If there be any difference then between us, it lies in your omitting to add a third case, viz. an *omission or essential corruption of instituted worship*. Without this, I do not see how you can justify your dissent from the Church of England, or even from the Church of Rome, provided you agreed with them in doctrine and in morals, and were satisfied respecting the piety of your fellow communicants.

You must admit that, so far as primitive example is binding, it has every appearance of establishing the necessity of baptism previously to communion; all that were admitted to church fellowship were in those times baptized. And it appears that the one was considered as necessary to the other. John, the harbinger of Christ, came to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord,” (Luke i. 17,) or to prepare materials for the kingdom of heaven, which he announced as being at hand. For this purpose he “baptized with the baptism of repentance,” (Acts xix. 4,) saying unto the people that “they should believe on him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus,” Acts ii. 42. In other words, his object was to render them Christians and to baptize them. It was thus that they were “prepared for the Lord,” or rendered fit materials for gospel churches. Peter said, “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you.” Paul, in all his Epistles, takes it for granted that all Christians were baptized, Rom. vi. 3, 5; Eph. iv. 5; Col. ii. 12; 1 Cor. i. 13; xii. 13. When baptism and the Lord’s supper are alluded to, it is in *connexion* with each other, 1 Cor. x. 2–4.

You do not pretend that any of the primitive Christians were unbaptized. All you allege is from *analogy*, or that the apostles dispensed with various *other things*, which you suppose to have been of equal importance; and that, therefore, if some at that time had neglected to be baptized on some such principle as that on which the Quakers now neglect it, they would have dispensed with this also. It is acknowledged that they did dispense with a uniformity in matters of circumcision and uncircumcision, of days, and meats, and drinks, and whatever did not affect the “kingdom of Christ,” Rom. xiv. 17. But it appears to me very unsafe to argue from abrogated Jewish rites to New Testament ordinances, especially as the one are opposed to the other. “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God,” 1 Cor. vii. 19. Nor does it appear to me, from any thing that is said on the doctrine of *forbearance* in the New Testament, that the apostles would have dispensed with the omission of baptism. The importance of this ordinance, above every thing dispensed with in the primitive churches, arises from its being the distinguishing sign of Christianity—that by which they were to be known, acknowledged, and treated as members of Christ’s visible kingdom: “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ,” Gal. iii. 27. It is analogous

to a soldier on his enlisting into his Majesty's service putting on the military dress. The Scriptures lay great stress upon "confessing Christ's name before men" (Matt. x. 32); and baptism is one of the most distinguished ways of doing this. When a man becomes a believer in Christ, he confesses it usually in words to other believers: but the appointed way of confessing it openly to the world is by being baptized in his name. If, therefore, we profess Christianity only in words, the thing professed may be genuine, but the profession is essentially defective; and as it is not Christianity, (strictly speaking,) but the *profession* of it, which entitles us to a place in Christ's visible kingdom, our claim to visible communion must of course be invalid.

Baptism is an act by which we declare before God, angels, and men, that we yield ourselves to be the Lord's; that we are *dead* to the world, and, as it were, *buried* from it, and *risen* again "to newness of life," Rom. vi. 3, 4. Such a declaration is equal to an oath of allegiance in a soldier. He may be insincere, yet, if there be no *proof* of his insincerity, the king's officers are obliged to admit him into the army. Another may be sincerely on the side of the king, yet, if he refuse the oath and the royal uniform, he cannot be admitted.

To treat a person as a member of Christ's visible kingdom, and as being in a state of salvation, who lives in the neglect of what Christ has commanded to all his followers, and this, it may be, knowingly, is to put asunder what Christ has joined together.—See Mark xvi. 16. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." By this language he hath *bound us*; though, not having said "he that is not baptized shall be damned," he hath mercifully refrained from *binding himself*.

To dispense with baptism as a term of visible communion, is to connive either at a total neglect of an ordinance which by the authority of Christ is binding to the end of the world, or at a gross corruption of that ordinance; and in many cases at both: for there are great numbers who do not believe themselves to be baptized according to the Scriptures, who yet content themselves with the baptism they have. To connive at a *known* omission of the will of Christ must be wrong, and must render us partakers of other men's sins; yet I see not how this can be avoided on the principle you espouse, provided you account such persons to be real Christians.

But supposing them to be sincere in their attachment to pædobaptism, or that they really believe it to be the mind of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures; yet still if you admit them to the Lord's supper, you must connive at what you consider as a *gross corruption* of the ordinance of Christ—a corruption that amounts to a subversion of every good end to be answered by it, and that has introduced a flood of other corruptions into the church. To me it appears evident that pædobaptism opened the door for the Romish apostacy; and that the church will never be restored to its purity while it is allowed to have any existence in it. The grand cause of the church's having been corrupted so as to become apostate was its being *MINGLED WITH THE WORLD*. Pædobaptism first occasioned this fatal mixture, and national establishments of religion completed it. The one introduced the unconverted posterity of believers; the other all the inhabitants of a country, considering none but pagans, Jews, and deists as unbelievers. The one threw open the door; the other broke down the wall. It is manifestly thus that the church and the world have been confounded, and will always be confounded, more or less, till pædobaptism is no more.

If you admit Pædobaptists to communion, you will not be able for any continuance to secure your own principle—that none but "real Christians" should be admitted. It is like inviting a friend to your table whose company

you value, but who cannot come without bringing his whole family with him. In the earlier ages baptized children were actually and consistently admitted to the Lord's supper. In national churches they are still generally admitted I believe as they grow up, if no gross immorality appears in their conduct, and in some if it does. And even in congregational churches they are taught to consider themselves, either on account of their birth or baptism, or both, as *somehow members of the visible church*. Such an idea might in some measure be suppressed, where the great majority were Baptists; but, by admitting members on your principle, it would soon be otherwise.

The religion of Jesus was never suited to the spirit of this world. Its subjects require to be *born again*, and to make an open *avowal* of it. Therefore, when worldly men took it in hand, they knew not what to make of it, nor what to do with it, till they had flamed it to their mind by explaining away these uncouth principles. Pædobaptism was of essential service to them in this business. Its language was, and still is, "One birth *will do*, at least for the kingdom of heaven upon earth, provided it be from a believing parent." And now, the great difficulty being removed, the smaller is easily surmounted. "There is no necessity for an open and public *avowal*; a little water in a private house *will do*." Thus the two grand barriers that should separate the church from the world are broken down.

The seven Asiatic churches are commended or censured in proportion to their purity. One thing alleged against the church at Thyatira was that she "suffered that woman, Jezebel, to teach and to seduce God's servants," Rev. ii. 20. The allusion is doubtless to the wife of Ahab, who corrupted the pure worship and ordinances of God in her time, and mingled them with idolatry. Whoever they were that were thus denominated, it was doubtless some person or body of persons that strove to draw off the church from her purity, and to introduce for doctrines the commandments of men. It seems, too, that some of *God's servants* were seduced by her; good men, whom your plan of admission would have tolerated. And it is worthy of notice that the censure is not directed against her for doing so, but against the church for suffering it.

You allow immorality or dangerous heresy, even in good men, to be a just cause of a refusal of communion. But is not God as jealous of his sovereign authority as he is of his truth and holiness? The ruin of mankind was by means of the breach of a positive institution. The corruption of instituted worship forms a large part of antichristianism, and is to the full as severely censured as its heresies and immoralities. Positive commands, like the bathing of Naaman in Jordan, are designed for the trial of our obedience. And with respect to the gross deviation from the command in question, after it has once opened the door for the grand apostacy, (an apostacy from which *we are not cleansed to this day*,) shall it be pleaded for as innocent, and ranked with meats, and drinks, and days? Rather ought we not to set our faces against the seductions of Jezebel; and, instead of conniving at *God's servants* who are seduced by her, to assure them that much as we love them, and long for communion with them, we must, while we have ears to hear, "hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches?" Rev. ii. 7.

STRICT COMMUNION IN THE MISSION CHURCH AT SERAMPORE.

[Letter to the Editor of the Instructor, Jan. 28th, 1814.]

I BY no means wish to obtrude myself on you or your readers; but the letter, by "A Pædobaptist," which you inserted in your paper of the 19th instant, calls upon me for an answer.

It is true that the Baptist missionaries at Serampore do not practise strict communion. It is also true that they did so from the beginning, till within the last three or four years, when they agreed to admit of open communion. After this the question was resumed and discussed. The result was that they determined to return to their original practice. As to any *injunction*, I know of none. Most of our churches in England practise strict communion, but do not "enjoin" it upon other churches; and I suppose it is the same with the churches at Serampore and Calcutta. They may recommend whatever they think right, without enjoining it.

I can easily conceive that these changes would cause some feelings among Baptists differently minded on the subject, but cannot conceive why our Pædobaptist brethren should take offence at it. Those Baptists who practise open communion do not mean to acknowledge the validity of pædobaptism. Had they rather then be admissible into our churches as unbaptized in the account of their brethren, than not at all? If so, to be sure we ought to feel obliged by their good opinion of us; as, after all that they have said and written and done against us, they cannot really think ill of us.

But is it true that our Pædobaptist brethren seriously wish us to practise open communion? I give them the fullest credit for desiring *as Christians* to be in fellowship with us, and with all other Christians; and this also is our desire as much as it is theirs. But, *as Pædobaptists*, do they wish us to admit them to communion, *without acknowledging the validity of their baptism*? This is the question; and from all that I have read of their writings on the subject, however they may complain of strict communion, they cannot answer in the affirmative.

Dr. Worcester, in his friendly letter to Dr. Baldwin, though he pleads for a free communion between Baptists and Pædobaptists, and avows it to be the object of his pamphlet, yet allows that "if professed believers are the proper subjects for baptism, and if immersion be not a mere circumstance or mode of baptism, but essential to the ordinance, so that he who is not immersed is not baptized, the sentiment of strict communion would be sufficiently established." Now Dr. Worcester's premises are our most decided principles, and this whether we practise strict or open communion. He therefore admits our practice to be sufficiently established, and has only to complain of us for not allowing the validity of their baptism; that is, for being Baptists.

The same is manifest from a review of Mr. Booth's Apology in the Evangelical Magazine. The reviewer makes nothing of free communion, *unless it were on the principle of admitting the validity of pædobaptism*. Those Baptists who practise it, he leaves to defend themselves as they can. The result is, that the real objection against us respects us not as strict nor as open communionists, but as Baptists. In other words, that the only open communion that would give satisfaction must include an acknowledgment of the validity of pædobaptism, which, for any Baptist to make, would be ceasing to be a Baptist.

THE ADMISSION OF UNBAPTIZED PERSONS TO THE LORD'S SUPPER INCONSISTENT WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT.

[A Letter to a Friend, in 1814.]

ADVERTISEMENT.

THAT the following is a genuine letter, written by the hand of our much lamented friend Mr. Fuller, no one who is at all acquainted with his manner of writing will deny.

In making war upon the common enemy, he was always found in the foremost rank, always among the first to take the field. But when he was called to animadvert on friends and allies, how strikingly different was his conduct.

In January last I received a parcel from him, enclosing a letter, in which he says—

“DEAR BROTHER,

. I have sent you Dr. Baldwin, which you may keep till I see you, if it be for half a year. Also a manuscript of my own and I wish none to see it but yourself, and that no mention be made of it. If any thing be written on the other side, it may, if thought proper, be printed, but not else.

Yours affectionately,

Kettering, Jan. 16, 1815.

A. FULLER.”

The above will justify me in withholding the letter till now; and the long expected publication of Mr. Hall, which has just appeared, equally requires that I withhold it no longer.

The manuscript has many verbal corrections and interlineations, exhibiting proofs of the care and deliberation with which this letter was composed. It may be proper for me to say, the *title* was written by the author himself, and the whole is printed with that scrupulous fidelity which I have thought due to the writer, as to one of the greatest men of the age, and one of the brightest luminaries of the Christian church.

Stepney, July 25, 1815.

WILLIAM NEWMAN.

LETTER, ETC.

DEAR SIR,

THE long and intimate friendship that I have lived in, and hope to die in, with several who are differently minded from me on this subject, may acquit me of any other motive in what I write than a desire to vindicate what appears to me to be the mind of Christ.

So far have I been from indulging a sectarian or party spirit, that my desire for communion with all who were friendly to the Saviour has, in one instance, led me practically to deviate from my general sentiments on the subject; the reflection on which, however, having afforded me no satisfaction, I do not intend to repeat it.

You request me to state the grounds of my objections to the practice in a letter, and I will endeavour to do so. I need not prove to you that it is not for want of esteem towards my Pædobaptist brethren, many of whom are dear to me. If I have any thing like Christian love in me, I feel it towards all those in whom I perceive the image of Christ, whether they be Baptists or Pædobaptists; and my refusing to commune with them at the

Lord's table is not because I consider them as improper subjects, but as attending to it *in an improper manner*. Many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, who partook of Hezekiah's passover, are supposed by that pious prince to have "prepared their hearts to seek the Lord God of their fathers;" but having eaten "otherwise than it was written," he prayed the Lord to "*pardon every one of them,*" and therefore could not intend that the disorder should be repeated, 2 Chron. xxx. 17-19.

I have been used to think that our conduct on such questions should not be governed by affection any more than by disaffection, but by a regard to the revealed will of Christ.

A brother who practises mixed communion lately acknowledged to me, that "he did not think it was a question of *candour* or *charity*, but simply this, *Whether there was or was not an instituted connexion in the New Testament between baptism and the Lord's supper*. If there was, we ought not, under a pretence of charity, to divide them; for surely Jesus Christ may be allowed to have had as much charity and candour as we!" Yet we hear a great outcry, not only from Pædobaptists, but Baptists, against our want of candour, liberality, &c.; all which, if this concession be just, is mere declamation. To what purpose is it, too, that such characters as *Owen, Watts, Doddridge, Edwards, &c.*, are brought forward in this dispute, unless it be to kindle prejudice? If it were a question of *feeling*, their names would doubtless have weight; but if it relate to the revealed will of Christ, they weigh nothing. Is there, or is there not, an instituted connexion between baptism and the Lord's supper as much as between faith and baptism? If there be, we might as well be asked, how we can refuse to baptize the children of such excellent men, as how we can refuse to admit them to the Lord's supper. If a man call me a bigot, I might in reply call him by some other name; but we should neither of us prove any thing, except it were our want of something better to allege. The question respects not *men*, but *things*. It has been painful for me to "withdraw from a brother who has walked disorderly;" nevertheless I have felt it to be my duty to do so. I was not long since assured by a Pædobaptist friend, that, "If I could think free communion to be right, I should be much *happier* than I was;" and it is possible that in some respects I might. If I could think well of the conduct of a brother whom I at present consider as walking disorderly, or if I could pass it by without being partaker of it, I doubt not but I should be the happier; but if that in which he walks *be* disorder, and I *cannot* pass it by without being a partaker of it, I had better be without such happiness than possess it.

The question of free communion as maintained by Baptists is very different from that which is ordinarily maintained by Pædobaptists. There are very few of the latter who deny baptism to be a term of communion, or who would admit any man to the Lord's supper whom THEY CONSIDER AS UNBAPTIZED. Some few, I allow, have professed a willingness to receive any person whom they consider as a believer in Christ, whether he be baptized or not. But this is probably the effect of the practice, so prevalent of late among Pædobaptists, of decrying the importance of the subject. I have never known a Pædobaptist of any note, who conscientiously adheres to what he thinks the mind of Christ relative to this ordinance, who would thus lightly dispense with it. The ordinary ground on which a Pædobaptist would persuade us to practise free communion is that their baptism, whether we can allow it to be quite so primitive as ours or not, is nevertheless *valid*, and that we should allow it to be so, and consequently should treat them as baptized persons by admitting them to the Lord's table. It is on this ground that *Mr. Worcester*, in his *Friendly Letter to Mr. Baldwin*, pleads for open

communion.—He allows that if Mr. Baldwin could demonstrate that baptism is to be administered only in one mode and to one kind of subject, and that immersion is not a *mere circumstance* or mode of baptism, but essential to the ordinance, so that he that is not immersed is not baptized, his sentiment of close communion “would be sufficiently established,”—pp. 8, 9. To the same purpose is the drift of the reviewer of *Mr. Booth's Apology*, in the Evangelical Magazine. But to admit the validity of pædobaptism would not overthrow strict communion only, but baptism itself as performed upon persons who have been previously baptized in their infancy. If infant baptism be valid, it ought not to be repeated; and he that repeats it is, what his opponents have been used to call him, an *Anabaptist*. The ground of argument, therefore, does not belong to *the subject at issue*. Its language is, Do acknowledge our baptism to be valid, and allow that whenever you baptize a person who has been sprinkled in his infancy you rebaptize him;—that is, Do give up your principles as a Baptist, in order that we may have communion together at the Lord's table!!!

Very different from this are the grounds on which our Baptist brethren plead for free communion. As far as I am acquainted with them, they may be reduced to two questions. 1. Has baptism any such instituted connexion with the Lord's supper as to be a prerequisite to it? 2. Supposing it has, yet if the candidate consider himself as having been baptized, ought not this to suffice for his being treated by a Christian church as a baptized person; and does not an error concerning the mode or subjects of Christian baptism come within the precepts of the New Testament which enjoin forbearance, and allow every man to be “fully persuaded in his own mind?”

Let us calmly examine these questions in the order in which they are stated:—

First, *Has baptism any such instituted connexion with the Lord's supper as to be a prerequisite to it?* No Baptist will deny it to be a *duty* incumbent on believers, but he may consider it as having no more connexion with the Lord's supper than other duties, and the omission of it, where it arises from error, as resembling other omissions of duty, which are allowed to be objects of forbearance.

If there be no instituted connexion between them, it must go far towards establishing the position of Mr. Bunyan, that “Non-baptism (at least where it arises from error) is no bar to communion.” If Mr. Bunyan's position be tenable, however, it is rather singular that it should have been so long undiscovered; for it does not appear that such a notion was ever advanced till he or his contemporaries advanced it. Whatever difference of opinion had subsisted among Christians concerning the mode and subjects of baptism, I have seen no evidence that baptism was considered by any one as unconnected with or unnecessary to the supper. “It is certain,” says Dr. Doddridge, “that as far as our knowledge of primitive antiquity reaches, *no unbaptized person received the Lord's supper*.”—Lectures, p. 511. See Mr. Booth's Apology, sect. 1. The practice of Christians having been uniformly against us, I acknowledge, does not prove us to be in the wrong; but an opinion so circumstanced certainly requires to be well established from the Scriptures.

To ascertain whether there be any instituted connexion between the two ordinances, it will be proper to observe the manner in which such connexions are ordinarily expressed in the New Testament. It is not unusual for persons engaged in argument to require that the principle which they opposed should, if true, have been so expressed in the Scriptures as to place it beyond dispute. This, however, is not the ordinary way in which any thing is there expressed. Nor is it for us to prescribe to the Holy Spirit in what manner he shall enjoin his will, but to inquire in what he has enjoined it. A Pædo-

baptist might say, If teaching be indispensably necessary to precede baptizing, why did not Christ expressly say so, and forbid his disciples to baptize any who were not previously taught? A Roman Catholic also, who separates the bread from the wine, might insist on your proving from the New Testament that Christ expressly connected them together, and required the one before and in order to the other.

To the former of these objections you would answer, Let us read the commission:—"Go, . . . teach all nations . . . baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost . . . Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . . and, lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Is it not plainly the *order* of things as stated by our Lord Jesus Christ, you would add, that we are first to *teach* men, by imparting to them the gospel; then, on their believing it, to *baptize* them; and then to go on to *instruct* them in all the ordinances and commandments which are left by Christ for our direction. Thus also to the Roman Catholic you would answer:—Let us read the institution as repeated by the apostle Paul to the Corinthians,—"I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the night in which he was betrayed *took bread*: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took the cup*, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye *eat this bread*, and *drink this cup*, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." You would add, How dare you put asunder the wine and the bread which Christ hath thus manifestly joined together? The former of these answers must, I think, be approved by every Baptist, and the latter by every protestant. But the reasoning in both cases proceeds on the supposition, that the ordinary way in which the mind of Christ is enjoined in the New Testament, is by *simply stating things in the order in which they were appointed and are to be practised; and that this is no less binding on us than if the connexion had been more fully expressed*. It is as clear in the *first* case as if it had been said, Go, first teach them the gospel; and when they have received it, baptize them; and, after this, lead them on in a course of evangelical obedience.—And in the *last* case, it is no less clear than if it had been said, First take the bread, then the cup, and never partake of the one without the other.

But if this be just reasoning with a Pædobaptist and a Roman Catholic, why should it not be so in the present case? If the above be the ordinary mode of Divine injunction, we can be at no loss to know what is enjoined respecting the duties in question. All the recorded facts in the New Testament place baptism before the celebration of the Lord's supper.

The first company who joined together at the Lord's table were all baptized. That Christ was so himself we are expressly informed; and of the disciples we are told that they baptized others (John iv. 2); which would not have been permitted had they, like the Pharisees and lawyers, refused to be baptized themselves.

The next mention of the celebration of the supper is in the second chapter of the Acts. The account given is, that every one of them was exhorted to "repent and be baptized," and that they who gladly received the word "were baptized;" after which they were "added to the church," and "continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in *breaking of bread*, and in prayers."

The question put by the apostle Paul to certain disciples at Ephesus, who said they had not heard whether there were any Holy Ghost, "Unto what

then were ye baptized?" clearly intimates that there were no Christians in those times who continued unbaptized. He does not ask whether they had been baptized, taking this for granted, but merely to *what* they had been baptized.

The nature and design of baptism, as given us in the New Testament, shows it to have been the *initiatory* ordinance of Christianity. It was not, indeed, an initiation into a particular church, seeing it was instituted prior to the formation of churches, and administered in some cases, as that of the Ethiopian eunuch, in which there was no opportunity for joining to any one of them; but it was an initiation into the body of professing Christians. And, if so, it must be necessary to an admission into a particular church, inasmuch as what is particular presupposes what is general. No man could with propriety occupy a place in the army without having first avowed his loyalty, or taken the oath of allegiance. The oath of allegiance does not, indeed, initiate a person into the army, as one may take that oath who is no soldier; but it is a prerequisite to being a soldier. Though all who take the oath are not soldiers, yet all soldiers take the oath. Now baptism is that Divine ordinance by which we are said to *put on Christ*, as the king's livery is put on by those who enter his service; and, by universal consent throughout the Christian world, is considered as the badge of a Christian. To admit a person into a Christian church without it were equal to admitting one into a regiment who scrupled to wear the soldier's uniform, or to take the oath of allegiance.

There are instances in the New Testament in which the word baptism does not mean the baptism by water, but yet manifestly alludes to it, and to the Lord's supper as *connected with it*; e. g. 1 Cor. x. 1-5, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all *baptized* unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same *spiritual meat*; and did all drink the same *spiritual drink*: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness." The Corinthians had many amongst them who had polluted themselves with idolatrous practices, and yet presumed on being saved by Christ. The design of the apostle was to warn them, from the examples of the Jewish fathers, not to rely upon their having been partakers of the Christian privileges of *baptism and the Lord's supper* while they indulged in sin. The manner in which these allusions are introduced clearly shows the *connexion* between the two ordinances in the practice of the primitive churches.

Thus also in 1 Cor. xii. 13, we are said "by one Spirit" to be "all *baptized into one body*, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and all made to *drink into one spirit*." The design may be to illustrate the spiritual union of all true believers in one invisible body, as originating in the washing of regeneration, and as being continued by the renewing of the Holy Spirit: but the allusion is, I conceive, to the ordinances of *baptism and the Lord's supper*; by the former of which they were initiated into the body of professing Christians, and by the other had communion in it. See Poole, Henry, and Scott on the passage.

From these instances, we have equal evidence that the two ordinances were connected in the practice of the first churches as we have of faith being connected with baptism, or of the bread being connected with the wine in the supper. The only difference between these cases is, that the one requires a part and the other the whole of a Divine institution to be dispensed with. Is it for us to make light of the precepts of Christ, under the notion of profiting and edifying his people? If we have any ground to expect his pre-

sence and blessing, it is in "teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever he has commanded" us.

But let us proceed to the second question, *Whether, if the candidate consider himself as having been baptized, this ought not to suffice for his being treated by a Christian church as a baptized person; and whether an error concerning the mode or subjects of baptism be not a subject of Christian forbearance, in which every one may be allowed to be fully persuaded in his own mind.*

That there are cases to which this principle will apply is certain. Concerning eating or not eating *meats*, and observing or not observing *days*, the apostle teaches that every man should "be fully persuaded in his own mind." "Who art thou," he asks, "that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.—Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.—Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.—Hast thou faith? have it to thyself," Rom. xiv.

These passages have often been alleged in favour of free communion between Baptists and Pædobaptists; and if the principle laid down by the apostle applies to that subject, though originally he had no reference to it, the reasoning of our brethren is just and right.

The case, I conceive, must have referred to the prohibition of certain meats, and the observance of certain days, under the *Jewish* law; which being no longer binding on Christians, some would avail themselves of this liberty, and disregard them; others, not having sufficient light, would regard them. Had it referred to any customs of *heathen* origin, or which had never been, nor been understood to be, of Divine appointment, it is not conceivable that those who regarded them should "regard them *to the Lord*." In this case every man was allowed to judge and act for himself, and required to forbear with his brethren who might be otherwise minded.

That we are to apply this principle without restriction few will maintain. Should the first principles of the gospel, for example, be rejected by a candidate for communion, few who pretend to serious Christianity would think of receiving him. Yet he might allege the same arguments, and ask, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.—Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.—Hast thou faith? have it to thyself." In this case, we should answer, that the language of the apostle was misapplied; and that it was not his design to affirm that Christians in a state of religious society had no right to judge of each other's avowed principles; for, if so, he would not have desired some to have been cut off who troubled the Galatians, Gal. v. 12. Nor would the church at Pergamos have been censured for having those amongst them that held pernicious doctrines, Rev. ii. 14, 15. Private judgment is every man's birth-right, considered as an individual; but as a candidate for admission into a voluntary society, it is essential that there be an agreement, at least, in first principles: for "how can two walk together except they be agreed?"

And as we are not so to apply this forbearing principle in matters of doctrine as to raze the foundations of Divine truth, neither shall we be justified in applying it to the dispensing with any of the *commandments* of Christ. The meats and days of which the apostle speaks are represented as not affecting the kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God," he says, "is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," ver. 17. But if they had required a positive commandment of Christ to be dispensed with, they *would* have affected the kingdom of God, and the

apostle would not have written concerning them as he did. In short, it is not just to argue from Jewish customs, which though once binding had ceased to be so, to Christian ordinances which continue in full force. The tone which the apostle holds in respect of those Jewish rites which ceased to be obligatory is very different from that which respects commandments still in force: "Circumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God," 1 Cor. vii. 19.—"I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you," 1 Cor. xi. 2.

If to be baptized be a qualification requisite to Christian communion, (which under the second question I have a right to assume,) it is absurd to suppose that it belongs to the candidate exclusively to judge of it. It is contrary to the first principles of all society for a candidate to be the judge of his own qualifications. Apply it to any other qualification, as faith in Christ, for instance, or a consistency of character, and you will instantly perceive its absurdity. We must return to the first question: Is baptism prerequisite to the Lord's supper? If it be so, it must belong to the church to judge whether the candidate has been baptized or not. But the *principle* on which the apostle enforces forbearance is often alleged as applicable to this question.—"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye,—for GOD HATH RECEIVED HIM." It is doubtful whether *receiving* here means admission to communion. Mr. Booth has shown that this is not the ordinary meaning of the term; but allowing this to be the meaning, and that God's having received a person furnishes the ground and rule of our receiving him, still there is nothing in our practice inconsistent with it. If receiving a brother here denote receiving him into Christian fellowship, the meaning is, receive him to *the ordinances*, and not to one of them without the other. We are willing to receive all who appear to have been received of God to the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper: if we object, it is because they wish to be received to the one *without the other*, of which there was no example in the first churches. Let it also be particularly noticed, that our brethren who plead for receiving Christians as Christians receive them to *THE ORDINANCES AS UNDERSTOOD AND PRACTISED BY THEM*, and this we do. If the prejudices of a pious catholic would permit him to request to join with them at the Lord's supper, they would, as we have often been told, receive him; but to *what*? Would they provide a wafer for him, and excuse him from drinking of the cup? No; they would say, We are willing to receive you to the Lord's supper, in the way we understand and practise it; but we cannot divide the wine from the bread without dispensing with an essential part of the institution. Such is our answer to a pious Pædobaptist. We are willing to receive you to the ordinances of Christ, as we understand and practise them; but we cannot divide the one from the other without dispensing with an institution of Christ.

OBJECTIONS.

It has been said that "we all practise a worse mixed communion than that with Pædobaptists; that we have *covetous* and other *bad characters* amongst us," &c. If we "bear them that are evil" in things of a moral nature, this is our sin, and we ought to repent of it, and not to argue that because we do wrong in one instance we ought to do so in another. If we omit to admonish and exclude manifestly wicked characters, it is of but little account that we are strict in regard to baptism; but in reproofing us, our Lord would not complain of our not being alike lax in things positive as we are in things moral, but of our not being alike strict in both. "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

There is, however, a wide difference between bearing with individuals, even in things which are evil, where that evil lies so much in the *motive* as to be very difficult of detection, and making it a *rule* to tolerate men in such vices. It was no reproach to Christ and his apostles to have had a Judas amongst them, though he was a "thief," so long as his theft was not manifested; but had there been a *rule* laid down that covetousness and even theft should be *no bar to communion*, the reproach had been indelible.

It has been said, "If our practice of strict communion be right, it ought to be to us an act of *self-denial*, and not of pleasure, inasmuch as charity would be unable to take pleasure in excluding those from communion whom we consider as Christians." And this so far as it relates to men is true, but it is no less true of many other duties, in which we may be called to act differently from our brethren, and to reprove them.

"But in thus denying ourselves," it has been further said, "we deny some of the best feelings of the human heart." This I cannot admit. The best feelings of the human heart are those of love and obedience to God; and if I deny myself of the pleasure which fellowship with a Christian brother would afford me, for the sake of acting up to the mind of Christ, or according to primitive example, I do not deny the best feelings of the human heart, but, on the contrary, forego the less for the greater. It is a greater pleasure to obey the will of God than to associate with creatures in a way deviating from it.

We *may* act in this matter from temper or from prejudice, rather than from a conscientious regard to the mind of Christ; and they who oppose us *may* act from worldly policy, or a desire to court applause as candid and liberal men; but neither of these cases proves any thing. The question is, whether, in admitting unbaptized persons to the Lord's table, we do not deviate from the mind of Christ.

I am willing to allow that open communion *may* be practised from a conscientious persuasion of its being the mind of Christ; and they ought to allow the same of strict communion; and thus, instead of reproaching one another with bigotry on the one hand, or carnal policy on the other, we should confine our inquiries to the precepts and examples of the New Testament.—
I am affectionately yours, ANDREW FULLER.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.

[In reply to a Correspondent.]

THAT there are circumstances attending the worship of God, whether it be moral or positive, which are not the objects of Divine appointment, I allow; such as the tunes in singing, and whether we baptize in a pool or in a river, or drink the wine at the Lord's supper out of a silver or pewter or wooden cup. Each of these is alike indifferent. I do not admit, however, that we have no example of uninspired preaching. On the contrary, we have no proof, that I remember, that even the apostles themselves were under the infallible inspiration of the Holy Spirit in their sermons, nor in all their writings; though they were in those which have place in the Holy Scriptures. Be that as it may: if what every preacher advanced had been inspired, it would itself have contained the oracles of God; but in that case there would have been no propriety in that direction—"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," 1 Pet. iv. 11.

As to our using human compositions in singing, I have sometimes had my doubts whether we ought not to sing the poetical parts of Scripture set to sacred music. I should rejoice to see a book of such Divine hymns introduced into all our churches, taking place of a vast load of trash and insipidity. If we had not hymns inspired, ready to our hands, any more than tunes, I should then think that the composing of the one as well as of the other was a circumstance of worship left to human powers. But be this as it may, whether the hymns we sing be a discretional concomitant of worship or not, this cannot be said of instrumental music. It was from the first a subject of *Divine injunction*. 'The very passage which you have quoted proves this, 2 Chron. xxix. 25-28. You must have seen with what tender regard to Divine authority it was introduced. It was "according to the command of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the command of Jehovah by his prophets." If the writer had designed merely to guard against the idea of David's having done it of his own discretion, he could not have chosen words better adapted to his purpose; and indeed it manifestly appears that this was his design.

But, you say, instrumental music "was not instituted by any express command of the ceremonial law; that it has nothing in it of the nature of a positive institute, and cannot therefore be considered as abolished by the introduction of the gospel." To this I reply—

1. Its not being required by the law of Moses does not prove that it "was not instituted by any express command." You seem to be aware of this, and therefore have softened your position by adding the words, "the law of Moses."

2. Its not being required by the law of Moses does not prove that it was "not a part of the ceremonial law which is abolished by the gospel." A great number of the directions relating to the building of the temple, and the regulation of its worship, were ceremonial, though not commanded "by the law of Moses;" and were all abolished when that temple ceased to exist.—See 1 Chron. xxviii. 11-19. These appendages to the temple could not survive the temple, and it appears that instrumental music was a kind of appendage to the sacrifices of those times. So it seems to be represented in 2 Chron. xxix. 25-28; and it was as much abolished when sacrifices ceased as the others were when the temple was no more.

3. If instrumental music was no part of ceremonial worship, it must have been *moral*; for what has already been advanced proves that it was not a mere discretional circumstance of worship, concerning which no commandment was given. That the vocal praising of God is a moral duty, I allow; but the use of instruments is not so. It is a practice which has every property of a positive institute, and not one, that I recollect, of moral obligation. That all duties, both moral and positive, are *commanded* of God, is true; but what is moral is commanded because it is right, and the motive by which it is enforced is not the mere will of the legislator; whereas that which is positive is right, because it is commanded. The whole authority in the latter case rests upon the Divine command, and this is the ground on which the practice of instrumental music is rested in the Scriptures. It was "according to the commandment of David, and of Gad, and Nathan: for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets," 2 Chron. xxix. 25. This is a kind of language which is never used of *vocal* music, or of any other moral duty, but which exactly accords with what is said of other positive institutions; particularly those which respected the appendages of temple worship, 2 Chron. viii. 14. Another thing by which moral and positive duties are distinguished is, that the former are binding alike in all ages and nations; but the latter, originating in Divine appointment, are binding

only at those places to which the appointment extends. Now you yourself say that instrumental music "was not in general use till David's time, which was five hundred years after the law." If it had been a moral duty, it would have been obligatory at all times, before David's time as well as in it; and we should have read of it, as I think we do of every moral duty, in the New Testament.

4. Your argument from the *worship of heaven* reminds me of the argument in favour of the surplice, from the heavenly inhabitants being clothed "in fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints;" to which Robinson replies, We are sorry to say it is all the righteousness that some saints have! But, seriously, the heavenly employments and enjoyments are frequently illustrated by things borrowed from the Jewish ceremonial, which things were once right, but in our day would be "will-worship," Col. ii. 23. The blessed above are said to be "made kings and priests unto God." In the same chapter in which we read of "harps" we also read of a "temple" and an "altar," in heaven, Rev. xiv. 17, 18. But what would you think of an argument derived from this in favour of modern priests, temples, and altars?

In short, instrumental music, the more I think of it, appears with increasing evidence to be utterly unsuited to the genius of the gospel dispensation. There was a glare, if I may so express it, which characterized even the Divine appointments of Judaism. An august temple, ornamented with gold and silver, and precious stones, golden candlesticks, golden altars, priests in rich attire, trumpets, cymbals, and harps; all of which were adapted to an age and dispensation when the church was in a state of infancy. But when the substance is come, it is time that the shadows flee away. The best exposition of harps in singing is given by Dr. Watts—

"Oh may my heart in tune be found,
Like David's harp of solemn sound."

I CANNOT forbear remarking the great similarity between your reasoning and that of Episcopalians in favour of certain ceremonies to which the puritans objected. They did not pretend that they were *obligatory*, but merely *lawful*; that they had been of Divine authority under the former dispensation, and were now matters of discretion. If this were indeed the case, and they had followed the example of an apostle, they would have relinquished them when they proved an occasion of offence. When some of the Corinthians pleaded for the lawfulness of eating the good creatures of God, though they had been offered in sacrifice to idols, Paul replies, granting them their principle, "Meat commendeth us not to God: for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse." In a similar manner the puritans answered the Episcopalians. Uncommanded ceremonies, granting them to be lawful, commend us not to God; for neither if we use them are we the better, neither if we disuse them are we the worse; and seeing they create much offence, they ought to be relinquished. And thus, though your principles should be true, your practice may be condemned. That for which you plead is confessedly not a duty. It commendeth you not to God; for neither if you make use of instruments are you the better, neither if you disuse them are you the worse; and seeing the use of them occasions offence to many serious minds, it ought to be relinquished.

But as Paul, after granting the Corinthians their argument, and condemning their conduct even on that ground, proceeded to prove that *the thing*

itself was unlawful; so I hope to prove the unlawfulness of instrumental music in Christian worship.

Instrumental music, I grant, was before the times of David; but if it was for the purpose of promoting civil joy, or, when employed in Divine worship authorized by Divine appointment, nothing favourable to your argument can be thence inferred.

Musical instruments were first invented by Jubal, a descendant of Cain, for the promoting of civil mirth; and to this purpose they have been employed in all ages and nations to this day. That they were used in the worship of God before the times of David is true; but it is also true that there was Divine authority for it. Trumpets were appointed to be used on various occasions by the law of Moses (Lev. xxiii. 24; xxv. 9; Numb. x. 1-10); also the psaltery, the harp, and the cymbal. You suppose it was not their *use* in religious worship, but the *manner* of it, that was the object of Divine appointment. The use of them, you suppose, was discretionary, and not appointed; seeing mention is made of them previous to their being employed in the temple service. But the phraseology of the passage in 2 Chron. xxix. 25 does not favour such an idea. Matthew Henry thus expounds it: "While the offerings were burning upon the altar, the Levites sang the song of the Lord, (ver. 27,) the psalms composed by David and Asaph, (ver. 30,) with the musical instruments, which God by his prophets had commanded the use of," ver. 25. It is allowed, however, that the appointment of instrumental music, in the times of David, respected "the special purposes to which it should be applied; but this does not prove that it was not previously appointed for other sacred purposes.

You seem to take it for granted that nothing was appointed of God, unless that appointment was *express*; but God has not always conveyed truth in this manner. Though we read of no express appointment, but merely of things being ordered or done by *men who were Divinely inspired*, yet the same thing is in many cases clearly to be understood. We are not expressly told that God appointed the means of Naaman's cure, namely, his bathing seven times in Jordan; but as a prophet of God directed him to it, we certainly conclude that he did so. The spirit of God that was in the prophet directed it. Thus, though the use of the psaltery, tabret, pipe, and harp, in sacred things, be not expressly commanded till the times of David, yet, being used before his time as the means of prophetic inspiration, their being Divinely appointed for the purpose cannot be denied, 1 Sam. x. 5; 2 Kings iii. 15.

I incline to think that the use of the *timbrel* by Miriam and the women of Israel was merely *civil*, Exod. xv. 20. It was an instrument necessary to the *dance*, and mostly, if not invariably, connected with it. It does not appear to have been used in singing the song of Moses, but at certain intervals. On account of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, one while they sang praises, and another while Miriam and the women went forth with the timbrel and the dance. It was a great national deliverance; and civil joy, with the common expressions of it, were mingled with their praises of Jehovah. But granting it was a part of *religious* exercises, it was introduced by one who in the very act is called "a prophetess," a name which is nowhere else ascribed to her; and no reason that I know of can be given for its being ascribed to her here, but that of intimating that she acted under Divine authority. If, as you contend, it was a part of "discretionary" worship, the same must be said of *dancing*, which accompanied it; and then it would be lawful in our worshipping assemblies to introduce not only the pipe, but the dance.

"Positive institutions," you say, "were confined to time, place, manner, and

other circumstances; but instrumental music was governed by such a variety of discretionary considerations as find no room in the institutes of Judaism. It might be performed at any other time, as well as at the stated periods of public worship; in any place, and on various public occasions, which are not specified by any law." You will allow the offering of sacrifices to have been a part of instituted worship; yet there are almost all the varieties attending it as those which you have mentioned. Those of Abel, Noah, Abraham, and Jacob were not "specified by the letter of any law;" but were offered on a great variety of occasions, and, prior to the time that the ark had rest, at as great a variety of places. Instead, therefore, you might say, of the offering of sacrifice to God possessing every property of a positive institute, it does not appear to possess any of its essentials. The truth is, that not one of the things you mention afford any proof for or against instituted worship; each is equally applicable to *sacrifice* and *praise*, though the one is a positive and the other a moral duty.

Some of the *occasions* you refer to, in which instrumental music is used, might be merely *civil*. Such appears to be the going forth of Jephthah's daughter, with "timbrels and dances," on occasion of his victory over the Ammonites; and the female processions on occasion of David's having slain Goliath, and the Philistines being defeated. A band of Bengal music was sent before Messrs. Thomas and Carey in their curious procession to Bote Haut;* to which, if I had been in their place, I should have had no objection, but rather have enjoyed it, as it was an expression of the civility and friendship of the Booteas. Others I allow were *religious*; as the bringing up of the ark, the building of the city wall, &c. But in these instances there are plain traces of Divine authority, and such as indicate that instrumental music was approved of God, before the arrangement of the temple service. The music used on the former of these occasions must have been previous to this, as it was before the ark had rest. Yet the whole of that solemn procession was "before the Lord," even the exercise of dancing and playing, which exposed David to the revilings of Michal. This was his own defence against her, 2 Sam. vi. 21-23. God accepted the worship too, and punished the reviler. But as Paul inferred from the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice that it was offered "in faith," so may we infer from the acceptance of the worship of David that it was performed in obedience to the Divine will. The conduct of David in praising the Lord with instruments of music is more than once mentioned as a model of *Divine authority* for after-times. Not only did they follow his example in the times of Hezekiah, as being according to the commandment of God and his prophets (2 Chron. xxix. 25); but when the foundation of the second temple was laid, the Levites are said to have "praised the Lord with cymbals, according to the ordinance of David, king of Israel," Ezra iii. 10. And afterwards, when the wall of the city was built, the singers are described as having "the musical instruments of David, the man of God" (Neh. xii. 36); which is a mode of speaking tantamount to their being ascribed to Divine authority. The example of David need not have been alleged, if it had been a mere discretionary matter, and not the performance of a sacred duty.

But, admitting my position, you dispute the *application* of it to the case in hand; arguing that we are allowed to retain some things which are ceremonial, though not obliged to use them as formerly; and instance in prostration, in certain times of worship, and certain garments. I do not know that prostration is ever made a part of instituted worship; it was a posture dictated by a humble spirit in all ages, and is still the same on various occa-

* Period. Accounts of the Baptist Mission, Vol. I. pp. 363, 364.

sions. As to garments, we are allowed to use them in a more civil way, as they were always used, but not as making any part of religious worship. We may wear a linen coat for coolness in summer, and a woollen one for warmth in winter; but if we make them any part of religion, we sin. Such reasoning would justify all the fripperies of modern superstition, most of which may be traced to Jewish origin. The Jews were obliged to worship at certain times, and we may worship at those times. We must worship at some time, and that time may happen to be the same as theirs; but we are not at liberty to choose those times which were then of Divine appointment. If we do, an apostle will be "afraid of us," Gal. iv. 10, 11. Had you only affirmed that what was obligatory on the Jews is with us discretionary in *civil* concerns, I should have had no objection, no, not to instrumental music; but if you make them a part of *worship*, you throw open a door to a flood of corruption.

Of the tribe of Judah, Moses "saith nothing" concerning priesthood. Hence Paul inferred there *was* nothing. Of priests, altars, sacred garments, and instrumental music in Christian worship, the New Testament "saith nothing." Is it improper then to infer that *no such things were known in the times of the first Christians?*

You perceive nothing in instrumental music contrary to the genius of the gospel. Another might say the same of *dancing*. But suppose you were to read in some ancient writer that it was the custom of the primitive churches, when assembled together for worship, to sing with psalteries and harps, and cymbals and organs, and to dance like David before the ark. Would you not suspect the veracity of the writer, or conclude that he had been misinformed? Yet why should you, if there be nothing in these things contrary to the genius of the gospel?

The New Testament speaks of praising God by *singing*, but further it says not. "After supper they sang a hymn."—"I will sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also."—"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord."

Paul speaks more than once in his Epistle to the Corinthians of instruments of music, but not as being used in religion. He describes them as necessary to war, but not to worship; and speaks of them in language of degradation, as "things without life, giving sound." If I have not charity, says he, I am as "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

The history of the church during the first three centuries affords many instances of the primitive Christians engaging in singing; but no mention, that I recollect, is made of instruments. Even in the times of Constantine, when every thing grand and magnificent was introduced into Christian worship, I find no mention made of instrumental music. If my memory does not deceive me, it originated in the dark ages of popery, when almost every other superstition was introduced under the plea of its according with the worship of the Old Testament. At present it is most in use where these kinds of superstitions are most prevalent, and where the least regard is paid to primitive simplicity. I remember lately to have noticed a description of modern Paris, by one of their own writers. "If," says he, "you are attached to religious solemnities, you will find some of all sorts. Catholics, who offer up their prayers to the Deity with the sound of musical instruments. Lutherans, who calmly listen to the lectures from the Bible and the gospel. Theophilanthropists, worshipping deists, who flourish in language, and sing as if they were at the opera."

I conclude with reminding you, that on the principle of *discretionary* worship you may introduce the dance, and commence Welsh Jumpers; the

surplice, and become Episcopalians; and even the mitre, and shake hands with his Holiness. I doubt not but *your* discretion will keep you from these things; but if there be no bar but discretion, I do not know what right you have to censure them in others.

THOUGHTS ON SINGING.

I HAVE long considered the manner in which our singing is conducted as equally contrary to Scripture and reason. The intent of singing is by a musical pronunciation of affecting truth to render it still more affecting. To accomplish this end, the music ought, at all events, to be adapted to the sentiments. As in common speaking there is a sound or modulation of the voice adapted to convey every sentiment or passion of which the human soul is at any time possessed, so I conceive it is in a considerable degree with regard to singing; there are certain airs or tones which are naturally expressive of joy, sorrow, pity, indignation, &c., and the grand art of psalmody seems to consist in applying these to the sentiments required to be sung. When David had composed a divine song, it was delivered to "the chief musician," who set it to sacred music; and the Levites and the people would probably learn both the song and the tune, and sing them on the days appointed for public worship.

Our method of singing is the reverse of this. Some person who has a taste for music composes a *tune*, a *mere* tune, without any sentiments to be expressed. He divides and subdivides his empty sounds into lines and bars, &c. The poet, instead of going before the musician, comes after him; and a hymn is conformed to the tune, instead of a tune to the hymn. The tune being composed to four, six, or eight lines, is applied to any song that is written in these respective measures, and repeated over, without any regard to the meaning, as many times as there are stanzas to be sung!

I do not mean to object to the division of music into parts or breaks, so as to afford proper places for pausing; but this division ought not to be uniform, but governed entirely by the matter to be sung. There ought, I conceive, to be no pauses in music, any more than in speaking, but at the conclusion of a sentence, or of some lesser break in the division of it; and the length of the pause ought to be governed by the meaning in some proportion as it is in reading. Those notes also which belong to words of but little meaning, the mere particles of speech, should be short; and those which belong to words of full meaning should be long and full of sound. Nothing can be more unnatural than for a congregation to dwell in a long-swalling sound upon such words as *that*, *in*, *and*, *from*, *to*, &c., while they skip over words expressing the very burden of the song, as if they were of no account: yet this will frequently and almost constantly be the case while we make hymns to tunes, instead of tunes to hymns.

Our *anthems* appear to me to approach the nearest to the scriptural way of singing; only they possess too much levity for worship, and abound with a number of unnecessary, because unmeaning, repeats.

I have long wished to see introduced into the churches (and I almost believe it will be at some future time) a *selection of divine hymns or songs*, taking place of all human compositions. By divine hymns or songs, I mean the pure word of God translated without any respect to rhyme or number, after the manner of Lowth's Isaiah, and set to plain, serious, and solemn music, adapted to the sentiments.

It has been observed by some of the ablest critics, that the spirit of David's Psalms (and the same would hold true of the other poetic parts of Scripture) can never be preserved in a translation of them into modern verse; but in a translation like our common Bibles, or that of Lowth's Isaiah, it is generally allowed, I believe, that the spirit of them is well preserved. Why then do we not set them as they are to sacred music? It is of a thousand times more importance to preserve the spirit of a psalm or Scripture song than to have it in numbers, even supposing a uniformity in numbers were of advantage.

What is the reason that *Handel's Messiah* has had so great an effect? It is in part owing to the Scriptures appearing in their native majesty, without being tortured into rhyme and number, and set to music adapted to the sentiments. I do not mean to say that Handel's music is in general adapted to Divine worship: it was not designed for it, but rather for a company of musicians who should display their skill. But the same words might be set to plain music without any of those trappings which recommend it to the attention of a merely musical audience. Such a sweetness and majesty is there in the poetic language of Scripture, that if there were nothing offensive in the music, it must needs recommend itself to a serious mind. Without disparaging the labours of any one, there is as great a disproportion between our best compositions and those of the Scriptures, as between the speeches of Job and his friends and the voice of the Almighty.

I am persuaded there are but few, if any, Divine subjects upon which a hymn or song might not be collected from the poetic parts of Scripture. In many instances the whole song might be furnished from a single psalm or chapter: and in others it might be collected from different passages associated together and properly arranged.

EXAMPLES.

I.—A SONG OF PRAISE TO THE REDEEMER.

Taken from Rev. v.

[Redeemed sinners signified by the living creatures and the elders.]

THOU art worthy to take the book,
And to open the seals thereof:
For thou wast slain,
And hast redeemed us to God by thy blood,
Out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;
And hast made us unto our God *kings and priests*:
And we shall *reign* on the earth.

[Thousands of thousands of angels join the song with a loud voice.]

Worthy is the *Lamb* that was *slain*
To receive power, and riches, and wisdom,
And strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!

[The whole intelligent creation in full chorus.]

Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,
Be unto *him* that sitteth upon the *throne*,
And to the *Lamb for ever and ever*!

[Redeemed sinners close the song in humblest prostration.]

AMEN.

The first should be sung, I think, with a soft tenor only, rather increasing in vigour and rapidity in the fifth and following lines;—the second in bold, loud, and animated notes, but not quick: there ought to be a full swell of sound to each of the seven ascriptions;—the third in full chorus, yet not so loud as the second, but more pathetic;—the last, in which they who began

conclude the song, though it be only one word, yet the notes to it should express a heart full of humility and gratitude.

II.—ON RECOVERY FROM SICKNESS.

Taken from Hezekiah's song, Isa. xxxviii. 10-20.

I said in the cutting off of my days,
I shall go to the gates of the grave;
I am deprived of the residue of my years.
I said, I shall not see the Lord,
The Lord, in the land of the living:
I shall behold man no more,
With the inhabitants of the world!

I reckoned till morning, as a lion
So will he break all my bones:
From day to night wilt thou make an end of me!
Like a crane or a swallow, so did I twitter:
I did mourn as a dove: *
Mine eyes fail with looking upward:
O Lord! I am oppressed, undertake for me!
What shall I say? He hath promised, and he hath performed;
I shall go softly all my years,
Remembering the bitterness of my soul!

O Lord, by these things men live,
And in all these is the life of my spirit:
So wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.
Behold, for peace, I had great bitterness;
But thou hast in love to my soul
Delivered it from the pit of corruption:
For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.

The grave cannot praise thee:
They that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.
The living, the living, he shall praise thee:
As I do this day.
The father to the children shall make known thy truth.

The Lord was present to save me.
Therefore will we utter our songs,
All the days of our life, in the house of the Lord.

I will conclude with two or three remarks:—1. It is impossible, whatever skill a person may have in music, to compose a tune properly without entering into the *spirit* of the song.—2. It is manifest, from these examples of sacred song, that the original singing was much of it *responsive*; and that justice cannot otherwise be done to it.—3. The criterion of a good tune is, not its pleasing a scientific ear, but its being quickly caught by a congregation. It is, I think, by singing, as it is by preaching: a fine judge of composition will admire a sermon which yet makes no manner of impression upon the public mind, and therefore cannot be a good one. That is the best sermon which is adapted to produce the best effects; and the same may be said of a tune. If it correspond with the feelings of a pious heart, and aid him in realizing the sentiments, it will be quickly learnt, and sung with avidity. Where this effect is not produced, were I a composer, I would throw aside my performance and try again.

* I recollect, some years ago, when in a very dejected state of mind, hearing some turtle-doves cooing to one another. Their mourning notes made a deep impression upon my heart, their tones being, as I suppose, in unison with its feelings. Had I so much skill in music as to compose a tune to this song, I would ingraft the very moan of the turtle to those words, *I did mourn as a dove*.

MISCELLANEOUS

TRACTS, ESSAYS LETTERS, ETC.

AN ESSAY ON TRUTH:

CONTAINING AN INQUIRY INTO ITS NATURE AND IMPORTANCE, WITH THE CAUSES OF ERROR AND THE REASONS OF ITS BEING PERMITTED

THE multifarious and discordant sentiments which divide mankind afford a great temptation to scepticism, and many are carried away by it. The open enemies of the gospel take occasion from hence to justify their rejection of it; and many of its professed friends have written as if they thought that to be decided amidst so many minds and opinions were almost presumptuous. The principal, if not the only, use which they would make of these differences is to induce a spirit of moderation and charity, and to declaim against bigotry.

To say nothing at present how these terms are perverted and hackneyed in a certain cause, let two things be seriously considered :—First, *Whether this was the use made by the apostles of the discordant opinions which prevailed in their times, even among those who “acknowledged the Divinity of our Saviour’s mission?”* In differences among Christians which did not affect the kingdom of God, nor destroy the work of God, it certainly was; such were those concerning meats, drinks, and days, in which the utmost forbearance was inculcated. But it was otherwise in differences which affected the leading doctrines and precepts of Christianity. Forbearance in these cases would, in the account of the sacred writers, have been a crime. Paul “would they were even cut off” who troubled the Galatian churches by corrupting the Christian doctrine of justification. And it is recorded to the honour of the church at Ephesus, that it “could not bear” them that were evil; but “had tried them who said they were apostles and were not, and found them liars,” Gal. v. 12; Rev. ii. 2. Secondly, *Whether an unfavourable opinion of those who reject what we account the leading principles of Christianity, supposing it to be wrong, be equally injurious with a contrary opinion, supposing that to be wrong?* To think unfavourably of another does not affect his state towards God: if, therefore, it should prove to be wrong, it only interrupts present happiness. We have lately been told indeed, but from what authority I cannot conceive, that “the readiest way in the world to thin heaven, and to replenish the regions of hell, is to call in the spirit of bigotry.” Far be it from me to advocate the cause of bigotry, or to plead for a bitter, censorious spirit, a spirit that would confine the kingdom of heaven to a party; but I do not perceive how this spirit, bad as it is, is productive of the effects ascribed to it. If, on the other hand, through an aversion to bigotry, we treat those as Christians to whom an apostle would at least have said, “I stand in doubt of you,” we flatter and deceive them;

which is really "the readiest way in the world to thin heaven, and to replenish the regions of hell."

Surely there is a medium between bigotry and esteeming and treating men as Christians irrespective of their avowed principles. Certainly a benevolent and candid treatment is due to men of all denominations; but to consider all principles as equally safe is to consider truth as of no importance.

Let us candidly inquire, Christian reader, whether, notwithstanding the diversity of sentiments in the Christian world, truth may not be clearly ascertained? Whether it be not of the utmost importance? Whether the prevalence of error may not be accounted for? And lastly, Whether the wisdom as well as the justice of God may not be seen in his permitting it?

WHAT IS TRUTH?

In attempting to answer this question, I desire to take nothing for granted but that Christianity is of God, and that the Scriptures are a revelation of his will. If Christianity be of God, and he has revealed his will in the Holy Scriptures, light is come into the world, though the dark minds of sinful creatures comprehend it not. It does not follow, because many wander in mazes of fruitless speculation, that there is not a way so plain that a wayfaring man, or one who "walketh in the truth," though a fool, shall not err. The numerous sects among the Greeks and Romans, and even among the Jews at the time of our Saviour's appearing, did not prove that there was no certain knowledge to be obtained of what was truth. Our Lord considered himself as speaking plainly, or he would not have asked the Jews as he did, "Why do ye not understand my speech?" The apostles and primitive believers saw their way plainly; and though we cannot pretend to the extraordinary inspiration which was possessed by many of them, yet if we humbly follow their light, depending on the ordinary teachings of God's Holy Spirit, we shall see ours.

Truth, we may be certain, is the same thing as what in the Scriptures is denominated "the gospel"—"the common salvation"—"the common faith"—"the faith once delivered to the saints"—"the truth as it is in Jesus," &c.; and what this is may be clearly understood by the brief summaries of the gospel, and of the faith of the primitive Christians, which abound in the New Testament. Of the former, the following are a few of many examples:—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—The Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost.—I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.—To him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.—I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.—Moreover, brethren, 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 hold fast what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain; for 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.—This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*, of whom I am chief.—This is *the record*, that *God hath given to us eternal life*, and

this life is *in his Son*.—Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”

If language has any determinate meaning, it is here plainly taught that mankind are not only sinners, but in a *lost* and perishing condition, without help or hope but what arises from the free grace of God, through the atonement of his Son; that he died as our substitute; that we are forgiven and accepted only for the sake of what he hath done and suffered; that in his person and work all evangelical truth concentrates; that the doctrine of salvation for the chief of sinners through his death was so familiar in the primitive times as to become a kind of Christian proverb, or *saying*; and that on our receiving and retaining this depends our present *standing* and final *salvation*. If this doctrine be received, Christianity is received; if not, the record which God hath given of his Son is rejected, and he himself treated as a liar.

When this doctrine is received in the true spirit of it, which it never is but by a sinner ready to perish, all those fruitless speculations which tend only to bewilder the mind will be laid aside; just as malice, and guile, and envies, and evil speakings are laid aside by him who is born of God. They will fall off from the mind, like the coat of the chrysalis, of their own accord. Many instances of this are constantly occurring. Persons who, after having read and studied controversies, and leaned first to one opinion and then to another, till their minds have been lost in uncertainty, have at length been brought to think of the gospel, not as a matter of speculation, but as that which seriously and immediately concerns them; and, embracing it as good news to them who are ready to perish, have not only found rest to their souls, but all their former notions have departed from them as a dream when one awaketh.

Corresponding with the brief summaries of the gospel are the concise accounts given of the *faith* of the primitive Christians.—“Whosoever believeth that *Jesus is the Christ* is born of God.”—“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that *Jesus is the Son of God*?”—“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth *the Lord Jesus*, and believe in thine heart that *God hath raised him from the dead*, thou shalt be saved.” The sacred writers did not mean, by this language, to magnify the belief of one or two Divine truths at the expense of others; but to exhibit them as bearing an inseparable connexion; so that if these were truly embraced, the other would be certain to accompany them. They considered the doctrine of the person and work of Christ as a golden link, that would draw along with it the whole chain of evangelical truth. Hence we perceive the propriety of such language as the following:—“He that *hath the Son* hath life; and he that *hath not the Son* hath not life.”—“Whosoever *denieth the Son*, the same hath not the Father.”

The doctrine and the faith of the primitive Christians were summarily avowed every time they celebrated the *Lord's supper*. The leading truth exhibited by that ordinance is the same which John calls “the record;” namely, that “God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” Under the form of a feast, of which we are invited to take, to eat, and to drink, are set forth the blessings of the New Testament, or covenant, and the medium through which they were obtained; namely, “the blood of Jesus, shed for many for the remission of sins; and the way in which they must be received; that is to say, as a *free gift*, bestowed on the unworthy for his sake. If this simple doctrine were believed with the spirit of a little child, and lived upon as our meat and drink, we might take an everlasting leave of speculations on things beyond our reach; and that without sustaining the loss of any thing but what were better lost than retained.

IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH.

If the above remarks may be thought sufficient to ascertain what is truth, its *importance* follows as a necessary consequence. If, as transgressors, we be exposed to the eternal displeasure of our Maker—if a door of hope be opened to us—if it be at no less an expense than the death of God's only begotten Son in our nature—if, through this great propitiation, God can be just, and the justifier of believers—finally, if this be the only way of escape, and the present the only state in which it is possible to flee to it for refuge, who, that is not infatuated by the delusions of this world, can make light of it? There is an importance in truth, as it relates to philosophy, history, politics, or any other branch of science, inasmuch as it affects the present happiness of mankind; but what is this when compared with that which involves their everlasting salvation? To be furnished with an answer to the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" is of infinitely greater account than to be able to decide whether the Ptolemaic or Copernican system be that of nature. The temporal salvation of a nation, great as it is, and greatly as it interests the minds of men, is nothing when compared with the eternal salvation of a single individual.

But many, who would not deny the superior value of eternal salvation to all other things, have yet gone about to depreciate the importance of Divine truth, and to represent it as having no necessary connexion with either present holiness or future happiness. Such appears to have been the design of those well-known lines of Pope:—

"For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

And to the same purpose we have often been told in prose that *we shall not be judged at the last day by our opinions, but by our works*. If truth and error existed in the mind merely as *opinions*, or objects of speculation, they might possibly have but little influence upon us; but if they be *principles* of action, they enter into the essence of all we do. Such is the influence of living faith, otherwise it could not be *shown by our works*;* and such is that of the belief of falsehood, else we had not read of the word of false teachers "eating as doth a gangrene."† The *works* by which we shall be judged cannot mean actions, *in distinction* from their principles, (for as such they would contain neither good nor evil,) but *as connected with them*. All pretences, therefore, to separate the one from the other are as contrary to reason as to Scripture.

To render this subject more evident, let the following particulars be duly considered:—

First, *It is by the belief of truth that sinners are brought into a state of salvation*.—Great things are ascribed in the Scriptures to faith; but faith could have no existence without revealed truth as its foundation. Whatever importance, therefore, attaches to the one attaches to the other. The great blessing of justification is constantly ascribed to faith, not as the reward of a virtue, but as that by which we become one with Christ, and so partakers of his benefits. While unbelievers, we have no revealed interest in the Divine favour; but are declared to be under condemnation; but, believing in him, we are no longer "under the law," as a term of life and death, but "under grace." Hence it is that, in the gospel, as *heard and received*, we are said to *stand*. Take away evangelical truth, and you take away the *standing* of a Christian. Bereaved of this, the best man upon earth must despair of salvation.

* James ii. 18.

† Γαγγραινα, 2 Tim. ii. 17.

Secondly, *Truth is the model and standard of true religion in the mind.*—That doctrines, whether true or false, if really believed, become *principles* of action—that they are a mould into which the mind is cast, and from which it receives its impression—is evident both from Scripture and experience. An observant eye will easily perceive a *spirit* which attaches to the different species of religion; and which, over and above the diversities arising from natural temper, will manifest itself in their respective followers. Paganism, Mahomedism, deism, apostate Judaism, and various systems which have appeared under the name of Christianity, have each discovered a *spirit* of its own. Thus also it was from the beginning. Those who received *another doctrine* received with it *another spirit*; and hence we read of “the *spirit* of truth” and “the *spirit* of error.” He that had the one is said to be “of God,” and he that had the other “not of God,” 2 Cor. xi. 4; 1 John iv. 6.

Revealed truth is represented as “a *form* of doctrine” into which believers are “delivered,” Rom. vi. 17. As a melted substance, cast into a mould, receives its form from it, and every line in the one corresponds with that of the other; so true religion in the soul accords with true religion in the Scriptures. Without this standard, we shall either model our faith by our own preconceived notions of what is fit and reasonable, or be carried away by our feelings, and lose ourselves among the extravagant vagaries of enthusiasm. Our views may seem to us very rational, or our feelings may be singularly ardent; and yet we may be far from being in the right. The question is, Whether they agree line to line with the Divine model? God saith, in his word, “Seek ye my face.” If our hearts say unto him, “Thy face, Lord, will we seek;” then does line answer to line; and this is true religion. Is it a leading feature of evangelical truth that it honours the Divine character and government? It is the same with true religion in the mind. Does that manifest love even to enemies? So does this? Is it the object of the former to abase the pride of man? It is no less the nature of the latter to rejoice in lying low. Finally, Is the one averse from all iniquity, and friendly to universal holiness? The other, dissatisfied with present attainments, “presseth towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Thirdly, *Truth is that which furnishes the motive for every exercise of true holiness.*—If once we are enabled to behold its glory, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, it changes us into the same image, begets and excites holy affections, and every kind of gracious exercise. Hence we are said to *know* the truth, and the truth to make us free; to be *sanctified* through it, and *begotten* by it, John viii. 32; xvii. 17; James i. 18.

It is not denied that there is much of what is called *morality* in persons who know and believe nothing to purpose of evangelical truth. Honour, interest, and the habits of education, will induce men to shun open immoralities, and to comply with things which are reputable and praiseworthy. But though there be great cause for thankfulness to God, who, by his providence, thus restrains mankind from much evil; yet this is not holiness. Holiness is the love of God and one another; whereas this is mere self-love. All works and worship of this kind are no better than the offering of Cain, which, being without faith, could not please God.

And as there may be a semblance of holiness without faith, so there may be a semblance of faith without holiness. The doctrines of the Bible, though in themselves practical, yet may be treated as mere speculations, and frequently are so by men who profess to believe them; and, where this is the case, instead of producing holiness, they may have a contrary effect: but this is owing to their being perverted. God's words do good to the upright.

There is not a sentiment in the living oracles but what, if received in the true spirit and intent of it, will contribute to the sanctification of the mind.

True religion is, with great beauty and propriety, called *walking in the truth*. A life of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, is Christian principle reduced to practice. Truth is a system of love, an overflow of the Divine *blessedness*, as is intimated by its being called "the glorious gospel of the *blessed* God:" a system of reconciliation, peace, and forgiveness; full of the most amazing condescension, and of spotless rectitude. To *walk* in truth like this is to walk in love, to be tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us; to be of the same mind with him who "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant;" and "to be holy in all manner of conversation."

Such were the fruits of truth which were actually brought forth by the primitive believers; and such, in different degrees, notwithstanding the many defects and scandals which abound among us, are the fruits of it in true Christians to this day. Thousands of examples, both in earlier and later times, might be produced, in which men who previously walked according to the course of this world, in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness, in strife and envying, on embracing the doctrine of Christ crucified have put off all these, and become as it were new creatures.

It is also worthy of special notice, that, in every instance in which the primitive churches deviated from the *doctrine* of the apostles, they appear to have degenerated as to zeal and practical godliness. A careful review of the Epistles to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Hebrews, who departed more than any other churches from the simplicity of the gospel, would furnish proof of the justness of this remark. It was not without reason that Paul observed to the Corinthians, "evil communications corrupt good manners;" by which he appears to have meant the communications of false teachers, who endeavoured to undermine the resurrection, and other important truths. And such was the corruption of manners which accompanied these notions, that, degenerate as we consider ourselves, compared with the primitive Christians, if any one of our churches tolerated the same things, we should be almost ready to pronounce it a synagogue of Satan. Among other things they divided into parties, boasted of the talents of their preachers, connived at the most unnatural kind of fornication, went to law with one another, communed with idolaters at their temples, and profaned the supper of the Lord by appropriating it to purposes of sensual indulgence! Such were the fruits of error.

If we look into the Epistle to the Galatians, who had been turned aside from the apostolic doctrine of justification, we shall find fruits of the same kind. They are described as *not obeying the truth*, as *foolish*, as in a manner *bewitched*; as having lost their former *zeal*, and rendered their Christianity a matter of *doubt*; as needing to have "Christ again formed in them:" and it is strongly intimated that they were guilty of *biting*, and as it were *devouring* one another, of "fulfilling the lusts of the flesh," and of coveting "vain-glory, provoking one another, and envying one another."—See chap. iii. 1; iv. 11, 19, 20; v. 7, 15, 16, 26.

If the Hebrews had not, in turning aside from the truth, been injured in their spirit and conduct, it is very improbable that such language as the following would have been addressed to them: "Wherefore, as the Holy Spirit saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their hearts, and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall

not enter into my rest.—Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of *you* an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God!—Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!” Neither is it likely, if no symptoms had appeared among them, that they would have been exhorted to “look diligently lest any man should fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up should trouble them, and thereby many be defiled; lest there should be any *fornicator*, or *profane person*, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” Finally, It is not probable that so solemn a warning against whoredom and adultery would have been introduced, and the offenders cited as it were to the tribunal of God, if there had been no occasion for it in their own conduct.—Chap. iii. 7–13; xii. 12, 13, 15, 16; xiii. 4.

Whether these instances of the pernicious effects of error in the primitive churches be not in direct opposition to the modern notions before stated, let the reader judge. Nor are such things peculiar to the primitive churches. If you see men desert the principles before stated, or hold them in a corrupted sense, you may commonly perceive a change in their *spirit*. They may retain what is called character, in the eyes of the world; but the savour of godliness is departed. They may retain their zeal; but it will be confined to some little peculiarity, to the neglect of the common faith. There will be a want of that lovely *proportion* which constitutes the true beauty of holiness. A man who chews opium, or tobacco, may prefer it to the most wholesome food, and may derive from it pleasure, and even vigour for a time; but his pale countenance, and debilitated constitution, will soon bear witness to the folly of spending his money for that which is not bread.

Fourthly, *The love which the primitive Christians bore to one another was, FOR THE TRUTH'S SAKE*, 2 John 2; 3 John 1.—Now that *for the sake of which* we love a person is considered as of greater importance than any thing else pertaining to him. It is that which constitutes his value in our esteem; and which if he abandon, we should no longer esteem him.

Here we may perceive what is essential to the true legitimate *charity* of the primitive Christians. Instead of regarding men irrespectively of their principles, they “knew no man after the flesh.” John, who was the most loving, or charitable, perhaps, of all the disciples of Christ, is so far from considering a departure from the truth as a light matter, and the subject of it as entitled to the same Christian affection as heretofore, that he expressly writes as follows:—“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, *hath not God*.—If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, *receive him not into your house*, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is *partaker of his evil deeds*.” Would not such language, I ask, in our days be reckoned very uncharitable? It would. But this proves, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the common ideas of charity are antisciptural. Charity will not take it for granted that whosoever deviates from *our* views must needs deviate from the doctrine of Christ; but will carefully inquire at the oracles of God, what is truth? Yet there is no need of being ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of it. The lady whom John addressed was supposed to be able to distinguish between those who *brought the doctrine of Christ* and those who came without it; and so are Christians in the present day. Charity *hopeth all things*, and will always put the most favourable construction upon the motives of others that truth will admit; but without truth, as its ground and guide, it will not proceed.

Here also we may see the nature of Christian *unity*. It is not merely for two or more persons to be *agreed*; for this they may be in evil. This is mere party attachment. It is natural for men to love those who think and

act like themselves, and that *for their own sake*. But *Christian* unity is to love one another *for Christ's sake*, and *for the truth's sake* that dwelleth in them. Christ, as revealed in the gospel, forms the great point of union. A number of minds are drawn towards this point; and the nearer they approximate to it, the nearer they approach to a union with one another. If all true Christians were nearer to the mind of Christ, their differences would soon subside; and they would feel themselves, as they approached it, to be of one heart and of one soul.

Lastly, *Truth is the only solid foundation of peace and happiness*.—There are cases, it is granted, in which the mind may rejoice in error, or be distressed by truth. False doctrine will operate like opium, filling the imagination with pleasing dreams; but all is transient and delusive. Truth, on the other hand, when it barely commendeth itself to the conscience of a sinner, may render him extremely unhappy. Such was the effect of Judas's conviction of Christ's innocence; and such is the effect of similar convictions in the present times. But where truth takes possession of the heart—or, as the Scriptures express it, where we “receive the love of the truth”—peace and joy accompany it. This is a fact established by history and experience, and is easily accounted for. Revealed truth carries in it a message of pardon, reconciliation, and eternal life; and all in a way honourable to the Divine character and government. This, in itself, is good news; and to every one who, as a sinner ready to perish, receiveth it, is a source of solid and lasting happiness. Truth also pours light upon all the dark and mysterious events of time, and teaches us, while weeping over human misery, not to despond or repine; but, viewing things on a large scale, to rejoice in whatever is. It exhibits God upon the throne of the universe, ordering every thing for the best; and thus reconciles the mind to present ill, by pointing it to the good that shall ultimately rise out of it.

Contrast with this the horrible complaints of an infidel. “Who can, without horror, consider the whole earth as the empire of destruction? It abounds in wonders; it abounds also in victims; it is a vast field of carnage and contagion. Every species is, without pity, pursued and torn to pieces, through the earth, and air, and water! In man there is more wretchedness than in all other animals put together. He smarts continually under two sources which other animals never feel; anxiety, and listlessness in appetite, which makes him weary of himself. He loves life, and yet he knows that he must die. If he enjoy some transient good, for which he is thankful to Heaven, he suffers various evils, and is at last devoured by worms. This knowledge is his fatal prerogative. Other animals have it not. He feels it every moment rankling and corroding in his breast. Yet he spends the transient moment of his existence in diffusing the misery which he suffers; in cutting the throats of his fellow creatures for pay; in cheating and being cheated; in robbing and being robbed; in serving, that he may command; and in repenting of all that he does. The bulk of mankind are nothing more than a crowd of wretches, equally criminal and unfortunate; and the globe contains rather carcasses than men. I tremble, upon a review of this dreadful picture, to find that it implies a complaint against PROVIDENCE; and *I wish that I had never been born!*”^{*} Such is the boasted happiness of unbelievers!

And though we should not go these lengths, yet, if we forsake truth, by deviating materially from any of the great doctrines of the gospel, it will affect our peace. Error is the wandering of the mind when it thinks without a guide; the issue of which is “stumbling upon the dark mountains.”

* Voltaire.

It is possible, in such circumstances, that the stupor of insensibility may be mistaken for the peace of God; but if the soul be once roused from its slumber, especially if it be the subject of any true religion, it will find itself miserable. As soon might we expect to find happiness in the mind of one who has lost its way, and knoweth not whither he goeth, as in a mind that has deviated from evangelical truth.

CAUSES OF ERROR.

If truth be of this importance, it may be inquired, How are we to account for the great diversity of sentiment in the religious world? Whence is it that professing Christians, even the wise and the good among them, should be so divided?

It certainly is not owing to any thing in Christianity itself. This will be found, on the strictest inquiry, to be one consistent whole, and all its precepts tend to unity of judgment, as well as of affection. To this end were all the Epistles addressed to the primitive churches. In some, the writers labour to establish them in the truth; in others, to reclaim them from error; in all, to promote a holy unanimity in principle and practice.

Yet, if we look to *fact*, we find that the churches, even in the purest ages, were never free from error. It was beyond the power of the apostles, inspired as they were, effectually to guard them against it. Of this the aforementioned Epistles to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Hebrews, are standing proofs; and in after-ages things were much worse. Those principles which at first were but the bud, or at most the blade, now became the full ear, and produced a harvest of corruption and apostacy. The history of Christianity, from that day to this, is the history of one continued struggle between truth and error; the mind of Christ, and the reasonings of the flesh. Nor was this state of things unknown to the apostles; they saw, in their times, *the mystery of iniquity begin to work*, and by the Spirit of inspiration foretold its progress. "In the latter times," say they, "some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons."—"In the last days perilous times shall come, in which men shall be lovers of their own selves; ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." And that, "as there were false prophets among the [Jewish] people, so there should be false teachers among [Christians], who would bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them; and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

What shall we say then? Shall we attribute the multifarious and discordant doctrines of past and present times to diversity of habits, educations, and connexions; to the various tastes and talents found among men; or to the frailty and imbecility of the human mind? These things may be allowed to have their influence; but it is not to them principally that the Scriptures attribute the corruption of Christian doctrine or worship.

There is an important difference between *diversity* and *contrariety*. The former belongs to men as men, which the latter does not. One man comprehends more of truth, another less; this has a talent for discovering one part of truth, and that another; but in all this there is nothing *discordant*, any more than in a diversity of features, or in the variegated face of the earth, which abounds in divers kinds of flowers, every one of which contributes to the beauty of the whole. It is not so with respect to truth and error, which are as opposite as right and wrong. True doctrines are the plants, and false doctrines the weeds, of the church. They cannot both flourish in the same mind. The one must be rooted up, or the other will be overrun and rendered unproductive.

The causes which the Scriptures assign for the corruption of Christian

doctrine are principally, if not entirely, of a *moral* nature. They represent evangelical truth as a holy doctrine, and as that which cannot be understood by an unholy mind. "The natural," or mere worldly wise, "man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." They are "hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes;" and thus "it seemeth good in his sight" whose mind it is to abase the pride of man. If the gospel had been "the wisdom of this world," the "spirit of this world" would have sufficed to understand it; and there would be no more errors concerning it than what arise from the imbecility of the human mind on all other subjects; but it is not: it is the wisdom that is from above, and therefore requires a state of mind suited to it; or, as the apostle expresses it, that "we receive not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are freely given us of God." Now, this being the case, so far as we attempt to judge, preach, or write of the gospel, under the influence of mere worldly wisdom, or in any other than its own spirit, we are morally certain, in some way or other, to pervert it.

Here then are opened to our view *three* grand sources of error; namely, The number of unconverted or mere worldly-wise characters who intrude themselves or are intruded by others into the Christian ministry—the greater number of merely nominal Christians, whose taste calls for antisciptural preaching—and the large portion of unsanctified wisdom found even in godly men.

First, The great number of *unconverted ministers*. Far be it from me to judge of men otherwise than by what they manifest themselves to be. I abhor the spirit of our modern Antinomians, who would persuade us that they know good ministers from others by a kind of spiritual physiognomy; but who, if the tree be known by its fruits, have much more reason to judge themselves. Yet the personal religion of many preachers must be allowed by charity itself to wear more than a suspicious appearance; nor is it surprising that it should be so. If, in the purest age of the church, when there were but few attractions for covetousness and ambition, there were "men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith;" men who had "the form of godliness, but denied the power thereof;" is it any wonder that there should be such in our times? And as the introduction of almost every error among the primitive Christians is attributed to this sort of characters, is it not reasonable to expect that things should move on in the same direction?

An unrenewed person, whatever be his education, talents, or natural temper, can never fall in with Christianity as it is taught in the New Testament. If, therefore, he occupy a station in the church, he will be almost certain to transform religion so as to suit himself. This, it is clear, was the grand source of the Romish apostacy. No sooner was Christianity adopted by the state than it became the interest of worldly men to profess it. Ecclesiastical offices were soon filled, in a great degree, by unbelievers in disguise. The effect was, as might have been expected, the doctrine, worship, discipline, and spirit of the gospel were gradually lost, and a system of corruption was substituted in their place.

This has been a source of departure from the truth down to the present times; and that, in different degrees, among all denominations of Christians. If we look into the establishments of Protestant Europe, we shall find that, in spite of oaths and subscriptions, devised in former ages for the security of orthodoxy, worldly men have a system of their own, and will explain their articles and creeds according to it. Or, if we look out of establishments, wherever worldly men are admitted to the work of the ministry, we shall find things much the same. Some of the greatest perverters of the

gospel, during the last century, have descended from pious parents, who, fond of the idea of bringing up their children to the public service of God, overlooked the necessity of personal religion; presuming, as it would seem, that God would in due time supply that defect. The consequence was, the young men, finding evangelical truth sit uneasily upon them, threw it off, and embraced a system more suited to the state of their minds.

Observing these things among men of education, many serious people have contracted a prejudice against learning itself; and have preferred the preaching of the most illiterate, for the sake of a pure doctrine. But neither is this any security; for men of assurance and address, pretending to extraordinary light and marvellous inspirations, will often obtrude themselves upon the people and draw disciples after them, especially from among the unthinking and light-minded part of Christian professors. In them the words of Peter have been eminently fulfilled: "Speaking great swelling words of vanity, they have allured, through the lusts of the flesh, those that for a while were escaped from them who live in error." Nor has their influence been confined to such characters: sincere people have frequently been misled by their specious pretences. When Judas, professing a solicitude for the poor, condemned an expression of love to Christ as an unnecessary piece of wastefulness, he drew away the other disciples after him. In short, men who have not the spirit by which the gospel was dictated will not cleave to it. Some may err on this side, some on that; some having greater talents may do greater injury to it, and others less; but all in one way or other will pervert it: and, where this is the case, "many will follow their pernicious ways; and the way of truth," being confounded with them, "will be evil spoken of."

Secondly, The great number of merely *nominal Christians*.—In the present state of things, the bulk of mankind are not governed by principle, but by custom—following the course of this world, whatever direction it may take. In one country they are heathens, in another Mahomedans, and in another Christians; in other words, they are of *no religion*. The effect of this is, that a large proportion of ministers are certain to be nominated and chosen by men who have no taste for the searching, humbling, and holy doctrine of the gospel, but are utterly averse from it; and, where this is the case, it requires but little discernment to perceive what will be the general tone of preaching. Even in congregational churches, if the people, or the leading individuals among them, be worldly-minded, ambitious, or in any respect loose livers, they will not be at a loss to find preachers after their own heart. Thus error is propagated, and thus it was propagated from a very early period. "The time will come," said Paul to Timothy, "when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

Thirdly, The large portion of *unsanctified wisdom found even in godly men*.—The wisdom of this world, as opposed to the wisdom of God, is not confined to mere worldly men. The apostle, after speaking of spiritual men as "judging all things," and as "having the mind of Christ," adds, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal; even as unto babes in Christ." And this, their carnality, is represented as rendering them unable to understand the great doctrines of Christianity, which are compared to *meat*, and as leading them to build upon the gospel foundation a mixture of "wood, and hay, and stubble;" all of which shall be burnt up another day, though they themselves are to be saved, 1 Cor. ii. 6, 7, 12, 15, 16; iii. 1, 2, 12–17.

There is a *slowness of heart* even in good men to believe what God has

revealed, especially if it clash with their preconceived ideas. Such was the state of mind of the apostles themselves previously to the resurrection of their Lord; and such is the state of mind of great numbers among us. We often hear men in controversy talk of being open to conviction and willing to retract their sentiments if but fairly confuted; but such professions either mean but little, or at best indicate a great want of self-knowledge. Those who are the most open to conviction will commonly suspect themselves the most, and of course will not be very forward in the use of such language. If there were not a *slowness of heart*, both in receiving truth and relinquishing error, a large proportion of our controversies would soon be at an end.

REASONS WHY ERROR IS PERMITTED.

The foregoing remarks may suffice to account for the prevalence of error, so far as *man* is concerned; but it may be further inquired, Wherefore doth *God* permit it? Why is it that the beauty of the Christian church is suffered to be marred and its peace invaded by a succession of perpetual discords? This is an awful subject; and if we were left to our own conjectures upon it, it would be our wisdom to leave it to the great day when all things will be made manifest: but we are not. The Scriptures of truth inform us that "there must needs be heresies, that they who are approved may be made manifest."

All the influences to which they are exposed, in the present life, are adapted to a state of probation, and to do us good or harm according to the state of mind which we possess. We are not only fearfully made, but as fearfully situated. The evidence in favour of true religion is sufficient for a candid mind, but not for one that is disposed to cavil. If we attend to it simply to find out truth and obey it, we shall not be disappointed; but if our souls be lifted up within us, the very Rock of salvation will be to us a stone of stumbling. The Jews required a sign *in their own way*: "Let him come down from the cross," said they, "and we will believe him." If he had *publicly* risen from the dead, say modern unbelievers, none could have doubted it.—Yet he neither came down from the cross nor rose publicly from the dead; and let them say, if they please, that he could not, and that all his miracles were the work of imposture. It may be *our* duty, as much as in us lies, to cut off occasion from them who desire occasion; but God often acts otherwise. They who *desire* a handle to renounce the gospel shall have it. Thus it is that men are *tried* by false doctrine, and even by the immoralities of professing Christians.

The visible kingdom of Christ is a floor containing a mixture of wheat and chaff; and every false doctrine is a wind, which he, whose fan is in his hand, makes use of to purge it. There are great numbers of characters who profess to receive the truth, on whom, notwithstanding, it never sat easily. Its holy and humbling nature galls their spirits. In such cases, the mind is prepared to receive any representation of the gospel, however fallacious, that may comport with its desires; and being thus averse to the truth, God, in just judgment, frequently suffers the winds of false doctrine to sweep them away. Such is the account prophetically given of the chief instruments in the Romish apostacy. The introduction of that mystery of iniquity is thus described: "Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Not only is *false* doctrine permitted, that it may sweep away hypocritical

characters, but the *discordance* which appears among the professors of Christianity is itself a temptation to many, and that in divers ways. Some, who consider themselves as almost if not altogether infallible, are hereby furnished with a plea for *intolerance and persecution*. In this way it operated much in former ages, and a portion of it is still prevalent among us. You see, say they, whither this liberty of conscience will lead men. If they be left to themselves, and form their own notions of religion, there will be no end to their errors and divisions, and to the sects that will arise out of them. Thus the catholics attempted to discredit the Reformation; and thus some protestants have endeavoured to discredit congregational church government, as fruitful of sects and divisions. But if either of them were required to prove that there is less error or opposition among themselves than among their neighbours, they might find it a difficult task. On one side, men find it necessary either not to think at all, or to conceal their sentiments; on the other, they speak and write their minds with greater freedom; but things are what they are, whether they be avowed or not. He who persecutes men for their errors may at last be found equally erroneous himself; but allowing that he is not, and that his creed is orthodox, yet he is far from being "sound in the faith," in the scriptural sense of the words. He "knoweth not what manner of spirit he is of." He may be willing to fight; but has yet to learn what are those weapons by which the soldiers of the Lamb are enabled to overcome.

Others, on the same ground, have *rejected all religion*. You cannot agree, say they, as to what is truth; settle it among yourselves before you attempt to trouble us with it. Very well: if you can satisfy your consciences with this evasion, do so. It will not avail you at death or judgment. You will then be reminded that you did not reason thus in things to which your *hearts were inclined*; but applied with all your powers, and used every possible means, to ascertain the truth for yourselves, and acted accordingly. On your own principles, therefore, will you be judged.

Others, who have not gone these lengths, have yet been tempted to despair of finding out what is the true religion. Amidst the opposition of opinion which continually presents itself before us, say they, how are we plain people to judge and act?—If you mean to intimate that it is vain for you to concern yourselves about it, that is the same as saying, it is vain to attempt any thing that is accompanied with difficulties, or to walk in any way that is attended with temptations; and this would lead you to stand still in other things as well as in religion. But if it be the real desire of your soul to know the right way and walk in it, there is no reason to despair. Follow no man as your guide; but go to your Bible and your God, and there decide the question. You need not say in your heart, "Who shall ascend into heaven? or who shall descend into the deep?" The word is nigh thee. To read controversial books may, in many cases, be useful; but seldom when it is done with a view to decide the great question, What is the right way to everlasting life? A book, as well as a sermon, *may* be the means of affording such direction. But when the mind is in a state of suspense, it is beyond all comparison the safest to consult the oracles of God. To launch into controversy, without having obtained satisfaction on the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, is to put to sea in a storm without a rudder. One great reason why men are "carried about with divers and strange doctrines" is—their "hearts are not established with grace." They have no principles of their own, and therefore are carried away with any thing that wears the appearance of plausibility.

But one of the worst inferences drawn from the discordant doctrines which abound in the world is that doctrine itself is of little or no account. As

intolerance and bigotry, under the specious name of zeal, distinguished former ages, so sceptical indifference, under the specious names of candour, liberality, and moderation, distinguishes this. This is the grand temptation, perhaps, of the present times. It would seem as if men must either fight for truth with carnal weapons, or make peace with error; either our religious principles must be cognizable by human legislators, or they are neither good nor evil, and God himself must not call us to account for them; either we must call men masters upon earth, or deny that we have any master, even in heaven.

It is a favourite principle with unbelievers, and with many professing Christians who verge towards them, that error not only has its seat in the mind, but that it is *purely* intellectual, and therefore *innocent*. Hence they plead against all church censures, and every degree of unfavourable opinion on account of doctrinal sentiments, as though it were a species of persecution. But if the causes of error be principally *moral*, it will follow that such conclusions are as contrary to reason as they are to Scripture.

The above remarks are far from being designed to cherish a spirit of bitterness against one another, as men, or as Christians. There is a way of viewing the corruption and depravity of mankind, so as to excite bitterness and wrath, and every species of evil temper; and there is a way of viewing them, that, without approving or conniving at what is wrong, shall excite the tear of compassion. It does not become us to declaim against the wickedness of the wicked in a manner as if we expected grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles; but while we prove ourselves the decided friends of God, to bear good-will to men. It becomes those who may be the most firmly established in the truth as it is in Jesus, to consider that a portion of the errors of the age, in all probability, attaches to them; and though it were otherwise, yet they are directed to carry it benevolently towards others who may err: "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

Finally, There is an important difference between razing the foundation, and building upon that foundation a portion of wood, and hay, and stubble. It becomes us not to make light of either; but the latter may be an object of forbearance, whereas the former is not. With the enemies of Christ, we ought, in religious matters, to make no terms; but towards his friends, though in some respects erroneous, it behoves us to come as near as it is possible to do, without a dereliction of principle. A truly Christian spirit will feel the force of such language as the following, and will act upon it: "All that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, grace be unto them, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.—Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity!"

THE MANNER IN WHICH DIVINE TRUTH IS COMMUNICATED IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

It is a fact which must have struck every attentive reader, that God has not communicated his mind to us by giving us a set of principles, arranged in the form of a scheme; or that we have no such creed as formally includes all the things necessary to be believed in either the Old or New Testament. On the contrary, we see Divine truth introduced rather incidentally than systematically. It is scattered from one end to the other, through all the historical, devotional, prophetic, and epistolary writings.

I have no intention to derive an argument from this, as some have done, against creeds and confessions of faith; nor do I conceive that such an argument can hence be fairly derived. We might with equal justice argue against the science of botany being reduced to a system, on the ground of herbs and flowers of the same kind not growing together, but being scattered over the earth in beautiful variety. The variegated face of nature is not marred by its productions being scientifically collected and arranged: on the contrary, its beauties are so much the better understood. Yet, with respect to the *actual position* of the products of nature, we must needs decide in favour of variety; and the same may be said of the actual position of Divine truth in the Holy Scriptures: the incidental manner in which it is commonly introduced gives it great energy and beauty. It may be worthy of attention to consider a few of the incidents and occasions on which some of the most important truths are introduced, and to notice the wisdom of God in his thus introducing them.

It is a truth which lies at the foundation of all religion, that there is a *First Cause* and Creator of all things, visible and invisible. But this truth is never introduced, that I recollect, in the form of an abstract proposition. At the commencement of revelation it is rather supposed than asserted: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." Moses does not expressly inform us that there was a God who existed prior to this, but leaves us to infer it; hereby intimating, perhaps, that this is so evident a truth that they who doubt it need reproof rather than information.

The perfections of God are taught abundantly in the Scriptures; yet I do not recollect a single instance where they are introduced merely as a proposition, without some practical end to be answered. When Abraham, through Sarah's unbelief and impatience, had deviated from his usual conduct, in taking Hagar to wife, hoping thereby to see the Divine promise fulfilled, Jehovah thus reproved him: "I am the *Almighty* (or *all-sufficient*) God. Walk before *me*, and be thou perfect." When Israel despondingly exclaimed, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God," he was thus answered: "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the *everlasting* God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, *fainteth not, neither is weary*? There is no searching of his *understanding*."

In this manner also we are taught the *moral government* of God, and the *accountableness* of rational creatures. These important truths, as they stand in the sacred page, do not barely meet our eyes, or our understandings, but our consciences. They give us no time to dispute: ere we are aware we feel ourselves arrested by them, as by an almighty and irresistible force. "They say, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard. Understand, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth!"

Thus also we are instructed respecting the *fall* and *depravity* of human nature. We have no encouragement curiously to inquire beyond the fact; but we are told that "God made man upright, and he sought out many inventions." If we would wish to flatter ourselves, or our species, from a partial view of human virtue, we are instantly cut short, in being told that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." And the substance of this is stated to induce

our acquiescence in the doctrine of *justification* "by free grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

The doctrine of the *Trinity* is never proposed to us as an object of speculation, but as a truth affecting our dearest interests. John introduces the sacred Three as witnesses to the truth of the gospel of Christ, as objects of instituted worship, into whose name we are baptized; and Paul exhibits them as the source of all spiritual good: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." Again, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

In this manner we are taught that great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh," or the proper *Deity* and *humanity* of Christ. One sacred writer announces, in prophetic language, "Unto us a *child* is born, and his name shall be called *The mighty God*." Again, he describes him as the *Lord God, coming with strong hand; yet feeding his flock like a shepherd, gathering his lambs with his arm, carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading those that are with young*. Another directs his followers to him, and says, "This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a *man* who is preferred before me, for he was before me." A third draws from his quiver an arrow of conviction: "Ye have *killed the author of life*!" A fourth finds in it a motive of compassion to the murderers: "Who are Israelites, of whom as concerning the *flesh* Christ came, who is over all, *God blessed for ever*." On one occasion, it is introduced as affording a pattern of humility and condescension: "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." On another, it accounts for the wonderful extremes in his character: the sacred writer having exhibited him as God, whose "throne was for ever and ever"—as having "laid the foundations of the earth," and declared the heavens to be the work of his hands—an objection might arise from his being well known to be a *man*, and to have lived among men. In answer to this he adds, "He was made a little lower than the angels.—The children being partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.—In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a faithful and merciful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Finally, it is brought in at the close of the Revelation, to seal it with Divine authority: "I Jesus have sent mine angel, to testify unto you these things in the churches. *I am the root and the offspring of David*." What a majestic sweetness does this truth afford in these connexions!

It is impossible to enumerate the various occasions on which the Scriptures introduce the doctrine of *atonement* by the death of Christ. This is, to the doctrines and precepts of the Bible, as the life-blood to the animal system. The first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians is often resorted to, as treating on evangelical blessings; but there is a design which runs through that whole chapter, nay, almost through the whole Epistle, which is to *endear the name of Christ, and to exhibit the invaluable worth of his redeeming love*. Are we blessed with all spiritual blessings? It is "in Christ Jesus." Were we predestinated to the adoption of children? It was "by Jesus Christ." Are we accepted? It is "in the Beloved." Have we redemption, even the forgiveness of sins? It is "through his blood." And so on. Christ crucified is the *substance* of the Jewish ceremonial, and the *spirit* of its prophecies; the theme of the Christian ministry on earth, and the song of the blessed above!

It is not very difficult to discern the wisdom of God in introducing truth

in such a manner. If every species of plants and flowers were to grow together, instead of the whole being scattered over the earth, the effect would be very different, and much for the worse; and if all truth relating to one subject were to be found only in one book, chapter, or epistle, we should probably understand much less than we do. There are some Divine truths which are less pleasant than others. Even good men have their partialities, or favourite principles, which would induce them to read those parts of Scripture which favoured them, to the neglect of others. But truth being scattered throughout the Scriptures, we are thereby necessitated, if we read at all, to read the whole mind of God; and thus it is that we gradually and insensibly imbibe it, and become assimilated to the same image. The conduct of God in this matter resembles that of a wise physician, who, in prescribing for a child, directs that its medicines be mixed up with its necessary food.

Moreover, Scripture doctrines being introduced in some practical connexion, we learn them in that connexion. The occasions and ends of truth being associated in our minds with the truth itself, the great design of God in giving us a revelation, which is to sanctify our spirits and fit us for every good word and work, is more effectually answered. To one that has learned truth from the Scriptures, and in whom it dwells richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, it is scarcely possible to think of a doctrine but in connexion with its correspondent duties, or of a duty without the principles by which it is enforced.

Once more, Truth being introduced in connexion with some case or incident, it more readily occurs to us, when such case, or something similar to it, becomes our own. If, through distrust of the Divine power and goodness, and with hope of better accomplishing my object, I be tempted to turn aside from the straightforward path of uprightness; having once read and felt the story of Abraham, and the admonition that was given *him* on that occasion, it is much more likely to occur to my mind, and to correct my folly, than if I had barely read that God was "Almighty," or had only found a general admonition to "walk before him, and be perfect." Or if I be tempted to sink in despondency on account of dark and intricate providences, having read of the promises of God to Jacob, of his subsequent fears, and of the happy issue, such promises are much more likely to be a ready remedy than if I had barely read, unconnected with any particular case, that God *will surely do his people good*. In the one case truth is laid down, as it were, in abstract propositions; in the other, it is illustrated by particular examples.

THE GREAT QUESTION ANSWERED.

"And he brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."—Acts xvi. 30, 31.

PART THE FIRST.

THAT great numbers of people, even in this christianized country, are ignorant of the way of salvation, is too evident to be denied. It is manifestly no part of their concern, any more than if they were in no danger of being lost, or there had never been such a thing as salvation heard of. Nor is this true only of weak and illiterate people: men, who in all other concerns are wise, in these things have no knowledge, or sense to direct them. The evil, therefore, cannot be ascribed to *simple* ignorance, which, as far as

it goes, tends to excuse; but to being *willingly* ignorant; saying unto God, "Depart from us—we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

God, however, has a witness in every man's conscience. Every man, whatever he may pretend, feels himself to be a sinner, and to need forgiveness. Ignorant and idolatrous as the Philippian jailer had been all his life, yet, when death looked him in the face, he trembled and cried for mercy. And if it were thus with the heathen, much more with those who have been educated under the light of revelation. The most careless and thoughtless cannot stand the approach of death. The courage of the most hardened infidel commonly fails him at that solemn period.

Reader, Are you one of the many who scarcely ever think of these things; and whose chief concern is what you shall eat, what you shall drink, and wherewithal you shall be clothed? Let the anxiety of a heathen reprove you.

If, like other animals, you were made only to eat and drink, and figure away for a few years, and then to sink into nothing, you might well throw aside every care, except that which respects your present gratification. But you are of an order of beings distinguished from all others in the creation. In your nature is united mortality and immortality; the dust of the ground, and the breath of the Almighty. Life to you is but the introduction to existence, a short voyage which will land you on the shores of eternity. You are surrounded by a number of objects, and feel an interest in each. You build houses, plant orchards, rear animals, and form to yourselves a home; but you are not at home. Your feelings associate with these things; but they are not fit associates for you. You may have a portion in all that is doing in your family, and in your country; yea, in some sort, in all that is done under the sun: but this is not sufficient for you. The time draweth nigh when there will be an end to all these things, and they will be as though they had not been; but you will still live. You will witness the wreck of nature itself, and survive it; and stand before the Son of man at his appearing and kingdom. Can you think of these things and be unconcerned?

Or, though you be an immortal and accountable creature, (as your conscience tells you you are, whenever you consult it, and sometimes when you would gladly shut your ears against it,) yet, *if you had not sinned against your Maker*, there would be no cause for alarm. A sinless creature has nothing to fear from a righteous God. The approach of an assize, with all its solemn pomp, does not terrify the innocent: neither would judgment or eternity inspire the least degree of dread if you were guiltless. But you are a *sinner*, a corrupt branch of a corrupt stock. God placed, as I may say, a generous confidence in our species, and required nothing in return but love; but we have returned him evil for good. You, for yourself, are conscious that you have done so, and that it is in your very nature to do evil.

Or, though you be what is called a sinner, yet, *if sin were your misfortune, rather than your fault*, you might fly for refuge to the equity of your Maker. But this is not the case. Whatever may be said as to the manner in which you became a sinner, and however you may wish to excuse yourself on that ground, your own conscience bears witness that what you are you choose to be, and occasionally reproaches you for being so. You may speculate upon sin as a kind of hereditary disease, which is merely a misfortune, not a fault; but, if so, why do you feel guilt on account of it, any more than of the other? Why do you not also acquit others of blame, where the evil is directed against you? You do not think of excusing a fellow creature, when he injures you, upon any such grounds as you allege in excuse of transgression against God. If the party be *rational and voluntary*, you make no further inquiry; but, without any hesitation, pronounce him criminal.

Out of your own mouth therefore shall you be judged. The inability that you feel to do good is entirely owing to your having *no heart* to it. It is of the same nature as that of an unprincipled servant, who cannot seek his master's interest, but is impelled, by his selfishness, to be always defrauding him. You would not hold such a servant blameless, nor will God hold you so. You are not destitute of those powers which render us accountable beings, but merely of a heart to make use of them for God. You take pleasure in knowledge, but desire not the knowledge of *his* ways; in conversation, but the mention of serious religion strikes you dumb; in activity, but in his service you are as one that is dead. You are fond of news: but that which angels announced, and the Son of God came down to publish, gives you no pleasure. All these things prove, beyond a doubt, where the inability lies.

Or, if sin should be allowed to be your fault, yet, if it were a *small offence*, an imperfection that might be overlooked, or so slight a matter that you could atone for it by repentance, prayers, or tears, or any effort of your own, there might be less reason for alarm; but neither is this the case. If sin were so light a matter as it is commonly made, how is it that a train of the most awful curses should be denounced against the sinner? Is it possible that a just and good God would curse his creatures in basket and in store, in their houses and in their fields, in their lying down and rising up, and in all that they set their hands to, for a mere trifle, or an imperfection that might be overlooked? If sin were a light thing, how is it that the Father of mercies should have doomed all mankind to death, and to all the miseries that prepare its way, on account of it? How is it that wicked men die under such fearful apprehensions? Above all, how is it that it should require the eternal Son of God to become incarnate, and to be made a sacrifice, to atone for it? But if sin be thus offensive to God, then are you in a fearful situation. If you had the whole world to offer for your ransom, and could shed rivers of tears, and give even the fruit of your body for the sin of your soul, it would be of no account. Were that which you offered ever so pure, it could have no influence whatever towards atoning for your past guilt, any more than the tears of a murderer can atone for blood; but this is not the case; those very performances by which you hope to appease the Divine anger are more offensive to him than the entreaties of a detected adulteress would be to her husband, while her heart, as he well knows, is not with him, but with her paramours. You are, whether you know it or not, a *lost sinner*, and that in the strongest sense of the term. Men judge of sin only by its open acts, but God looketh directly at the heart. Their censures fall only on particular branches of immorality, which strike immediately at the well-being of society; but God views the root of the mischief, and takes into consideration all its mischievous bearings. "Know thou, therefore, and consider, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast done; that thou hast departed from the living God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts."

Finally, Though your sin be exceedingly offensive to your Creator, and though you can make no atonement for it, yet, if you could *resist his power, escape his hand, or endure his wrath*, your unconcernedness might admit of some kind of apology. Surely I need not prove to you that you cannot resist his power:—what is your strength when tried? You may in the hour of health and festivity, and when in company with others like yourself, look big, and put out great words, but they are words only. If God do but touch you with his afflicting hand, your strength and your courage instantly forsake you: and will you go on to provoke Omnipotence? "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou contend with horses? If in the land of peace thou hast been overcome, how wilt thou do in the

swellings of Jordan?" Neither canst thou "escape" his hand; for whither wilt thou flee? If, attentive to thy safety, the rocks could fall on thee, or the mountains cover thee, yet should they not be able to hide thee "from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."—"God hath beset thee behind and before, and laid his hand upon thee. Whither wilt thou go from his Spirit? Whither wilt thou flee from his presence? If thou ascend to heaven, he is there! Or, if thou make thy bed in hell, behold, he is there!"—The only question that remains is, whether you can "endure his displeasure?" And this must surely be a forlorn hope! By the horrid imprecations which we so commonly hear from hardened sinners, who call upon God to damn their bodies and souls, it would seem as if they laid their account with damnation, and wished to familiarize it; as if they had made a covenant with death, and with hell were at agreement: but when God shall lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, these refuges of lies will suddenly be swept away.

Reader! "Can thine heart endure, and thine hands be strong, in the day that he shall deal with thee?" Think of the "wrath to come." If it were founded in caprice or injustice, supported by conscious innocence you might possibly bear it; but, should you perish, you will be destitute of this. Conscience will certainly say *Amen* to the justice of your sufferings. If you had mere justice done you, unmixed with mercy, your sufferings would be more tolerable than they will be. If you perish, you must have your portion with Bethsaida and Chorazin. Goodness gives an edge to justice. The displeasure of a kind and merciful being (and such is the wrath of the Lamb) is insupportable.

If after having heard these things, and lived in a country where they are fully declared, you do not feel interested by them, you have reason to fear that God has given you up to hardness of heart, and that that language is fulfilled in you: "Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing; and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." Remember that in Old Testament times, when God blessed his people Israel with singular temporal blessings, he punished their transgressions mostly by temporal judgments; but now that we are favoured with singular spiritual privileges, the neglect of them is commonly punished with spiritual judgments.

But whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, I will declare unto you the only way of salvation. That which was addressed to the Philippian jailer is addressed to you. "God hath so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He has given him not only to teach us the good and the right way, but to be made a sacrifice for sin, and as such to be himself the way. He suffered from the hands of wicked men; but this was not all: "it pleased the Lord to bruise him. He hath put him to grief," and made "his soul an offering for sin." He commanded his sword to awake against him, that through his death he might turn his hand in mercy towards perishing sinners. He hath set him forth "to be a propitiation to declare his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." This is the only sacrifice which is well-pleasing to God. All that went before were of no account, but as they pointed to it; and all the prayers and praises of sinful creatures are no otherwise acceptable than as presented through it. It is not for you to go about to appease the Divine displeasure, or to recommend yourself to the Saviour by any efforts of your own; but,

despairing of help from every other quarter, to "receive the atonement which Christ hath made." To this you are *invited*, and that in the most pressing terms. He that made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, hath on this ground committed to his servants the ministry of reconciliation; and they as "ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you" by them, "pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

The blessings of pardon, peace, and eternal life are compared to a feast or marriage-supper, which the King of heaven and earth hath made for his Son; and he hath commanded his servants to go forth, as to the highways and hedges, and to invite, without distinction; yea, to "compel them to come in." Nor is this all; you are exhorted and commanded to believe in Christ, on pain of damnation. All your other sins expose you merely to the curse of the law; but the sin of unbelief, if persisted in, will expose you, like the barren fig-tree, to the curse of the Saviour, from which there is no redemption.

Say not in thine heart, All these things I have believed from my youth up. You may indeed have been taught them, and have received them as a tradition from your fathers; but such faith is dead, and consequently unoperative. It is the same as that of the Jews towards Moses, which our Saviour would not admit to be faith. "If ye believed Moses," saith he, "ye would believe me, for he wrote of me." It is no better than the faith of devils, and in some respects has less influence; for they believe and tremble, whereas you believe and are at ease.

But it may be you will say, I have examined Christianity for myself, and am fully persuaded it is true.—Yet it has no effect upon you, any more than if you disbelieved it, unless it be to restrain you within the limits of exterior decorum. Your faith, therefore, must still be "dead, being alone." Believing in Christ is not the exercise of a mind at ease, casting up the evidences for and against, and then coldly assenting, as in a question of science, to that side which seems to have the greatest weight of proof. To one whose mind is subdued to the obedience of faith, there is indeed no want of evidence; but it is not so much from external proofs as from its own intrinsic glory, and suitableness to his case as a perishing sinner, that he feels himself impelled to receive it. The gospel is too interesting, and hath too much influence on our past and future conduct, to be an object of unfeeling speculation. It is a "hope set before us," which none but those who are "ready to perish" will ever embrace. To believe it is to renounce our own wisdom, our own righteousness and our own will, (each of which is directly opposed to it,) and to fall into the arms of mere grace, through the atoning blood of the cross. If the good news of salvation be not in this manner believed, it signifies but little what speculative notions we may entertain concerning it; for where there is no renunciation of self, there is no dependence upon Christ for justification; and where there is no such dependence, there is no revealed interest in that important blessing; but the curses and threatenings of God stand in all their force against us.

If after all your examinations you continue to make light of the gospel feast, and prefer your farms, merchandises, or any thing else before it, you will be found to have no part in it. Yet be it known unto you that the feast shall not be unattended. Heaven shall not go without inhabitants, nor Christ without reward, whether you be saved or lost. The Stone set at nought by man is nevertheless "the Head of the corner." Consider then, take advice, and speak your mind.

PART THE SECOND.

HAD this question been addressed to the first genius upon earth, unacquainted with the gospel, it could not have been answered. Had it been put to all the great philosophers of antiquity one by one, and to all the learned doctors among the Jews, none of them could have resolved it to any good purpose. Nor, amidst all the boasted light of modern times, can a single unbeliever be found who would know what to do with it. Yet it is a question which arises in almost every man's mind at one period or other of his life, and a question that must be resolved, or we are lost for ever.

Reader! is it possible this important question has already occupied your mind. An alarming sermon, a death in your family, a hint from a faithful friend, or it may be an impressive dream, has awakened your attention. You cannot take pleasure as formerly in worldly company and pursuits, yet you have no pleasure in religion. You have left off many vices, and have complied with many religious duties, but can find no rest for your soul. The remembrance of the past is bitter; the prospect of the future may be more so. The thoughts of God trouble you. You have even wished that you had never been born, or that you could now shrink back into non-existence, or that you were any thing rather than a man. But you are aware that all these wishes are vain. You do exist; your nature is stamped with immortality; you must go forward and die, and stand before this holy Lord God!

If these or such like exercises occupy your mind, the question of the Philippian jailer is yours; and to you let me address a few directions included or implied in the answer.

If by this question you mean, What can you do to appease the wrath of God, or recommend yourself as a fit object of his mercy? What can you do as a good deed, or the beginning of a course of good deeds, in reward of which he may bestow upon you an interest in the Saviour? I answer, *nothing*. An interest in Christ and eternal life is indeed given as a reward, but not of any thing we have done or can do; no, not by Divine assistance; it is the reward of the obedience of Christ unto death. To us it is of mere grace, and as such must be received. Faith, though in itself a holy exercise of the mind, yet, as that by which we are justified, is directly opposed to doing. "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." He that worketh seeks to obtain life and the favour of God in some way or other as a reward; but he that believeth receives it as a free gift to the unworthy. And let me apprise you that this is the state of mind you must be brought to, or you must perish for ever. So far as you think of doing any thing, call it what you may, with a hope of being pardoned and justified for its sake, so far you reject the only way of salvation, and have reason to expect your portion with unbelievers.

Let me deal freely with you. Yours is a most serious situation. The gospel rest is before you; and if you enter not in, it will be because of unbelief. You know the answer given to the jailer; and this is the only answer that can with safety be given to you. Consider and beware, as you regard your eternal salvation, that you take up your rest in nothing short of it.

But, in the first place, let me declare unto you the gospel of God, which you are directed to believe. If this meet your case—if, rightly understood, it approve itself not only to your conscience, but your whole soul—if it accord with your desires, as it undoubtedly does with your necessities—all is well, and well forever. I shall not trouble you with the opinions of men as

to what the gospel is, nor even with my own, but direct you to the accounts given of it by him whose it is. The New Testament abounds with epitomes, or brief descriptions of it, delivered in such plain and pointed language that he that runs may read it. Such 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.—Moreover, brethren, 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. For 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.—This is a faithful saying, (a truth of such importance as to have become a kind of Christian proverb,) and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.—We *preach* Christ crucified.—I determined *not to know any thing* among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.—*This is the record*, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

It is not meant, by these brief descriptions of the gospel, that there is no other truth necessary to be believed; but that the doctrine of the cross, properly embraced, includes all others, or draws after it the belief of them.

The import of this gospel is, that God is in the right, and we are in the wrong; that we have transgressed against him without cause, and are justly exposed to everlasting punishment; that mercy, originating purely in himself, required for the due honour of his government to be exercised through the atonement of his beloved Son; that with this sacrifice God is well pleased, and can, consistently with all his perfections, pardon and accept of any sinner, whatever he hath done, who believeth in him.

What say you to this? The truth of it has been confirmed by the most unquestionable proofs. It first began to be spoken by the Lord himself, and has been confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, with signs and wonders, and divers miracles. The witness of the three in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, is borne to this; namely, that "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son;" and to this also is directed the witness of the three on earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood. Can you subscribe to this great truth in all its bearings, and rest the salvation of your soul upon it? or do you doubt whether you be so guilty, so helpless, and in so dangerous a state as this doctrine supposes? Is it as one of the chief of sinners that you view yourself? or does it grate with your feelings to receive forgiveness in that humble character? In suing for mercy, are you content to stand on the same low ground as if you were a convict actually going to be executed? or does your heart secretly pine after a salvation less humiliating, in which some account might be made of that difference of character by which you may have been distinguished from the vilest of men, and in which you might be somewhat a co-operator with God? Does that which pleases God please you? or does your mind revolt at it? It meets all your wants; but not one of your prejudices, proud thoughts, or vicious propensities: all these must come down, and be made a sacrifice to it. Can you subscribe it on these terms?

I am well aware that the great concern of persons in your situation is to obtain *peace of mind*; and any thing which promises to afford this attracts your attention. If this gospel be believed with all your heart, it will give you peace. This is the good, and the old way; walk in it, and you will find rest for your soul; but it is not every thing which promises peace that will ultimately afford it. It is at our peril to offer you other consolation, and at yours to receive it.

Consider, and beware, I say again, as you regard your eternal salvation, that you take up your rest in nothing short of Christ!—With a few serious cautions against some of your principal dangers, I shall conclude this address.

First, *Beware of brooding over your guilt in a way of unbelieving despondency, and so standing aloof from the hope of mercy.* Say not, My sins have been too great, too numerous, or too aggravated to be forgiven. “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from *all* sin:” believest thou this? You are not straitened in him; but in your own bowels. “God’s thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor his ways as your ways: as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts higher than your thoughts, and his ways than your ways.” On the sinner that returneth to our God he bestoweth *abundant* pardon. It is not, If thou canst do any thing, help me; but, “If thou canst believe—all things are possible to him that believeth.” Of what dost thou doubt—of his all-sufficiency? “He is able to save to the *uttermost* all that come unto God by him.” Of his willingness? Ought not his gracious invitations to satisfy thee on this head? Can you imagine that he would proclaim, saying, “Whosoever thirsteth, let him come unto me and drink,” and yet be reluctant to gratify the desires of those that come to him? Objections on the ground of the greatness of guilt and unworthiness may seem to wear the face of modesty and humility; but, after all, it becomes you to consider whether they be any other than the workings of a self-righteous spirit. If you could find in your heart to accept of mercy as one of the chief of sinners, all your objections would vanish in a moment. One sees in your very tears of despondency a pining after acceptance with God by something in yourself. Were they put into words, they would amount to something like this:—If I had but somewhat to recommend me to the Saviour, I could go to him with assurance; or, if I had been less wicked, I might hope for acceptance. And what is this but making good the complaint of our Saviour? “Ye will not come to me that ye may have life!” Such longing after something to recommend you to the Saviour is no other than “going about to establish your own righteousness;” and, while this is the case, there is great danger of your being given up to imagine that you find the worthiness in yourself which your soul desireth.

Secondly, *Beware of dwelling in a way of self-complacency on those reformations which may have been produced by the power of conviction.* This is another of those workings of unbelief by which many have come short of believing, and so of entering into rest. There is no doubt but your convictions have driven you from the commission of grosser vices, and probably have frightened you into a compliance with various religious duties; but these are only the loppings-off of the branches of sin: the root remains unmortified. It is not the breaking off of your sins that will turn to any account, unless they be broken off *by righteousness*; and this will not be the case but by believing in Christ. The power of corruption may have only retired into its strong holds, from whence, if you embrace not the gospel way of salvation, it will soon come forth with increased energy, and sweep away all your cobweb reformations. Nay, it is very possible that, while the “lusts of the flesh” have seemed to recede, those of the *mind*, particularly spiritual pride, may have already increased in strength. If, indeed, you dwell on your reformations, and draw comfort from them, it is an undoubted proof that it is so; and then, instead of being reformed, or nearer the kingdom of heaven than you were before, your character is more offensive to God than ever. Publicans and harlots are more likely to enter into it than you.—Besides, if your reformations were ever so virtuous, (which they are not, in His sight by whom actions are weighed,) yet, while you are an unbeliever, they cannot be accepted. You yourself must first be accepted in the Beloved, ere any

thing that you offer can be received. "It does not consist with the honour of the majesty of the King of heaven and earth to accept of any thing from a condemned malefactor, condemned by the justice of his own holy law, till that condemnation be removed."

Thirdly, *Beware of deriving comfort from the distress of mind which you may have undergone, or from any feelings within you.* Some religious people will tell you that these workings of mind are a sign that God has mercy in reserve for you; and that if you go on in the way you are in, waiting as at the pool, all will be well in the end: but do not you believe them. They have no Scripture warrant for what they say. It is not your being distressed in mind that will prove any thing in your favour, but the issue of it. Saul was distressed, as well as David; and Judas as well as Peter. When the murderers of our Lord were pricked in their hearts, Peter did not comfort them by representing this their unhappiness as a hopeful sign of conversion; but exhorted them to "repent and be baptized, every one of them, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." And thus it was with Paul and Silas, when the jailer was impressed with fear and dismay; they gave him no encouragement from thence, but preached Jesus Christ as the only source of hope. If one who had slain a man in Israel had stopped short of the city of refuge, and endeavoured to draw comfort from the alarm which he had felt lest the avenger of blood should overtake him, would he have been safe? There is no security to you, or to any man, but in fleeing immediately to the gospel refuge, and laying hold of the hope set before you. If you take comfort from your distress, you are in imminent danger of stopping short of Christ, and so of perishing for ever. Many, no doubt, have done so; and that which they have accounted waiting at the pool for the moving of the waters has proved no other than settling upon a false foundation. Indeed it must needs be so; for as there is no medium, in one that has heard the gospel, between faith and unbelief, he that does not believe in Jesus for salvation, if he have any hope of it, must derive that hope from something in himself.

Fourthly, *Beware of making faith itself, as an act of yours, the ground of acceptance with God.* It is true that believing is an act of yours, and an act of obedience to God. Far be it from me that I should convey an idea of any thing short of a cordial reception of the gospel being accompanied with salvation—a reception that involves a renunciation of self-righteousness, and a submission to the righteousness of God. But if you consider it as a species of sincere obedience which God has consented to accept instead of a perfect one, and if you hope to be justified in reward of it, you are still "going about to establish your own righteousness" under an evangelical name. This is the commandment of God, that ye believe on the name of his Son. Faith is an act of obedience to God, yet it is not as such that it justifies us, but as receiving Christ, and bringing us into a living union with him, *for whose sake alone* we are accepted and saved. If you truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, you will think nothing of the workings of your own mind, but of his work who came into the world to save the chief of sinners.

Finally, *Beware of taking comfort from any impulse, or unfounded persuasion that your sins are forgiven, and that you are a favourite of God.* Many are deceived in this way, and mistake such a persuasion for faith itself. When a sinner is driven from all his former holds, it is not unusual for him, instead of falling at the feet of Christ as utterly lost, to catch at any new conceit, however unscriptural and absurd, if it will but afford him relief. If, in such a state of mind, he receive an impression, perhaps in the words of Scripture, that God has forgiven and accepted him, or dream that he is in

heaven, or read a book or hear a sermon which is favourable to such a method of obtaining relief, he eagerly imbibes it, and becomes intoxicated with the delicious draught. The joy of hope being so new and unexpected a thing, and succeeding to great darkness and distress, produces a wonderful change in his mind. Now he thinks he has discovered the light of life, and feels to have lost his burden. Now he has found out the true religion, and all that he read or heard before, not affording him relief, is false doctrine, or legal preaching. Being treated also as one of the dear children of God, by others of the same description, he is attached to his flatterers, and despises those as graceless who would rob him of his comforts, by warning him against the lie which is "in his right hand."

I do not mean to say that all consolation which comes suddenly to the mind, or by the impression of a passage of Scripture, any more than by reading or hearing, is delusive. It is not the *manner* in which we obtain relief that is of any account, but *what it is that comforts us*. If it be the doctrine of the cross, or any revealed truth pertaining to it, this is gospel consolation; but if it be a supposed revelation from heaven of something which is not taught in the Scriptures, that is a species of comfort on which no dependence can be placed. A believer may be so far misled as to be carried away with it; but if a man has nothing better, he is still an unbeliever.

To conclude: If ever you obtain that rest for your soul which will bear the light, it must be, not from any thing within you, but by looking out of yourself to Christ as revealed in the gospel. You may afterwards know that you have passed from death unto life by the love you bear to the brethren, and by many other Scriptural evidences; and, from the time of your embracing the gospel remedy, you may be conscious of it, and so enjoy the hope of the promised salvation; but your first relief, if it be genuine, will be drawn directly from Christ, or from finding that in the doctrine of salvation through his death which suits your wants and wishes as a perishing sinner.

THE AWAKENED SINNER.

[A Correspondence between Archippus, a Minister of the Gospel, and Epaphras, a young man who had been one of his hearers.]

LETTER I.

[Epaphras to Archippus.]

MY DEAR SIR,

FOR several years past, you know, I have sat under your ministry. Having lately been removed by providence beyond the reach of it, many things, which made but little impression upon my mind at the time, have been called to remembrance. My heart often sinks at the thought of the non-improvement of my former mercies, and trembles lest those solemn warnings and tender exhortations which I have heard from you should, on a future day, bear witness against me.

You have more than once talked to me on the concerns of my soul; but I could never be free to answer you. Indeed I did not like to hear of the subject. It always struck a damp upon my spirits, and rendered your company, which otherwise was very agreeable, a burden. But now, seldom seeing your face, I feel a wish to open my mind to you; and the rather because the salvation of my soul has of late concerned me more than at any former period.

Though you were well acquainted with my person, you knew but little of my character, or of the things which were at work in my mind. I have been guilty of many evils from my youth. I have also been the subject of occasional convictions; and strange thoughts have passed my mind concerning religion. When about twelve years of age, the death of several persons around me impressed my mind with solemn reflections about my own future state. I conceived of God as an almighty Being; but had no just ideas of his moral character. It appeared to me that, being stronger than we, his will must be our law. I saw no justness or fitness in its being so; but, as we were unable to dispute with him, it must be so. I entertained many hard thoughts of his government, on the ground of our first parent being constituted the head of his posterity, and of the consequence of his sin as affecting us. Sometimes I wished I had never been born; but then again it would recur to me, born I am, and die I must, and after death is a judgment! At other times, my thoughts would turn to the only hope set before us, the salvation of Jesus Christ. I conceived of him, however, as coming into the world, not to satisfy the injured justice of God, but to make us amends for the injury we had received from Adam's transgression, and to give us, as it were, another chance for our life. I thought God must know that he had dealt hardly with us; and, therefore, was constrained by equity to do as he did, in giving his Son to die for us; and that, if he had not done this, we should have had just cause for complaint, whatever we might have as it was.

I read in the Scriptures of the necessity of repentance and conversion; and many thoughts passed through my mind on this subject; but I generally postponed a serious attention to it to some future day. I formed resolutions of amendment, and fixed times when I would return to God by repentance; but as the former seldom proved to be of any account in the hour of temptation, so the latter passed over, and left me where I was. About this time I fell into company, which often drew me into a breach of the sabbath. During the summer season we used to walk in the fields, to the neglect of public worship. I could not do this, however, without its being followed by keen remorse. Such was the bitterness of my soul on one of these occasions, that I invoked the curse of the Almighty upon myself, and wrote it upon the walls of a building near the outside of the town, if I passed that building any more on the sabbath day, to the neglect of his worship.

I now began to think myself a little better; but still suspected I was not right at heart. The words of Christ to Nicodemus would in a manner strike me dead, "Ye must be born again!" The ideas which I formed of the new birth, as nearly as I can remember, were, that I must be in some very deep distress, next to despair; and in that state of mind a voice from heaven, or something like it, was to set me at liberty. I used to go alone into the fields in an evening, and there weep over my condition, and pray that I might be converted; but it always seemed to me that God would not hear me. At length I began to despair. I thought I never should be converted, and so must perish for ever. Sometimes I thought of giving up all concern about it, and enjoying the pleasures of life while I could; but as I knew not how to shake off my uneasiness, I thought I would try *another year*, and wait and pray . . . peradventure by that I might be converted.

During this year I was often beset with thoughts like these—Perhaps, after all, there is nothing in religion; perhaps the Bible is nothing more than the invention of some great man, to keep the world in order; perhaps the Mahomedans have as good ground to believe in the Alcoran as we have in the Scriptures; perhaps there is no hereafter; perhaps there is no God.—My heart, I believe, would willingly have received these principles, shocking as they are; but my conscience would not suffer me do it. I even took

pains to convince myself of their falsehood, by walking out into the fields in a star-light evening, viewing the heavens, and inferring thence the being of a God; which, when admitted, the reality of religion followed as a necessary consequence.

About this time I read "Alleine's Alarm to the Unconverted." He said, "There were some who thought themselves converted, but were not so; and others who thought they were not converted, but were so." I overlooked the alarming part of the treatise, and caught hold of this, gathering from it some sort of hope that the latter might possibly be my case. My year was now expired; and though I had a few hopes, I felt no ground for any satisfactory conclusion. I thought I must be better than I was; yet how to make myself so I knew not.

But my sheet is full; I therefore at present subscribe myself yours with much respect,
 EPAPHRAS.

LETTER II.

[Epaphras to Archippus.]

MY DEAR SIR,

LET me presume upon your patience, while I resume the narrative of my past exercises of mind. When about fourteen years of age, I remember, as I was one morning musing by myself, and thinking of the number and magnitude of my offences, the bitter pangs of despair seized me. *Iniquity*, said I, *will be my ruin*. A sigh, as from the bottom of my heart, succeeded this exclamation. But, all on a sudden, I seemed to hear as it were a voice from heaven, saying to me, "Sin shall not have dominion over thee; for thou art not under the law, but under grace." I instantly burst into a flood of tears, and went on weeping for joy, till my weeping powers seemed to be exhausted. In reflecting upon this, I thought, I am now surely converted; this must be the new birth. I was the subject of transporting joy, and confidence of having found the pearl of price.

From what I have heard you say concerning impressions, even in Scripture language, where it is not the truth contained in the words, but the idea of their being an extraordinary revelation from heaven made to the soul of the forgiveness of its sins, I have no reason to suppose that your thoughts of this singular part of my experience will accord with what at that time were mine. Indeed, from what followed, I have no reason to think favourably of it myself, for within a few hours all was forgotten, as though it had not been; and what is worse, I returned to my sins as eagerly as ever, and lived several years after this in the unbridled indulgence of almost every species of iniquity that came within my reach. It is true, I could not sin without occasional pangs of remorse, and such as were very bitter; but my heart was set on evil. I formed intimacies with dissolute young people, and did as they did. I drew many into my wicked courses, as others had drawn me into theirs; and having never made any profession of religion, I felt the less concern. I seemed to consider religion as a kind of discretionary service. Those who made profession of it I thought were obliged to act accordingly; but others, except so far as they might be induced to attend to it for their own safety, were at liberty to give scope to their inclinations.

My heart was so hardened by repeated acts of sin that God was scarcely in any of my thoughts. His all-piercing eye did not restrain me. There was a poor godly man, however, one of my father's labourers, whose eye and ear used to strike me with terror. If at any time I had been reading, or had gone a few miles to hear a sermon, or any thing else that looked like religion, I used to imagine that he looked upon me with complacency and

hope; but when I had been indulging in sin, I thought I saw in his face the very frowns of Heaven. It was a strange and singular regard that I felt for this poor man. His good opinion was what I desired above that of all other persons. When he has been going to worship on a Lord's-day morning, I have run with eagerness to overtake him; yet when in his company I had nothing to say. If ever I wished for riches, it was that I might be able to confer them upon him.

Within the last year my concern has been renewed. Having been deeply engaged in a very ungodly piece of conduct, which was publicly known, I dreaded nothing so much as meeting the eyes of this poor man. He, however, said nothing to me; and I suppose thought no more of it than he would of seeing evil fruit growing upon an evil tree; but my mind from that time became habitually wretched. Like Samson, I strove to shake myself, and to do as at other times; but my strength was gone; the joy of my heart was fled. From this time, many of my open vices were relinquished; the love of sin, however, was not subdued. On the contrary, in proportion to the restraints under which my convictions laid me as to some evils, such was the strength of my inclinations towards others. For two or three months together, it was common for me to indulge in sin in an evening; and when I waked in the morning, to be overwhelmed with guilt and horror. In the hour of dejection I would resolve against future compliances. In some few instances I kept to my resolutions; and when I did so I had peace; as also when at any time I had wept over my sin, and bemoaned my miserable condition, I enjoyed a kind of secret satisfaction: but when my resolutions failed me, as they mostly did in the hour of temptation, all my peace and comfort would forsake me. I have learned, by these things, that there is no help in me; and that, if God were to forgive me all that is past, I should in one hour destroy my soul.

Formerly I used to sin away my convictions; but have not been able to do so of late. Conscience has seemed to follow me wherever I have gone, or rather, like an angel of God with a drawn sword in his hand, to meet me in my wicked course. Indeed, I am now afraid of losing my convictions, knowing that eternal ruin must be the consequence in that case, whatever it be as it is.

O sir! I am a miserable sinner. My crimes have been much more numerous and aggravated than you or any of my friends can have imagined. I have long known myself to be a sinner; but now I feel it. I often repeat to myself the lamentations of a sinner as described by Mr. Mason—

“I have been Satan's willing slave,
And his most easy prey;
He was not readier to command
Than I was to obey.

If any time he left my soul,
Yet still his work went on;
I've been a tempter to myself:
Ah, Lord, what have I done !”

I sometimes think I feel the wrath of God, as an earnest of hell, kindled already in my bosom. My former hopes, instead of affording me any encouragement, work despair. It seems to me presumptuous, after so many base and repeated relapses, to hope for mercy. When I look into the Scriptures, I see, as I have long seen, that except I repent, and believe in Christ, I must inevitably perish; but, alas! loaded as I am with sorrow, my heart is too hard to repent; and as to faith, and the prayer of faith, they are things foreign from the state of my mind. I would give the world, if I had it, to be possessed of them; but oh, I cannot, I dare not, believe; I am unworthy

of mercy. I fear I am a reprobate, of whom God hath determined to make an example, and therefore that there is no hope for me. My heart has often revolted at that awful doctrine, and now it overwhelms me. I know you will feel for me; but whether any relief can be afforded to a soul like mine I know not. Let me conjure you, however, to be plain with me, and tell me, without reserve, what you think of my case; and if you have any counsel to offer, let me entreat you to impart it.

I am, with unfeigned respect, yours, &c.

EPAPHRAS.

LETTER III.

[Archippus to Epaphras.]

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

THE narration with which you have favoured me has deeply interested my feelings on your behalf. My desire and prayer to God for you is that you may be saved. In the early workings of your mind I see much of the enmity and error of the human heart. Your thoughts of God and his government, Christ and his gospel, and of the nature of conversion, are the thoughts of many much older than you; but they are not the better on this account. These are among the "imagination and high thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God," and require to be "cast down, and every thought to be brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ."

Your temptations to disbelieve the Bible, and even the being of God, were no more than the ordinary operations of a depraved heart, disturbed by the light of the gospel having made its way into the conscience. Your vows and endeavours to repent and be converted appear to have arisen from a mixture of slavish fear and self-righteous hope. You were not sorry for your sin, nor wished to be sorry, from any dislike you bore to it; but you trembled at the wrath to come, and wished to become any thing that you might escape it; and, not knowing the deceitfulness of your own heart, you flattered yourself that, by putting on a good resolution, you could bend it into a compliance with the will of God.

I need not say much concerning the *impression* by which your mind was filled with joy. You yourself seem sufficiently convinced, by what followed, that it was not conversion, but a blossom without fruit. Those who conclude, from such feelings, that they are in a state of salvation, are objects of pity.

Concerning your late and present distress, I feel much for you; not only in a way of sympathy, but of concern for the *issue*; for many persons have been as deeply distressed about their salvation as you appear to be, who have yet taken up their rest in something short of Christ; which is a much more dangerous state than that from which they were first awakened, and, if persisted in, will render their case less tolerable than if they had lived and died in ignorance.

Your sins, you say, "are much more numerous and aggravated than I or any of your friends can have imagined." Doubtless you have been guilty of things which neither I nor any other creature can have been privy to; but I apprehend that, at present, you have but a very imperfect sense of them. So far from thinking that you view the evil of your way in too strong a light, I am persuaded you are a *thousand* times more wicked in the sight of God, whose judgment is according to truth, than ever you have yet been in your own sight: your heart condemns you; but "God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things!"

I write not thus to drive you to despair; for though your sins were ten

times more numerous and more aggravated than they are, while the good news of eternal life, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, is held up to you, there is no reason for this. You have learned, you think, "that there is no help *in* you." Be it so; it does not follow that there is none without you. On the contrary, it is by a thorough and practical knowledge of the one that the other becomes acceptable. If the help that is provided without, therefore, give you no relief, I am constrained to think it is because you are not yet brought to despair of help from within.

Let me speak freely to you of *the gospel of Jesus Christ*. You may think this to contain no *news* to you; but I am persuaded that hitherto you have neither understood nor believed it. Your despair is like that of a man who gives himself up for lost without having tried the only remedy. You have prayed for mercy, but *hitherto you have asked nothing with a pure respect to the atonement of Jesus*. Ask in his name, and you shall receive, and your joy shall be full.

Consider well the following passages of Scripture, as expressing the sum of the glorious gospel of the blessed God: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.—This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.—I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, unless ye have believed in vain—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.—The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified.—I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified,—God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech men by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.—The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.—By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.—Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—Him that cometh I will in nowise cast out."

This, my dear friend, was the all-efficacious doctrine by which the pressure of guilt was removed from thousands in the times of the apostles, and has been removed from millions in succeeding ages. When a perishing sinner inquired, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer was at hand, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This was the plenteous *redemption* which even Old Testament sinners embraced by faith. These were the water, the wine, and the milk, which they were freely invited to buy, "without money, and without price." This is the wedding supper, which the Lord hath prepared, and concerning which he hath declared, "All things are ready; come ye to the marriage."

But, you will say, I have read, and considered, and believed all this long ago; and yet I am not relieved. I remember Saul, on a certain occasion, said to Samuel, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord;" but Samuel answered, "What meaneth, then, this bleating of the sheep in mine ears; and this lowing of the oxen which I hear?" That you have read these things, and thought of them, may be admitted; but if you have believed them with all your heart, how is it that I hear of peace and satisfaction arising from tears and moans, and a compliance with resolutions? How is it that the magnitude of guilt, instead of leading you to confess it upon the

head of the gospel sacrifice, and to sue for *mercy* wholly in his name, should induce you to despair? How is it that your being *unworthy* of mercy is made an objection to believing? Indeed, my young friend, these are but too manifest indications that hitherto you have been going about to establish your own righteousness, and have not "submitted to the righteousness of God;" a course which, if not relinquished, will ruin your soul. The overthrow of the Jews, in the times of our Saviour and his apostles, was owing to this. They were anxiously concerned about religion; they "followed after the law of righteousness;" yet they attained it not: and wherefore? "Because they sought it not by faith; but as it were by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone!" It is not the magnitude of your sins that will prove a bar to your salvation; if there be any bar, it will be your unbelief. "If thou canst believe—all things are possible to him that believeth!"

I am apprehensive that you have never yet cordially admitted the humbling import of the gospel. It is not your believing from the tradition of your fathers that there was a person called Jesus Christ, who came into the world about eighteen hundred years ago, and who is in some way or other the Saviour of sinners. The gospel is a Divine system; the wisdom of God in a mystery. It implies a number of important truths to which the corrupt heart of man is naturally averse; and cannot properly be said to be believed while they are rejected or overlooked. Such are the equity and glory of the Divine law, and the guilty, lost, and perishing condition of those who have transgressed it. More particularly, that God is worthy of being loved with all the heart, however depraved that heart may be; that our transgressions against him have been *without cause*; that we are justly deserving of his eternal displeasure; that there is no help in us, or hope of recovery by our own efforts; finally, that we are utterly unworthy of mercy, and must be saved, if at all, by mere grace. These truths are plainly *implied* in the doctrine of *atonement* and of a *free* salvation; and without admitting them it is impossible we should admit the other. While we conceive of ourselves as injured creatures, and of the gift of Christ and of salvation by him as a recompense for the injury, it is no wonder we should imagine it to be confined to the comparatively worthy, or the least criminal, and so begin to despair as we perceive the magnitude of our guilt. Or if in words we disavow all merit, and confess ourselves to be in a helpless and hopeless condition, yet we shall view it as our misfortune rather than our sin, and ourselves as more deserving of pity than punishment. And while this is the case, our supposed love to the Saviour is certain to operate at the expense of the Lawgiver.

You acknowledge that in your earlier years such notions possessed your mind. Let me entreat you to consider whether they have not still a place in you, and whether your present unhappy state of mind be not chiefly to be ascribed to them. If you do not admit what the gospel necessarily implies, and that in a practical way, so as to act upon it, how can you admit the thing itself? There is no grace in Christ's laying down his life for us, and bestowing salvation upon us, but upon the supposition of the justice of the Divine government, and therefore we cannot perceive any; for it is impossible to see that which is not to be seen. But if you perceive the rectitude of the Divine character and government, and feel yourself to be a justly condemned sinner without help or hope, or a single plea to offer in arrest of judgment, the gospel will appear in its glory, and all its blessings will be welcome to your heart. Thus, knowing the "only living and true God," you will know "Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent;" hearing and learning of the Father, you will come to the Son; and thus after every self-righteous effort has been tried in vain, you will, ere you are aware, "repent and believe the gospel."

Then you will no longer conceive of God as a being who avails himself of his almighty power to awe you into silence; but as one who has righteousness on his side, on account of which "every mouth will be stopped, and all the world be guilty" before him. Then, instead of being overwhelmed and driven to despair by the doctrine of election, it will appear not only equitable, but the only source of hope. You will perceive that what would have been just towards all mankind cannot be unjust towards a part of them; and feeling yourself divested of all claim, unless it be to shame and confusion of face, you will throw yourself at the feet of sovereign mercy. I do not say you will be *willing to be saved or lost as it shall please God*. Some worthy men have worked themselves and others into a persuasion that they were the subjects of such resignation; but resignation of this kind is not required at our hands, as it would be inconsistent with that importunity for the blessing with which we are encouraged to besiege the throne of grace, and even with love to God itself, which cannot possibly be reconciled to be everlastingly banished from him, and to live in enmity against him. But this I say, you will feel and acknowledge that God might justly cast you off for ever; and that, if he accept and save you, it must be purely of undeserved mercy.

You say you *dare not believe*. If you mean that you dare not entertain the persuasion of your being saved in your present condition, that may be very proper: but has God any where revealed that you shall? If not, such a persuasion would not be faith, but presumption. That faith which has the promise of eternal life has revealed truth, and particularly the gospel of salvation by Jesus Christ, for its object. And dare you not believe this? Rather, how dare you disbelieve it? How will you "escape if you neglect so great salvation?" Is it presumption to take God at his word? Is it presumption to renounce your own righteousness, and submit to the righteousness of God? Is it presumption to believe that Christ "is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him?" Rather, is it not the greatest of all sins to question these truths, after all that God has said in confirmation of them?

But you will answer, That at which I hesitate is embracing the *promises, with application to myself*. You are not required or allowed to take the promises in any other than their *true meaning*. So far as that meaning includes *your case*, so far you are warranted to apply them to it, and no further. For example, if *you* return to the Lord, you have a right to conclude that *you* as readily as any sinner in the world shall receive abundant pardon; if *you* come to Jesus, *you* shall in nowise be cast out; but neither these promises nor any other hold up any assurance of salvation to the impenitent and unbelieving. First believe the promises to be what they profess to be, true, great, and precious, to the renouncing of every other foundation of hope; and then the consciousness of this will afford a ground of persuasion that the blessings contained in them are your own.

But you add, you *cannot* repent, and *cannot* believe. Consider, I beseech you, what it is that hindereth; and whether it be any thing else than the latent enmity of your heart to God. If you loved him, surely you could repent; nay, surely you could not but repent, and mourn for all your transgressions against him: surely you could not be insensible to the glory of Christ, and the way of salvation by him. You love yourself, and *can* mourn on your own account; but for all that you have done against him you *cannot* be grieved! You love yourself, and would give the world, if you had it, to escape the wrath to come; but, for all that the Saviour has done and suffered, you can perceive no loveliness in him! You can see no glory in being pardoned for the sake of his atonement; no comeliness in him, no beauty,

that you should desire him! Do I misrepresent the case? Let conscience answer.

O my dear young friend, do not cover your sin, nor flatter yourself that the bar to your salvation does not lie in your own heart. With the secret purposes of God you have nothing to do as a rule of conduct: the things that are revealed belong to you; and these are, that you should repent of your sins and believe in Christ alone for salvation. If you be not found an unbeliever, you need not fear being found a reprobate. I am yours, with much affection,

ARCHIPPUS.

LETTER IV.

[Archippus to Epaphras.]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

SEVERAL months have elapsed since I wrote to you, and I have received no answer. Am I to interpret your long silence as an intimation that you do not wish for any further correspondence with me on the important subject of your last? If I felt no concern for your eternal welfare, I might not only so consider it, but remain as silent on my part as you do on yours. But I must write at least this once. When I think of your situation, I feel somewhat as the apostle did towards the Galatians—"a travailing in birth that Christ may be formed in you."

In looking over the copy of my last, I acknowledge I have felt some misgivings of heart. I am sometimes ready to ask, May it not appear to him as though I were unfeeling? Though what I wrote was, according to the best of my judgment, the truth of God, yet was there not too much use of the probe for a single letter? Might I not have dwelt less on the searching, and more on the consolatory? Yet, after all, I am not sure that I ought. But as the apostle, after addressing a searching Epistle to the Corinthians, had many conflicts in his own mind concerning the issue, and at times half repented, so it is with me. Yet what counsel or direction have I to offer, which has not already been offered? If the free grace of the gospel, or the all-sufficient redemption of Jesus Christ, would comfort you, I could joyfully enlarge upon them. The provisions of mercy are free and ample. "All things are ready: millions of sinners have already come to the marriage, "and yet there is room." If there were only a *peradventure* that you should be accepted, that were sufficient to warrant an application. Thus the lepers reasoned in their perishing condition: "Why sit we here until we die? If we say we will enter into the city, the famine is there; and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall into the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we can but die." Thus also reasoned Esther: "I will go in unto the king, which is not according to law; and if I perish, I perish!" But in applying to the Saviour of sinners there are no such *peradventures*. To cut off every objection, he has proclaimed with his own lips, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, let him come unto me and drink!"—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"—"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for *every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened!*"

But to all this you repulsively answer, I *cannot* repent, I *cannot* believe. What then can I do?—If the doctrine of the cross contain no charms which can attract you, it is not for me to coin another gospel, nor to bend the Scriptures to the inclination of man's depraved heart. We must bend to

them, and not they to us ; or, if not, they will be found to be true, to our confusion.

I am aware that persons in your condition desire above all things to be soothed and comforted by something else than the gospel. They imagine themselves to be willing to be saved in God's way,—as willing as the impotent man that waited at the pool was to be made whole ; therefore they wish to be directed to wait and hope *in the way that they are in*, till it shall please God to release them, as by the moving of the waters. It is also grateful to them to be encouraged, on the ground of their *present distress*, to hope that God has mercy in reserve for them ; for that it is his usual way first to convince of sin, and afterwards to impart the joys of salvation. A company of gentlemen (on board a ship that touched at one of the southernmost parts of South America) had a mind to make a short botanical excursion. They accordingly ascended one of the mountains. Ere they were aware night came on, and a very cold fog. They felt an unusual propensity to sleep ; but a medical friend, who was with them, strongly remonstrated against every indulgence of the kind, as they would be in the utmost danger of never waking again. What would you have thought of this gentleman's conduct, if, instead of urging his companions to escape from the mountain, he had indulged them in their wishes ? The Scriptures declare that "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him ;" and surely we ought not to contradict this declaration, either by directing to the use of means short of believing, or encouraging those who use them to hope for a happy issue. The crucifiers of Christ were in great distress ; but Peter did not encourage them to take comfort from this, but directed them to repent and be converted—to repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins. The Philippian jailer was in great distress ; but Paul had no comfort for him on this ground, nor any counsel to offer but believing in Jesus.

A necessity is laid upon me, and woe is me if I preach not the gospel ! I have not deviated from this point in what I have hitherto written ; nor will I deviate, whatever be the consequence. Wherefore ? Because I love you not ? God knoweth ! I am determined not to know anything but Jesus Christ and him crucified. If this doctrine fail to relieve you, the cause must be looked for, not in the want of encouragement, but of desire to embrace it. But, O my dear young man, consider Jesus Christ, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession ! As one that has tasted that the Lord is gracious, though a perishing sinner like yourself, I do most heartily recommend him to you. I was brought low, and he helped me ! The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me ; I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord, O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul ! By happy experience I can bear witness that gracious is the Lord and righteous ; yea, our God is merciful. He delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. O taste and see that the Lord is gracious ! The eyes of many are upon you ; saints and angels stand ready to embrace you as a brother, as soon as you shall embrace their Lord. The Spirit and the bride say, Come ; and he that heareth saith, Come ; and Jesus himself, who testifieth these things, exalted as he is in the highest heavens, closes the invitation, saying, "Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely." Pore no longer on your misery ; look no longer for any worthiness in yourself ; but, as an unworthy sinner, rely for acceptance with God on the righteousness of Christ alone. This is the good old way in which believers in every age have walked ; walk therein, and you shall find rest unto your soul. I am your affectionate friend,

ARCHIPPUS.

LETTER V.

[Epaphras to Archippus.]

MY DEAR SIR,

MY mind has been for some time in so confused and unhappy a state, that though I felt my obligations to you, and by no means intended to slight your kindness, yet I knew not how to answer you. I rather felt a wish to be secluded, at least for a time, that I might bemoan my case by myself in secret.

Your first letter, I must say, yielded me no comfort. On the contrary, it wounded me not a little. I confessed to you that I had been a great sinner; you persuaded me that I was much worse than I imagined. I acknowledged the hardness of my heart, and the prevalence of my unbelief; you attributed both to my being destitute of the love of God. I wanted relief, and you cut off every source of consolation save that which arises from faith in Christ, of which I had told you I felt myself incapable. When I considered my inability to believe, however, I did not mean that I could not believe the gospel; I supposed I could and did believe that: you have shown, however, that in this I was mistaken. My heart, it seems, is that of an infidel. Alas for me! instead of obtaining any relief, such things sink me deeper and deeper into despondence. Your letter seemed to me a kind of message from God; but it was a message of death. After reading it I felt myself locked up as it were in a dungeon, and loaded with inextricable chains. I could find no words to vent the sorrow of my heart but those of the weeping prophet. "He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. He hath set me in dark places as those that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out; he hath made my chain heavy. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer! In such a state of mind, you will not wonder that I should have no heart to write.

Since that time, however, I have conversed with different persons, and have heard different ministers; from one of whom, especially, I obtained what I could never obtain before—*encouragement*. As you may suppose, it was impossible wholly to conceal my unhappiness of mind from those about me. One day I fell in company with a gentleman of very respectable appearance. He, observing in my countenance an habitual dejection, and learning, it should seem, by some means the cause of it, wished to offer me a little advice. I heard what he had to say; but it did me no good. He observed that there was such a thing as being righteous over-much; that he did not apprehend I had been a greater sinner than other men; and that if I were sober, just, and devout in moderation, all would be well enough at last. I had too much light to be imposed upon by this. I thought I saw plainly that though he might be a gentleman and a scholar, yet he had not learned to speak a word in season to him that is weary.

After this I met with a poor man who appeared to be very zealous in religion. On perceiving my unhappiness, he was very desirous that I should go with him to his place of worship. He told me that their minister would pray for me, and give me the best of counsel; and that great numbers of people in my case had, on going to hear him, obtained relief. They had gone, he said, under the most pungent distress, but had come away pardoned, and justified, and full of joy. He moreover cautioned me against the licentious and horrible doctrines of imputed righteousness, invincible grace, and predestination. I heard what he said, and it appeared to me that he was very sincere in his way: but I thought I had long ago experienced what *he*

called a being pardoned and justified; namely, a strong impression upon my mind, even in the words of Scripture, that I was so, which yet had proved delusive. And as to his warnings, though I had felt many inward struggles against those doctrines, yet I could never persuade myself to think them any other than Scriptural. I went, however, two or three times to hear at the place which he recommended; but though they might be very good people, yet the religion which they taught appeared to me exceedingly superficial and enthusiastic. I saw, plainly enough, that almost any kind of unhappiness concerning one's future state would be admitted as godly sorrow; and any sudden impression that should fill the mind with joy would be deemed the joy of the gospel. My conscience, therefore, would not suffer me, however desirable consolation would have been to me, to take up my rest with them.

One day I was induced to hear a stranger who preached an occasional sermon near to where I reside. In the course of his sermon he spoke much of the duty and privilege of prayer; and, when addressing himself to the unconverted, observed that they had no power of themselves to turn to God through Christ; but they could pray to the Lord for grace to enable them to do it: and, if they did so, he would hear them, and grant them the thing they prayed for. At first I caught at this idea, as appearing to exhibit something that was more within my reach than repentance and faith themselves: but when I came to the trial, I found it was only in appearance; for unless I prayed in *faith*, that is, with an eye to the Saviour in all I asked, God would not hear me. But to pray in faith could not be more within my reach than faith itself. I thought of you at the time; and that this was a kind of language that you would not use, on account of its implying that a sinner is not to be exhorted *immediately* to repent and believe in Christ, nor to any thing spiritually good: but merely to what may be done without repentance, and without faith, as the means of obtaining them.

If I understand your sentiments, you would direct an unconverted sinner to pray, and to pray for spiritual blessings, as Peter did the sorcerer; but it must be *with* repentance, and *in the name of Jesus*; that is, it must be the prayer of penitence and faith. I also was conscious to myself that I was equally able to repent and believe in Christ as I was *sincerely* to pray for grace to enable me to do so; and that, if I could once find a heart for the one, I could for the other.

I pass over some other interviews and sermons, and proceed to relate what has been more interesting to my heart than any thing else. One Lord's-day morning, I was very much dejected, owing to some struggles of mind about embracing the scheme of *universal salvation*. Having read a publication in favour of it, my heart would gladly have acquiesced; but my judgment and conscience would not suffer me. I saw clearly that that doctrine could never be embraced without offering the most indecent violence to the Holy Scriptures. Indeed, I was conscious that I should never have thought of believing it to be true, if I had not first wished to have it so.

These thoughts, however, sunk me into the deepest despondency, as they seemed to darken a gleam of hope which, though faintly, I cherished. In this dejected state of mind, I went to hear a minister whom I had more than once heard spoken of as singularly evangelical, and his preaching as being much in an experimental strain. I attended both parts of that day, and once or twice more, before I obtained any relief. As he generally addressed himself to believers, and dwelt upon the privileges and blessings to which they are entitled, I did not, at first, feel interested in his discourses. At length, he took his text from Matt. xi. 28, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heaven laden, and I will give you rest." I was glad to hear the passage named, as I hoped that something might now be said suited to my case. I

knew I was weary and heavy laden to a great degree, and rest for my soul was the very thing I wanted. He proposed first to notice the *characters* addressed; and, secondly, *the blessings to which they are invited*; or, as he explained it, which *belonged* to them. Under the first head of discourse he distinguished sinners into *insensible* and *sensible*; and endeavoured to prove that it was the latter only who were here invited to come to Christ. He mentioned several other invitations, as, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."—"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."—"The Spirit and the bride say, Come,—and let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Each of these passages was explained in the same way, as descriptive of the spiritual thirst of a soul made sensible of its wants.

I was apprehensive, at first, that this distinction would exclude me from having any part or lot in the matter; but when the minister came to explain himself, and to depict the case of the weary and heavy laden, he entered so fully into my experience that all my apprehensions were removed. I was conscious that I was just that poor miserable creature that he described, who had long been seeking rest, but could find none. He warned us against making a *righteousness* of our tears and moans, but insisted that they were *evidences* of a work of grace; proving from God's promises to the "poor in spirit," to the "broken-hearted," and the like, that there was hope in Israel for such characters; and that these their distresses were sure signs of their future deliverance, for that whom the Lord wounded he healed, and whom he killed he would make alive.

After worship was over, I could not forbear speaking to the minister, and thanking him for his discourse; and the greater part of the congregation being withdrawn, I opened my mind freely to him, told him how long I had been under distress of mind, and that I could never before obtain relief. A few of his most intimate friends were present, who also heard what I said. They affectionately smiled, and congratulated me on my having been brought under an evangelical ministry, and by means of it found rest unto my soul. Nor did they scruple to say, that the reason why so many of God's dear children were held in bondage for so long a time was that the pure gospel was withheld from them, and a kind of linsey-woolsey doctrine substituted in its place. I confess my heart had some misgivings at that time, fearing lest I should be cheered by flattering words, instead of the water of life. I told them that I dare not at present consider myself a converted man; but that I hoped I should be such. They answered me with a smile, intimating that such thoughts were a sign of grace; and that there was no doubt but that in waiting at the pool of God's ordinances, I should obtain all that peace and joy which my soul desired.

On my return home, I cannot say that I was wholly free from apprehensions; but my heart was greatly lightened of its load. I have attended at the same place ever since; and have often been encouraged in the same way. I am not without my doubts and fears lest my peace should prove unfounded; and, by a careful reperusal of both your letters, I perceive that, if your principles be true, it is so. Yet surely my hope is not all in vain! I tremble at the thought of sinking again into the horrors of despondency.

I am yours, with much respect,

EPAPHRAS.

LETTER VI.

[Archippus to Epaphras.]

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

If I have been interested by your former letters, I must say I am doubly so by your last. Your case appears to me to be delicate and dangerous. Yet I feel myself in a very unpleasant situation. I cannot speak the truth without its having the appearance of a want of feeling towards you, and of something like invidiousness towards those with whom you associate. If I could remain silent with a good conscience, I should certainly do so.

It afforded me pleasure to learn that you had refused consolation from several of those sources which heal the hurt of a sinner slightly, crying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace;" but, without taking upon me to decide upon the personal religion of the parties, I must declare my firm persuasion that you have not refused them *all*. I cannot think a whit the better of a ministry on account of its being spoken of as "singularly evangelical." Such language frequently means no more than that a preacher is very orthodox in his own esteem, or, at most, that his preaching is singularly adapted to soothe and comfort his people. But these things are no proof that it is the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. I do not deny the character of good men, or of gospel ministers, to all who have advanced doctrines like those by which you were comforted; but I am persuaded that, in respect of these principles, they are anti-evangelical. I have no desire, however, to impose my opinion upon you. Believe neither of us any further than what we advance accords with the oracles of God.

What is it, I would ask, that has given you relief? Is it any thing in the gospel? any thing in the doctrine of the cross? If so, rejoice in your associates, and let your associates rejoice in you. If it be so, you have no reason to "doubt or fear," or cherish any "misgivings of heart." That consolation which proceeds from these sources is undoubtedly of God. But, you will ask, is there no true consolation but what is derived *directly* from the doctrine of the cross? may we not be comforted by a consciousness of that in our own souls to which God has promised everlasting life? I answer, We certainly may: the Scriptures point out many things as evidences of a work of grace; and, if we be conscious that we are the subjects of them, we are warranted to conclude ourselves interested in eternal life. But it becomes us to beware of reckoning those things as evidences of grace which are not so, and to which no promises are made in the word of God. If the account which you have given be accurate, the evidence from which your encouragement was drawn was mere *distress*—distress in which your "heart was too hard to repent," and under which you "*could not believe.*" Yet, on account of this distress, you have been complimented with possessing a "broken heart, a poor and contrite spirit;" and the promises made to such characters have been applied to you. If these things be just, a hard heart and a contrite spirit may be found in the same person, and at the same time. To this may be added, though believers derive consolation from a consciousness of that within them to which the Scriptures promise everlasting life; yet this is not the way in which the Spirit of God *first* imparts relief to the soul. The first genuine consolation that is afforded is by something *without* ourselves, even by the doctrine of the cross: whilst this is rejected or disregarded, we are unbelievers, and cannot possibly be the subjects of any disposition or exercise of mind which is pleasing to God, or to which he has promised salvation; and, consequently, cannot be conscious of any thing of the kind.

The first relief enjoyed by the manslayer was from a city of refuge being provided: after he had entered in, he would derive additional consolation from knowing that he was within its gates: and thus it is that *rest to the soul* is promised to them that *come to Jesus,—take his yoke,—and learn his spirit*. But the rest which you have found was not by *coming to him* as weary and heavy laden, but from a consciousness that you *were* weary and heavy laden, and by being taught that this was a true sign of future deliverance. You have found rest, it seems, without coming to Jesus that you may have life!

If indeed your spirit is “poor and contrite”—if it be a grief of heart to you to reflect on your conduct towards the best of beings—if a view of the cross of Christ excite to mourning, on account of that for which he died—then is thy heart with my heart; and with the greatest satisfaction I can add, give me thy hand. Yes; if so, your heart is with God’s heart, with Christ’s heart, and with the heart of all holy beings; and all holy beings will offer thee their hand. But in this case you not only *can*, but *do* repent and believe in Jesus. The question is, Is *that distress* of soul which is antecedent to all godly sorrow for sin, and in the midst of which the sinner is not willing to come to Jesus as utterly unworthy that he may have life, any evidence of a work of grace? If it be, Saul during his last years, and Judas in his last hours, were both gracious characters. If ever men were weary and heavy laden, they were; but neither of them came to Jesus with his burden—neither of them found rest for his soul.

Consider, I beseech you, whether that distress of soul which has preceded and issued in true conversion be ever represented in the Scripture as an evidence of a work of grace; or whether the parties were ever comforted on that ground. Do reperuse the cases already referred to, of Peter’s address to the murderers of Christ, and that of Paul and Silas to the jailer.

Consider impartially whether the distinction of sinners into *insensible* and *sensible*, with a design to exclude the former from being the proper objects of gospel invitation, be justifiable. A *compliance* with the invitation doubtless implies a just sense of sin, and a thirst after spiritual blessings; and so does a compliance with the Divine precepts; but it does not follow that either the invitations or the precepts are improperly *addressed* to sinners, whether sensible or insensible. Those who *made light* of the gospel supper were as really and properly invited to it as those who accepted it. Those also who were invited to buy and eat, to buy wine and milk without money and without price, are described as spending their money for that which was not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. The same invitation which, in the beginning of that chapter, is given in figurative language, is immediately afterwards expressed literally, and runs thus—“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” The *thirst*, therefore, which they are supposed to feel, could be no other than the desire of happiness, which they vainly hoped to assuage in the enjoyments of this world; but which God assures them could never be assuaged but by the blessings of the gospel, the sure mercies of David. The invitation of our Saviour to the weary and heavy laden is manifestly a quotation from Jer. vi. 16, and the people who were there invited to stand in the ways and see, to inquire after the old paths, and the good way, and to walk therein, with the promise that they should find rest to their souls, were so far from being sensible of their sin that they impudently answered, “We will not walk therein.” To confine the invitations of Scripture to *sensible* sinners, and to hold up the blessings of the gospel as *belonging* to them, before and as the ground of their compliance, is to pervert the word of God.

But why do I thus write? Is it because I want to plunge my dear young friend into the gulf of despondency? Far be this from me! My desire is to draw him off from all false dependences, and to lead him, if it might be, to rest upon the Rock of ages. Is it consolation that he wants? Let me remind him of what I have said before. If he be willing to relinquish every other ground of hope, and to embrace Jesus as the only name given under heaven and among men by which we can be saved, there is nothing in heaven or earth to hinder it. I have no desire to persuade you that you are not in a converted state. It may be that what you have said of your being unable to repent or believe in Christ was the language of despondency. Hardness of heart and unbelief are found even in believers themselves, and are frequently the objects of lamentation. There are seasons especially in which it may seem, even to a good man, as if he were void of all tenderness of heart, and all regard for Christ. Whether this was your case at that time, or not, I feel no regret for having directed you, as a perishing sinner, to believe in Jesus for salvation, rather than encouraged you to think the best of your state, from any supposed symptoms of grace that might be found in you. I would do the same with any religious professor who should be in a state of doubt and darkness respecting the reality of his religion; for if there be any true religion in us, it is much more likely to be discovered and drawn forth into actual exercise by an exhibition of the glory and grace of Christ, than by searching for it among the rubbish of our past feelings. To discover the small grains of steel mixed among a quantity of dust, it were much better to make use of a magnet than a microscope.

An exhibition of the name of Christ is that by which the thoughts of the heart are revealed. To him, therefore, as a guilty and perishing sinner, I must still direct you. If you be indeed of a broken and contrite spirit, if true grace have a being in your soul, though it be but as the smoking flax, his name will so far be precious to you. To him your desires will ascend; in him they will centre; on his righteousness all your hope of acceptance with God will be placed; and, when this is the case, you will find rest to your soul.

I am yours, with sincere affection,

ARCHIPPUS.

SPIRITUAL PRIDE:

OR THE OCCASIONS, CAUSES, AND EFFECTS OF HIGH-MINDEDNESS IN RELIGION;
WITH CONSIDERATIONS EXCITING TO SELF-ABASEMENT.

INTRODUCTION.

As there is nothing pertaining to holiness which renders us more like our Lord Jesus Christ than lowliness of mind, so there is nothing pertaining to sin which approaches nearer to the image of Satan than *pride*. This appears to have been the transgression for which he himself was first condemned, and by which he seduced our first parents to follow his example. It was insinuated to them that they were kept in ignorance and treated as underlings, and that by following his counsel they would be raised in the scale of being: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

All the evil that is in the world is comprehended in three things—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." Each of these cardinal vices implies that man is alienated from God, and that all his affections and thoughts centre in himself; but the last is the most subtle in its influence. It consists in **THINKING MORE HIGHLY OF OURSELVES THAN WE**

ought to think. It is a mental flatulency that pervades all the soul, and and puffs it up with vain conceits. It is visible to all about us, but to us invisible. It seizes those revenues of glory which are due to God, and applies them to selfish uses. Strength, beauty, genius, opulence, science, the success of labour, and the achievements of enterprise, all are perverted to its purpose. Finally, It renders man his own idol; he worshippeth the creature more than the Creator; he sacrificeth to his own net, and burneth incense to his own drag.

But the particular species of pride which I shall attempt to delineate is that which is *spiritual*, or which has religious excellence, real or supposed, for its object.

Religion is not the only object by which religious professors may be elated; but the elatedness occasioned by it is that only which is denominated *spiritual pride*.

SECTION I.

THE OCCASIONS, OR OBJECTS, OF SPIRITUAL PRIDE.

THOUGH a considerable part of the following remarks will have respect to the faults of good men; yet not the whole of them; spiritual pride is not confined to spiritual men. The subject of it indeed must needs be, if not a professor of religion, yet a religious man in his own esteem, but that may be all. One of its principal operations is in a way of *self-righteous hope*, which is the reigning disposition of millions who have no just claim to the character of religious; and as this is a species of spiritual pride which appears at a very early period, it may be proper to begin with this, and proceed to others in the order in which they are commonly manifested.

The likeness which is drawn by our Saviour of the Pharisees in his time bears a minute resemblance to the character of great numbers in every age: all their works are done to be seen of men, and constitute the ground of their hope of acceptance with God. The sentiments of their hearts in their devout addresses to their Maker, if put into words, would be to this effect: "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." It is not common for those who pay any regard to the Scriptures expressly to arrogate to themselves the honour of making themselves to differ. Most men will thank God that they are what they are; and the Pharisee did the same. Many will now acknowledge, in addition to this, that their hopes of being accepted of God are "through the merits of Jesus Christ;" but it is not by such language that a self-righteous spirit is to be disguised. Nor is it peculiar to those whom we call decent characters "to trust that they are righteous and despise others;" for the same spirit may be seen in the most profligate of mankind. Judging of themselves by others, they derive comfort; for they can always find characters worse than their own. Reprove a common swearer, and he will thank God he means no harm; for he is frank and open, and not as that liar. Convict a liar, and he will argue that in this wicked world a man cannot live if he always speak truth; and he is not a thief. The thief pleads that he never was guilty of murder; and even the murderer was provoked to it. Thus they can each find worse characters than their own: the motto of each is, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men."

A minister of the Church of England was some years since appointed chaplain to a certain charitable asylum,* where his constant business would

* The Rev. Thomas Scott, the excellent commentator, and minister of the Lock Hospital, an institution appropriated to unhappy females.—B.

be to visit and converse with persons who, by their own misconduct, were reduced to the most deplorable condition. On receiving his appointment, he thought within himself, I shall have one advantage however: I shall not have to encounter a self-righteous spirit. But on entering upon his office he soon perceived his mistake, and that there was no less pharisaism in these dregs of society than among the more refined and sober part of mankind.

Much of this spirit is seen *under the convictions and alarms of awakened sinners*. The conflicts of mind by which many for a long time are deprived of all peace and enjoyment, are no other than the struggles between the gospel way of salvation and a secret attachment to self-righteousness. When terrified by the threatenings of the word, or the near approach of death, the first refuge to which the sinner usually betakes himself is the promise of amendment. He vows to reform, and this affords him a little ease. For a time it may be his gross vices are relinquished; he carefully attends to religious duties; and, while this lasts, he flatters himself that he is a better man, and supposes the Almighty is no less pleased with him than he is pleased with himself. If he rest here, his pride proves his eternal overthrow.

But it may be his rest here is short. It commonly proves that the vows and resolutions thus made are like the morning cloud and the early dew that goeth away. A new temptation to some old sin, which was not mortified, but had merely retired during the present alarm, undoes all. Now remorse and fearful apprehension take possession of the soul, not only on account of its having sinned against greater light than heretofore, but for destroying its own refuge. The gourd is smitten, and the sinner, exposed as to a vehement east wind, fainteth. Yet even here spiritual pride will insinuate itself and offer a species of false comfort. While he is weeping over his sins, and bemoaning the unhappiness of his case, that he should thus undo all his hopes, a soothing thought suggests itself, Will not the Almighty have compassion on me for these penitential tears? surely my mournings will be heard, and my lamentations go up before him! Many have stopped short here, and, it is to be feared, have missed of eternal life!

But it may be he is disturbed from this repose also. Conscience becomes more enlightened by reading and hearing the word. He is convinced that neither tears nor prayers, nor aught else but the blood-shedding of the Saviour, will take away sin; and that there is no way of being saved by him but by believing in him. Yet a thought occurs, Can such a sinner as I believe in Christ? Would it not be presumption to hope that one so unfit and unworthy as I am should be accepted? This thought proceeds upon a supposition that some degree of previous fitness or worthiness is necessary to recommend us to the Saviour, which is repugnant to the whole tenor of the gospel, and so long as it continues to influence our decisions will be an insuperable bar to believing.

Self-righteousness, at some stages, will work in a way of *despair*. The sinner, finding that no duties performed in impenitence and unbelief are any way available, or in the least degree pleasing to God—that no means are pointed out in the Scriptures by which a hard-hearted sinner may obtain a heart of flesh—and that, nevertheless, he is told to repent and believe in Jesus, or perish for ever—sinks into despondency. Hard thoughts are entertained of God. He thinks he has taken all possible pains with himself; and if what he possesses be not repentance nor faith, he has no hopes of ever obtaining them. God, it seems to him, requires impossibilities, and can therefore be no other than a hard master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed. The religious efforts of some, like those of the slothful servant, end here. All is given up as a hope-

less case, and the things which their hearts, amidst all their convictions, have been lingering after, are again pursued.

To come to Jesus as a sinner *ready to perish*, justifying God and condemning self, suing for mercy as utterly unworthy, as one of the chief of sinners, pleading mercy merely for the sake of the atonement, is a hard lesson for a self-righteous heart to learn. The shiftings of pride in such cases are fitly expressed by the sinner's "going about" to establish his own righteousness, and not submitting to "the righteousness of God." Like the priests of Dagon, he will set up his idol as long as he can possibly make it stand. But if ever he obtain mercy he must desist. There is no rest for the soul but in coming to Jesus. And if he be once brought to this, all his self-righteous strivings, and the hopes which he built upon them, with all his hard thoughts of God for requiring what in his then present state of mind he *could not* comply with, will appear in their true light, the *odious workings of a deceitful and deceived heart*.

Such, and many other, are the workings of spiritual pride in the form of a self-righteous spirit under first awakenings; but it is not in this form only, nor at this period only, that it operates. You may have obtained rest for your souls in the doctrine of the cross; you may have communicated your case to others, joined a Christian church, and may purpose to walk in communion with it through life; but still it becomes you to be upon the watch against this as well as other evils to which you are exposed.

The apostle, in giving directions for the office of a bishop, objects to a "novice," or one newly converted to the faith; and for this reason, "lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." It is here plainly implied that the early stages of even true religion, in persons possessed of promising gifts, are attended with peculiar temptations to high-mindedness. Alas, what numerous examples of this are daily apparent in young ministers! The transition, in many instances, is great: from a dejected state of mind to become guides of others, or from obscure circumstances to be elevated to the situation of a public teacher, attracting the smiles and applauses of the people, is what few young men are able to bear. When alone, conversing with God, or with their own souls, they can see many reasons for self-abasement; but when encircled with smiling crowds, and loaded with indiscreet applause, these thoughts evaporate. Every one proclaims the preacher's excellence; and surely what every one affirms must be true! In short, he inhales the incense, and becomes intoxicated with its fumes.

Such a man, we sometimes say, possesses talents, but he is aware of it. In one sense a man must needs be aware of it. Humility does not consist in being ignorant of our talents, be they what they may; but in being properly impressed with the *end* for which they are given. The attention of a vain mind is fixed upon the talents themselves, dwelling on them with secret satisfaction, and expecting every one to be sensible of them no less than himself. Hence it is that the most fulsome adulation is acceptable. Hungering and thirsting after applause, he is ever fishing for it, and the highest degrees of it, when bestowed, strike but in unison with his own previous thoughts. Hence the flatterer, whom others can easily see through, appears to be a sensible and discerning man, who has discovered that of which the generality of people around him are insensible. Not so the humble. His attention is not fixed so much upon his talents as on the *use* which is required to be made of them. Feeling himself accountable for all that he has received, and conscious of his unspeakable defects in the application of them, he finds matter for continual shame and self-abasement. In this view

the greatest of men may consider themselves as the "least of all saints," and unworthy of a place among them.

Vanity of mind, so far as it relates to our behaviour towards man, will frequently effect its own cure. It is certain to work disgust in others, and that disgust will be followed by neglect, and other mortifying treatment. Thus it is that time and experience, if accompanied by a moderate share of good sense, will rub off the excrescences of youthful folly, and reduce the party to propriety of conduct. And if there be true religion as well as good sense, such things may be the means of really mortifying the evil, and may teach a lesson of genuine humility; but where this is wanting, the change is merely exterior. Though the branches may be lopped off, the root remains, and is strengthened by time, rather than mortified. Youthful vanity, in these cases, frequently ripens into pride and overbearing contempt.

From the earliest ages of Christianity, those who were possessed of spiritual gifts, and official situations in the church, were in danger of being elated by them. Though the eye cannot in truth say to the hand, "I have no need of thee, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you;" yet if there had not been something nearly resembling it in the church, such language would not have been used. Neither would the primitive ministers have been charged not to "lord it over God's heritage," if such things had never made their appearance. The primitive churches had their Diotrophes, who cast out such as displeased him (3 John 9, 10); and such men have not been wanting for successors in every age. This lust of domination has sometimes been formed in preachers, and sometimes in men of opulence among private members; but commonly in persons, whether preachers or hearers, who were the least qualified for the exercise of legitimate rule. The churches of Christ, as well as all other societies, require to be governed, and he has prescribed laws for this purpose; but no man is fit to govern but he that is of a meek and lowly disposition. *The greatest of all must be the servant of all.* The authority which he maintains must not be sought after, nor supported by improper measures; but be spontaneously conferred on account of superior wisdom, integrity, and love.

There are various other things, as well as official situations, which furnish occasion for spiritual pride. Members of churches being equal, as members, with their pastors, may assume a kind of democratic consequence, and forget that it is their duty to honour and obey them that have the "rule over them in the Lord." If ministers are called the servants of the churches, it is because their lives are laid out in promoting their best interests; and, when this is the case, they are entitled to an affectionate and respectful demeanour. To be a servant of a Christian church is one thing, and to be a slave to the caprice of a few of its members is another. *Whatever it be in which we excel, or imagine ourselves to do so, there it becomes us to beware lest we be lifted up to our hurt.* Those differences which are produced by religion itself may, through the corruptions of our nature, be converted into food for this pernicious propensity.

Those who name the name of Christ are taught to relinquish the chase of fashionable appearance, and to be *sober and modest in their apparel and deportment*; but while they are renouncing the pride of life in one form, let them beware that they cherish it not in another. We have seen persons whose self-complacency, on account of the plainness of their apparel, has risen to a most insufferable degree of arrogance; and who have appeared to be much more affected by a ribbon or a bonnet on another's head than by all the abominations of their own hearts. The genuine "adorning" of the Christian is not that of the putting on of apparel; no, not that which is plain, any more than that which is gaudy; but the "ornament of a meek and

quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." To value ourselves on account of outward finery, which, where it is followed, is commonly the case, is offensive to God, and inconsistent with a proper attention to the inner man; but to value ourselves for the contrary may be still more so. The former, though a proof of a vain and little mind, yet is never considered, I suppose, as an exercise of holiness; but the latter is: great stress is laid upon it, and commonly to the neglect of the weightier matters of religion. In short, a righteousness is made of it, which of all things is most odious in the sight of God.

Those who name the name of Christ are taught also to *demean themselves in such a manner* as will naturally inspire respect from persons of character, and this may become a snare to the soul. Religion, by changing the course of a man's conduct, often raises him to a much superior station in society than he occupied before. From being a drunkard, a liar, or in some form a loose character, he becomes sober, faithful, and regular in his conduct. Hence he naturally rises in esteem, and, in some cases, is intrusted with important concerns. All this is doubtless to the honour of God and religion; but let us beware lest a self-complacent thought enter our heart, and we be lifted up to our hurt. This species of pride will frequently appear in a scornful behaviour towards others who are still in their sins, and in a censorious and unforgiving spirit towards such members of the church as have conducted themselves with less regularity than ourselves. A lowly mind will drop a tear over the evil courses of the ungodly, and, feeling its obligations to renewing and keeping grace that hath made the difference, will find matter even in a public execution for humiliation, prayer, and praise. The falls of fellow Christians will likewise excite a holy fear and trembling, and induce a greater degree of watchfulness and supplication, lest we should in a similar way dishonour the name of God; and if called to unite with others in the exercise of scriptural discipline, it will be with a spirit of tenderness; not for the purpose of revenge, but of recovery. Seest thou a man whose resentments rise high when another falls, who is fierce and clamorous for the infliction of censure, and whose anger cannot be otherwise appeased, there is little reason to expect that he will stand long. He "thinketh he standeth;" let him "take heed lest he fall!"

† He whose character is established by a steady and uniform conduct is doubtless worthy of our esteem; but if with this he be unfeeling towards others less uniform, there are three or four questions which it might be well for him to consider. First, Whether the difference between him and them be owing so much to the prevalence of Christian principles as to other causes. It may arise merely from a difference in *natural temper*. The sin which easily besets them may be of a kind which exposes them to the censures of the world; while his may be something more private, which does not come under their cognizance. It may arise from a greater regard to *reputation* in him than in them. Some men pique themselves much more than others upon the immaculacy of their character. But these are motives which if weighed in the balance will be found wanting. Secondly, Whether a censorious spirit towards those who have fallen does not prove that we arrogate to ourselves the difference, and depend upon ourselves for the resisting of temptation. We may "thank God" in words that we are "not as other men," and so did the Pharisee; but we may be certain while this spirit prevails that God is not the rock on which we rest. Thirdly, Whether arrogance and self-dependence be not as odious in the sight of God as the greatest outward vices, and whether it be not likely that he will give us up to the latter as a punishment for the former. We might have thought it a pity that so eminent a character as Simon Peter, one that was to take so important a

part in spreading the gospel, should not have been preserved from so shameful a denial of his Lord. He prayed for him that *his faith should not fail*: why did he not pray that he should be either exempted from the trial, or preserved from falling in it? Surely if this self-confidence had not been more offensive to Christ than even his open denial of him it had been so; but as it was, rather than he should be indulged in spiritual pride, he must be rolled in the dirt of infamy.

God abhors the occasional exercises of self-confidence in his own people, and still more the habitual self-complacency of hypocrites. I remember a professor of religion, a member of one of our churches, who for a series of years maintained a very uniform character. He was constant in his attendance on all opportunities. At his own expense he erected a place of worship in his village for the occasional preaching of the gospel. Few men were more respected both by the world and by the church. To the surprise of every one that knew him, all at once he was found to be guilty of fornication. The church of which he was a member excluded him. From this time he sunk into a kind of sullen despondency, shunning all company and conversation, and giving himself up to melancholy. His friends felt much for him, and would often represent to him the mercy of God to backsliders who return to him in the name of Jesus. But all was of no account: he was utterly inconsolable. His sorrow did not appear to be of that kind which, while it weeps for sin, cleaves to the Saviour; but rather, like "the sorrow of the world" which "worketh death," was accompanied with a hard heart, and seemed to excite nothing unless it were a fruitless sigh. I well recollect having some conversation with him at the time, and that his state of mind struck me in an unfavourable light. It appeared to me that the man in the height of his profession was eaten up with spiritual pride; that God had let loose the reins of his lust to the staining of his glory, and that now, looking upon his reputation as irrecoverably lost, he sunk into despair.—A few years after, when his friends had begun to despair of him, all at once he wanted to come before the church and be restored to his place. In his confession little was said of the evil of his sin, or of the dishonour brought upon the name of Christ by it; but of certain extraordinary impulses which he had received, by which the pardon of his sin was sealed to him. The church, though with some hesitation, received him. They were soon under the necessity, however, of re-excluding him, as from that time he became a most self-important and contentious Antinomian.

God in calling sinners by his grace has given great proof of his sovereignty, passing over the wise and prudent, and revealing himself to babes; the mighty and the noble, and choosing the base; yea, the devout and the honourable, and showing mercy to publicans and sinners. This is, doubtless, of a humbling nature, and its design was that "no flesh should glory in his presence." But even in this case there is an avenue at which spiritual pride may insinuate itself; and it seems to have found its way among the believing Gentiles. Hence the following language: "Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear." It is easy to perceive how the same thoughts may be admitted in weak, ignoble, and once profligate characters who have obtained mercy, while others more respectable are yet in their sins.

Moreover, the Christian religion tends to *enlighten* and *enlarge* the mind. Men that have lived a number of years in the grossest ignorance, on becoming serious Christians have gradually obtained a considerable degree of intelligence. They have not only been spiritually illuminated so as to read

the Scriptures as it were with other eyes, and to discourse on Divine subjects with clearness and advantage; but have formed a habit of reading many other useful publications, and of thinking over their contents. All this is to the honour of Christianity; but through the corruption of the heart it may become a snare. It is true that spiritual knowledge in its own nature tends to humble the soul both in the sight of God and man; but all the knowledge that good men possess is not spiritual; and that which is so, when it comes to be reflected upon in unworthier moments, may furnish food for self-complacency. Neither are all whose minds are enlightened by the gospel, and whose light is so far operative as even to effect some change of conduct, good men: we read of some who "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour," who were afterwards entangled and overcome, 2 Pet. ii. 10. An influx of knowledge to some men, like an influx of wealth to others, is more than they are able to bear, and, if they have not the grace of God at heart as a balance, they will certainly be overset. A disposition for raising difficulties and speculating upon abstruse and unprofitable questions, a captiousness in hearing, an eagerness for disputing, and an itch for teaching, are certain indications of a vain mind, which at best is but half instructed, and, in many cases, destitute of the truth. Such characters are minutely described by Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy: "Give no heed," saith he, "to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith. The end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm."

If a little knowledge happen to unite with a litigious temper, it is a dangerous thing. Such characters are the bane of churches. If they might be believed, they are the faithful few who contend for the "faith once delivered to the saints;" but they know not what manner of spirit they are of, nor consider that there is a species of "contention" that "cometh only by pride." There were men of this stamp in the times of the apostle Paul, and whose character he described, with the effects produced by their wrangling. Such a one, saith he, is "proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions, and strifes of words, whence cometh envy, strife, railings, evil-surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth." It is to be hoped that some who have manifested this litigious spirit may not be altogether "destitute of the truth;" and it may be worthy of notice that the persons referred to by the apostle are not *thus* denominated, but are supposed to kindle the fire which "men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth" keep alive. It is doubtful, however, if not more than doubtful, whether the description given of *them* will admit of hope in their favour. But if it will, and the same hope be admitted of some litigious spirits in our times, it is doubtless a very wicked thing to furnish the enemies of religion with brands, as I may say, wherewith to burn the temple of God.

Another branch of this species of pride is seen in the conduct of professors who will *take such liberties, and go such lengths in conformity to the world, as frequently prove a stumbling-block to the weak and the tender-hearted*. If reproved for it, they are seldom at a loss in vindicating themselves, attributing it to a more liberal and enlarged way of thinking, and ascribing the objections of others to weakness, and a contractedness of mind. Thus some men can join in the chase, frequent the assembly room, or visit the theatre, and still think themselves entitled to the character of Christians, and perhaps to a place in a Christian church. A case nearly resembling this occurred in the primitive times. The heathen sacrifices were

accompanied with feasts, at which the people ate of that which had been offered to their gods. When a number of Corinthian idolaters, who had always lived in this practice, became Christians, it proved a snare to them. They seem to have thought it hard to be obliged to deny themselves of these social repasts. Some of them ventured to break through; and, when spoken to on the subject, pleaded that the "idol was nothing," and therefore could have no influence on the food; adding that they were not so void of "knowledge" as not to be able to distinguish between the one and the other. Paul, in answer, first reasons with them on *their own principles*. You have knowledge . . . what do you know? That an idol is nothing in the world, and there is none other God but one. Very well: we know the same. You, it seems, by your superior discernment, can partake of the food simply as food, without considering it as offered to an idol, and so can preserve your consciences from being defiled. Be it so; yet *there is not in every one this knowledge*. Granting, therefore, that the thing itself, as performed by you, is innocent; it becomes an occasion of stumbling to others. Your mental reservations are unknown to them: while, therefore, you preserve your consciences from guilt, theirs may be defiled in following your example. And why boast of your *knowledge*? "knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." And if any one think that he knoweth any thing, "he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."

Having thus condemned their vain conduct, even upon their own principles, the apostle proceeds to show that it is *in itself sinful*, as participating of idolatry! "Flee from idolatry! I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the *communion* of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the *communion* of the body of Christ? Behold Israel after the flesh, are not they who eat of the sacrifices *partakers* of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing? But this I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with demons! Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?—Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

This admirable counsel will serve as a universal test of right and wrong. Instead of vindicating fleshly indulgences, and priding ourselves on the superiority of our knowledge to that of others, before we engage, let us seriously ask ourselves whether that which we are about to do be capable of being done "to the glory of God." We can take exercise, and enjoy agreeable society, with various other things, for the purpose of unbending and recreating the mind. By these means we are enabled to return to the duties of our stations with renewed vigour. In such cases we should feel no difficulty in asking a Divine blessing upon them to this end. But can we pursue the chase, frequent the theatre, or unite at the card table, with such an object in view? Dare we pray for a Divine blessing to attend these exercises before we engage in them? If not, they must needs be sinful.

Moreover, Christianity, confers great and important *privileges* upon those who embrace it. "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." They are "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." However they may have been estranged from God, and every thing that is good, they are now "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." The various distinctions of "male and female, rich and poor, bond and free," are here of no account, "all are one in Christ Jesus." This is, undoubtedly, one of the glories of the gospel, and that which proves it to be a religion framed for

man. In its own nature it is also adapted to fill the soul with humility and gratitude. The natural language inspired by a proper sense of it is, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" But even this may be converted into food for spiritual pride. To be raised from worse than nothing, and placed among "the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty," is a wonderful transition; and, if contemplated in an unfavourable state of mind, may prove the occasion of evil. A place and a name in a Christian church, though in the esteem of some persons reproachful, yet in that of others may be honourable; and the party may be much more affected by it in this than in the other. Members of churches have been known to be more than a little vain of the distinction. In some it has operated in a way of turbulence; leading a member to watch with an evil eye every measure that did not originate with himself, as if it were aimed to raze the foundations of all religion. In others it has operated in a way of meanness. Pleased with the familiarity and friendly treatment which, while their conduct is uniform, they receive from men of superior stations, they have no principle of their own; their study is to please others, rather than to show themselves approved unto God. The same persons, if guilty of any thing which exposes them to censure, commonly discover far more concern for the *dishonour* of the thing than for the sin of it; and their confessions wear the appearance, not so much of the humble acknowledgments of a contrite spirit, as of the abject cringings of a mind terrified at the idea of losing its consequence.

From an idea of the honour and privileges attached to Christianity, some have been tempted to look down upon their carnal connexions as though they were beings of an inferior nature. Religious children have been in danger of losing a proper filial respect towards their irreligious parents, and religious servants towards their irreligious masters. Indeed, we have heard heavy complaints against religious servants. Some have resolved, on this account, to employ none of them. I hope this is far from being a general case. Within the sphere of my observation there are, I am persuaded, more respectable families who prefer them than otherwise. I may add, that such complaints too often proceed from persons who either are prejudiced against religion, or who possess but a small portion of it. Nor are their declarations confined to servitude; but generally extended to all dealings with religious people. I have heard men of extensive connexions in the world, however, speak a very different language. "Of mere professors," say they, "we have no opinion; but give us men of religion to deal with: others may be held by their honour, and their interest; but that is all: a religious man is a man of principle." But true it is that many have acted as though their extraordinary hopes and privileges as Christians tended to free them, in some degree at least, from the ordinary obligations of men; and as though it were beneath them to respect and honour those persons who are destitute of piety. The repeated injunctions of the New Testament on this head, while they acquit Christianity of the evil, imply that Christians are, nevertheless, in danger of falling into it.

Nor is this spirit confined in its operation towards the *irreligious*: among Christians themselves in their behaviour towards one another it too often intrudes itself. The parent and the children, the master and the servant, the magistrate and the subject, being all on an equal footing in the house of God, there is danger of the latter forgetting the inequality when out of it, and disregarding that order and subordination which are essential to the well-being of society. If we indulge in high-mindedness, it will be natural to dwell in our thoughts upon that relation wherein we stand upon even ground with another, rather than upon that wherein we are beneath him;

and thus a parent, a master, or a magistrate, will not be honoured by us in these relations, on account of his being a fellow Christian. If nothing like this had existed in the times of the apostles, it is not likely we should have had the exhortation in 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2, "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour; that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort."

To the above may be added *privileges and advantages which, though of a worldly nature, are accidentally attached to religion*. The circumstance of being of a party or denomination which has the sanction of authority, or the greatest numbers, or people of the greatest opulence and respectability belonging to it, is frequently known to furnish occasion for spiritual pride. What airs have some men assumed on account of their religion happening to be established by law! and what an outcry have they made against schism! as though the true church and the true religion were to be known by human legislation; not considering that the same legislature establishes different forms of religion in different parts of the empire; and that Episcopalians, therefore, are no less schismatical in Scotland than Presbyterians and other Dissenters in England. What airs also have some men assumed among Dissenters on account of their denomination, or the congregation where they have attended being distinguished for its opulence; as if, since the times of our Saviour and his apostles, things were turned upside down, and that which was then a matter of no account was now become all in all.

Even where persons are of the same denomination, the mere circumstance of a *regular and strict adherence to its rules*, though of little or no importance, becomes the occasion of a sort of spiritual pride. We have heard much of the *regular* clergy, and of the *regular* Dissenters too, who each value themselves and despise others whom they consider as *irregular*, though, in many instances, they be men whose worth is superior to their own.

Nor is this spirit apparent on one side only. If some are lifted up by being of that party which has the greatest number, others are no less so in being of that which has the smallest. To despise the multitude, and to pique themselves on being among the *discerning few*, is common with men who have nothing better on which to ground their self-esteem. Pride will also find footing to support it in being *irregular*, as well as *regular*. The contempt with which some affect to treat all forms and rules, and those who adhere to them, is far from being to their honour, and bears too near a resemblance to the spirit of Diogenes, who trampled upon the pride of Plato, and that, as Plato told him, "with greater pride."

SECTION II.

THE CAUSES OF SPIRITUAL PRIDE.

THE operations of this principle may not only be traced by those things which furnish occasion for it, but by other things which have a *direct and positive influence in producing it*. The *occasion* and the *cause* must not be confounded. The one is the object upon which pride fastens, and which it perverts to its use; the other is the principle by which it is produced. The apostle himself was in danger of being "exalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations that were given him;" not that those revelations tended in their own nature to produce this effect; but, like all other good things, they were capable of being abused through the remains of indwelling

sin. To be the occasion of spiritual pride reflects no dishonour; but that which in its own nature causes it must needs be false and pernicious. The principal sources of this overwhelming stream will be found among the dark mountains of error and delusion.

It may not be in our power to determine with certainty whether the spiritual pride which we see in others *originates* in their religion or operates *notwithstanding* it; but if we be only able to show that the former *may possibly be the case*, we shall at least furnish grounds for self-examination; and if withal it can be proved that certain notions have a natural tendency to produce that very effect which is manifest in the spirit of those who avow them, we shall thereby be able to judge with some degree of satisfaction what is true and false religion. That which worketh lowliness of mind is from above; but that which produces self-complacency is assuredly from beneath.

It requires also to be noticed that these things may prevail in *different degrees*. The religion of some is *wholly false*; and spiritual pride compasseth them as doth a chain; that of others is *partly* so; and they are greatly affected by it: but the tendency is the same in both.

Once more, It requires to be noticed that the prevalence of true or false religion in individuals cannot be ascertained with certainty by the truth or falsehood of their *professed creed*. This may be true, and we, notwithstanding, be essentially erroneous; or, on the other hand, it may include much error, and yet the principles which really govern our spirit and conduct may be so different that the truth may nevertheless be said to dwell in us. Such cases may, however, be considered as rare—a kind of exception from a general rule.

It is a general truth, manifestly taught in the Scriptures, that spiritual pride is fed by false religion. All the false teachers of whom they give us an account were distinguished by this spirit. “They loved to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen of men.—They loved the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.—There was a certain man called Simon, who beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one.—I will come unto you shortly, and not know the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power: for ye suffer if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.—Let us not be desirous of vain-glory; if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing he deceiveth himself.—As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh constrain you to be circumcised. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.—Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.—Presumptuous are they, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.—When they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.—Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence, receiveth us not.”

It should seem, from hence, that though all spiritual pride does not arise from false religion, yet all false religion produces spiritual pride. The best of men, and those who adhere to the best of principles, are in danger of this sin: but as there is a wide and manifest difference between sinning and living in sin, so it is one thing to be occasionally lifted up, and that at a time when the great principles we imbibe are in a manner out of sight, and another to be habitually intoxicated with self-complacency, and that as the

immediate *effect* of our religion. See you a man whose meditation, preaching, or writing produces *humble charity, a pure heart, a good conscience*, and you may expect to find in him *faith unfeigned*. But if you perceive in him a fondness for unprofitable themes of discourse, which "minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith," with a forwardness to *affirm what he does not understand*, you may be almost certain that he has "swerved from the truth, and turned aside to vain jangling."

As true religion principally consists in "the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent," or in just sentiments of the *Law-giver* and the *Saviour* of men; so almost every species of error will be found in the contrary. If we err in our conceptions of the Divine character, it resembles an error at the outset of a journey, the consequence of which is that the farther we travel the farther we are off. Without a proper sense of the holy excellence of the Divine nature, it will be impossible to perceive the fitness of the law which requires us to love him with all our heart. Such a requirement must appear rigorous and cruel. Hence we shall be disposed either to contract it, and imagine that our Creator cannot now expect any thing more at our hands than an outward decency of conduct; or, if we admit that perfect love is required, we shall still perceive no equity in it, and feel no manner of obligation to comply with it. The law will be accounted a task-master, and the gospel praised at its expense. In both cases we shall be blinded to the *multitude and magnitude of our sins*; for as where no law is there is no transgression, so in proportion as we are insensible of the spirituality or equity of it, we must needs be insensible of the evil of having transgressed it. And thus it is that men are whole in their own esteem, and think they need no physician, or one of but little value. Thus it is that degrading notions are entertained of the Saviour, and diminutive representations given of his salvation. In short, thus it is that justification by free grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, either becomes inadmissible, or, if admitted in words, is considered as a victory over the law, and as exonerating from all obligations to obey its precepts. Here, or hereabouts, will be found the grand springs of spiritual pride.

It is difficult to conceive whence the notion of *sinless perfection* in the present life, and all the spiritual pride that attaches to it, could arise, unless it was from ignorance of the glorious holiness of God, the spirituality of his law, and the corruption of the human heart. A proper sense of these truths would impel the best character upon earth to exclaim, with the prophet, "Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips."

And how is it that an obligation to love the Lord supremely, and with all our hearts, should be so hard to be understood? Yet few think themselves obliged to love him. "We are *sinners*," say they, "and *cannot* love him! and if we now and then yield him a little formal service, though it be by putting a force upon our inclinations, we imagine we do great things, nearly as much as ought to be required of us, and much more than many do whom we could name!"

Thus the sin of not loving God from our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves, is made nothing of in the world, though it be the fountain and sum of evil. The conscience itself is so defiled, that if we manifest but a decent behaviour in our relations among men, it very nearly acquits us. We claim a kind of exemption from every thing else. And whether it be by the dint of repetition with which this claim has been preferred, or whether those who ought to resist it be themselves too much inclined to favour it, so it is, that too many ministers give it up, contenting themselves with exhorting their hearers to things with which they *can* comply consistently with reigning enmity to God in their hearts—to things which contain nothing truly good

in them, and which a sinner may therefore perform through his whole life, and be shut out of heaven at last as "a worker of iniquity." There is not a precept in the Bible that can be obeyed without love, or with which a man may comply and be lost for ever: to exhort sinners, therefore, to things which merely qualify them for this world, or even to reading, hearing, or praying, in such a manner as cannot please God, is deviating from the Scriptures, and yielding up the first principles of moral government to the inclinations of depraved creatures. In short, it is no better than to enforce the *tithing of mint and cummin, to the neglect of judgment, mercy, and the love of God.*

On this sandy foundation rests the whole fabric of *self-righteous hope*, and all the spiritual pride which attaches to it. So long as we are blinded to the spirituality and requirements of the Divine law, we are in effect *without the law and alive* in our own conceit; and while this is the case, we shall see no necessity for salvation by free grace through a mediator, nor any fitness in it. Seeking to be justified, as it were, by the works of the law, we shall continue to stumble at the stumbling-stone. But when the *commandment*, in its true extent, comes home to the conscience, we find ourselves the subjects of abundance of sin, of which we never before suspected ourselves; and then, and not till then, we *die*, or despair of acceptance with God by the works of our hands.

We are clearly and expressly taught what that doctrine is which excludes boasting; and, by consequence, what it is that nourishes and cherishes it. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. *Where is boasting then?* It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay; but by the law of faith.—Not of works, lest any man should boast." But if, in direct opposition to this, men be taught, and induced to believe, that Christ came into the world only to give us good instruction, and set us a gold example—that there is no need of any atonement, for that "Repentance and a good life are of themselves sufficient to recommend us to the Divine favour"—and that "all hopes founded upon any thing else than a good moral life are merely imaginary;"—where is boasting now? Is it excluded?

Moreover, Though the Divinity and atonement of Christ be allowed, yet if men be taught and induced to believe that the grand object obtained by his death is that *repentance, faith, and sincere obedience should be accepted as the ground of justification, instead of sinless perfection*, the effect will not be materially different.* On this principle, the gospel is as really a covenant of works as the law, only that its terms are supposed to be somewhat easier. Nor is boasting excluded by it. The ground of acceptance with God, be it what it may, must be that which is made our *plea* for mercy. If faith, *considered as a virtue*, be that ground, we may then plead it before God, as *that for the sake of which* we hope to be saved; and if this be not

* This seems to have been the idea of Bishop Butler. "The doctrine of the gospel," he says, "appears to be, not only that he [Christ] taught the efficacy of repentance; but rendered it of the efficacy which it is, by what he did and suffered for us; that he obtained for us the benefit of having our repentance accepted unto eternal life: not only that he revealed to sinners that they were in a capacity of salvation, and how they might obtain it; but, moreover, that he put them into this capacity of salvation, by what he did and suffered for them; put us into a capacity of escaping future punishment, and obtaining future happiness." See his *Analogy*, Part II, Chap. V. p. 305. [The worthy prelate seems, however, to have taken refuge in more scriptural views in the hour of death.—Ed.]

boasting, nothing is. This, I am persuaded, no real Christian ever did, or dares attempt. Many good men, I doubt not, have been entangled with these disputes in theory; but, when upon their knees, it is *in the name of Jesus* that their petitions for mercy are presented, *and for his sake only* that they hope for their sins to be forgiven them. Faith, in the one case, is paying a composition, and all that in such circumstances ought to be required: but faith, in the other case, is acquiescing in the bestowment of mercy as a free and undeserved favour; not as the reward of any thing good in us, but of the obedience and death of the Saviour. The intercession of Christ, in the first instance, would be an apology for the well-disposed, resembling that which he offered for Mary of Bethany—*They have done what they could*; but, in the last, it is what the Scripture denominates it, an intercession for *transgressors*. Here the Divine government is justified, the conduct of sinners condemned, and the all-prevailing worthiness of the Intercessor alleged as the only ground, or reason, for the sake of which mercy should be bestowed. Thus it is that, while officiating as the Advocate of *sinners*, he sustains the character of “Jesus Christ the righteous.” Finally, Influenced by the former of these statements, I feel myself on respectable terms with my Creator; though not sinless, yet entitled to mercy, as doing my best: influenced by the latter, I approach my Creator as *a sinner ready to perish*, without a single plea for mercy but what arises from his own gracious nature, operating through the atonement of his Son. And through my whole life, whatever be my repentance, my faith, or the sincerity of my obedience, I never ground a single plea on any of these things as a procuring cause of mercy, but invariably desire that I may be “found in him.”

There is another species of spiritual pride, very different from any thing which has yet been described, and which originates in what some would call *the extremes of orthodoxy*; but which might, with greater propriety, be termed *gross heterodoxy*, or *false notions of the doctrines of grace*.

I have said it arises from *false views of the doctrines of grace*; and this I am persuaded is the case even where the most orthodox language is retained. The same terms may be used, by different persons, to express very different ideas. Thus it is that the doctrines of election, the atonement, justification by imputed righteousness, efficacious grace, and perseverance in a life of faith, are held fast in words, but in fact perverted.*

REMARKS ON TWO SERMONS BY W. W. HORNE OF YARMOUTH.

[A letter to a friend.]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You have sent me two sermons by William Wales Horne, entitled “The Faith of the Gospel Vindicated,” requesting my opinion of them. Why did you wish to impose upon me the task of reading such a performance? I suppose it was owing to your being a Norfolk man, and feeling interested in any thing that is done among the churches in that part of the kingdom. I hope this is not a fair sample of Norfolk divinity. If it be, they are low indeed! It would appear, however, that the author is a man of some con-

* It is supposed that the conclusion of this Essay is identical with certain parts of the treatise on Antinomianism, as, in the first edition of the works, by Dr. Ryland, the reader is referred for the remainder to the Introduction and Part II. of that piece.—ED.

sequence, at least in his own eyes, as, by the motto he has chosen, he seems to consider himself as *set for the defence of the gospel*.

Defence implies attack. Has any body in Norfolk then been attacking what he calls the gospel? So it should seem; and I should almost suspect from some passages that the assailants were in his own congregation. He certainly appears to be out of humour with some of them,—p. 32. Indeed, I entertain a hope for their sakes that this may be the case; for it is grievous to think that a people sustaining the character of a Christian church should suffer themselves to be imposed upon by such flimsy, incoherent, and erroneous preaching, and reckon it the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Of Mr. Horne I know nothing, save from this publication. He seems disposed, however, to give his readers all the information he can respecting *himself*, and this even in his title-page. From thence we learn, First, That he is not only a preacher, (which we might have gathered from his publishing "Sermons,") but a "minister of the gospel." Secondly, That he is not an ordinary minister, but one who is peculiarly qualified to repel the attacks of adversaries; "set," like an apostle, "for the defence of the gospel." Thirdly, That he not only preaches and defends the gospel, but does all "extempore;" that is, without writing or studying his discourses before he delivers them. Fourthly, That though he neither writes nor thinks himself in order to preaching, yet such is the importance of what he delivers, that "James Murden," a short-hand writer, sits and takes down his discourses, by which means they are preserved for the benefit of posterity. Finally, On the back of the same leaf, we are given to understand that if the public will come forward, and, by a liberal subscription, secure him in a pecuniary view, he will give them a whole volume of these sermons, containing 300 pages, all on the most "interesting and edifying subjects." Whether all this information was *necessary*, especially that which relates to the sermons being "delivered extempore," some persons may doubt; thus much, however, may be acknowledged, that if from this time we remain ignorant of Mr. Horne's extraordinary talents, and be either uninterested or unedified by his writings, it must be our own fault.

After a great deal said about faith, in which the belief of the truth is frequently confounded with the truth believed, and much declamation against error, in which we are after all left to guess wherein it consists, the preacher at length comes to the point which he appears to have had in view; or (as he does not *think* beforehand) to the point which was impressed upon his mind at the time; that is to say, that *faith is not the duty of either sinners or saints*.

Mr. Horne asserts that "men in nature's darkness have nothing to do with the faith of God's elect." He does not mean by this that they are destitute of it, for that would be saying no more than his opponents would admit; but that they have no *right* to believe in Jesus Christ. This he attempts to prove from their being under a covenant of works. "The law," he says, "is their first husband; and till they become dead to him they cannot be married to another (that is, to Christ by faith) without being called *adulteresses*,"—p. 26. If this reasoning were allowed to be solid, it would affect only those who are in "nature's darkness;" whereas Mr. Horne's position is, That faith is not the duty of any man, of believers any more than of unbelievers. "It is not," he says, "a duty which God requires of his people, but a grace which he gives them,"—p. 26. But the reasoning itself is false. That sinners are alive to the law as a covenant of works is too true; but that the law in that character is alive to them is not true.

The covenant of which the apostle speaks, in the passage alluded to, is that which was made with Israel at Sinai, to which they as a nation were

bound by Divine authority till the coming of Christ, but which being then abolished, they were no longer under obligation to adhere to it as a covenant, but were at liberty to embrace a new and better dispensation. This was applicable to the Jews, to whom the apostle addresses himself as to them *who knew the law*, but is totally inapplicable to Gentiles; who never were married to the law. But whether the covenant of works be considered as made with Israel at Sinai or with man in innocence, it is no longer in force; that is to say, it is dead. In the former view, it was rendered null by the introduction of the gospel: "For in that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." In the latter view it must have ceased from the time of man's apostacy. The law has no promise of life to a single transgressor, and never had; but merely a threatening of death. God is not, therefore, in covenant with sinners, nor they with him: they are not under a covenant of works; but merely under the curse for transgressing it. Thus taking the covenant which way we will, it is dead: and therefore, on Mr. Horne's own principle, sinners ought to be dead to it; and, in virtue of the free invitations of the gospel, are at liberty to be married to another.

A *desire to be under the law* is not now an attachment to a Divine constitution, nor is there any regard to God's law in it; it is merely a proud and unbelieving reluctance to admit that we have broken the law, and a vain desire to be still claiming life as the reward of our own good deeds. In short, it is no other than an attachment to the idol of our own righteousness; and we might as well infer that while a sinner is *joined to idols* he has no *right* to desert them, and return to God, as that he would be found guilty of spiritual adultery by coming off from all dependence on self, and believing in Jesus Christ. If this doctrine were true, our Saviour, instead of complaining of the unbelieving Jews that they *would not come to him that they might have life*, ought to have commended them for their fidelity to their "first husband." Nay, if this doctrine be true, I see not why Mr. Horne should exclaim as he does against people being of a pharisaical or self-righteous spirit; they ought rather to be commended for their chaste adherence to the law, as to their own proper husband.

Mr. Horne tells us of some who "strive to enter in at the strait gate, and are not able;" and that the reason why they are not able is that they "do not strive *lawfully*, or consistently with the mind and will of God, not coming to God in his own lawful and appointed way." "The Jews of old," he says, "strove to enter in, but were not able; because they strove, like our modern Pharisees, to enter in by the works of the law," Rom. ix. 32, 33,—p. 7. Very good; but how can these things hang together? If coming to God by Jesus Christ, and not by the works of the law, accord with the "mind and will of God," and be God's "lawful and appointed way," how can it be *unlawful* to walk in it? On the other hand, if the law as a covenant be the proper husband of the unconverted, and they ought faithfully to adhere to him, and not to come to God by Jesus Christ, on pain of being called "adulteresses," why complain of them for striving *unlawfully*, and tax them with losing a prize by this their unlawful conduct, with which, after all, they had "nothing to do?" "Self-righteous thoughts and imaginations," says he, "are as inimical to the attributes of the Deity, and as offensive to the Lord of glory, as the immorality of the profligate part of mankind." And yet they have no *right* to relinquish them by believing in Jesus Christ! "A self-righteous sinner," he adds, "is in open rebellion against the Lord, and against his anointed Son." And yet he has no *right* to be reconciled to him, or to come to him that he might have life! "The spirit of the self-righteous is directly opposite to that humility, self-abhorrence, and self-

abasement requisite in poor, undone, rebellious sinners, when coming before a God of immaculate purity,"—p. 42. And yet, strange to tell, they *ought* to be of this spirit, and not of that which renounces these self-exalting notions and depends entirely on Jesus Christ, lest they be called "*adulteresses!*" In most cases, gross inconsistencies are reckoned blemishes: whether they will be so in this, I cannot determine. As the preacher does not profess to think before he speaks, contradiction may, for aught I know, be here in character.

"Whatever may be thought of universal exhortations, I am bold to assert," says Mr. Horne, "that not one of the self-righteous are invited to come to Christ.—Christ 'came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,'"—p. 26. Of Mr. Horne's "boldness" there is certainly no doubt; but "wherein he is bold (I speak foolishly) I am bold also." The self-righteous Jews were invited to the gospel supper before the Gentiles. And though they *made light of it*, yet the kingdom of God at that time *came nigh* unto them. The same characters were exhorted, "while they had the light, to believe in the light, that they might be the children of light." Now, whether we should hearken to God's word, or to the "bold" assertions of Mr. Horne, let Christians judge.—But Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." True; and he came into the world to *save, not the righteous, but sinners*; yet Paul and many other self-righteous characters were saved by him; not, however, *in* their self-righteousness, but *from* it: and thus it is that self-righteous characters are *called* to relinquish their vain hopes, and to come to Jesus as *sinners* for salvation.

"Faith," says Mr. Horne, "is not a natural grace; it is no duty of the law." Having no idea what a "natural grace" is, unless it were some ornament of the body or mind, I can make no answer to the former part of this assertion. As to the latter, it is true that obedience to the law and faith in Christ, *as mediums of obtaining life*, are in the Scriptures opposed to each other. The one receives justification as a reward, the other as a free gift to the unworthy, wholly out of respect to the righteousness of another.

It is on the *medium of obtaining life* that the apostle speaks, when he says, the law is not of faith. "The just," says he, "shall *live* by faith." And "the law is not of faith; but the man that doeth them shall live in them." Justification by obedience to the law was entirely distinct, therefore, from justification by faith in Christ; the one would be by works, the other is by grace.

It does not follow, however, that the law, *considered as a standard of right and wrong*, is opposed to faith, or that it does not require it. It is manifest that faith is a part of the *revealed will* of God, being commanded in the Scriptures. "Repent, and believe the gospel."—"While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."—"This is his commandment, That we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ." If these commandments have not their root in the moral law, which requires every creature to love God under every manifestation by which he shall at any time make himself known, they must be the requirements of the gospel, under the form of a *new law*; a principle which has been generally rejected by the friends of evangelical truth.

"Had faith," says Mr. Horne, "been a duty of the law, the Jews of old would have obtained that which they sought after (the peculiar favour of God); for they sought it by the works of the law. But faith was not of the law, and therefore they could not obtain it,—p. 27. By this reasoning, it would seem as if the carnal Jews really complied with the Divine law; going to the utmost of its requirements, and this without finding faith in Christ among them, because it was not there to be found. But has Mr. Horne yet

to learn, that in all the attachment of the carnal Jews to the works of the law there was no real conformity to any Divine precept? "For the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

Mr. Horne considers faith as the "gift, or work, of God's Holy Spirit;" and therefore concludes that it cannot be a duty. I have no dispute with him as to faith, and every thing else which is truly good in a fallen creature, being of grace: but it does not follow thence that it is not a duty; for there is no good performed in the world but that which grace produces. If, therefore, nothing be the duty of sinners but that which may be done without the grace of God, it is not their duty to do any thing good: and, if so, all their alienation of heart from God and goodness is not their sin; nor does it require forgiveness.—"Is it the duty of the unconverted man," asks Mr. Horne, "to make himself a new creature in Christ; to give himself the Holy Ghost;" No; but it is his duty to be that which nothing short of the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit can make him.

Finally, "If evangelical faith be a duty, the believer may glory, and boast himself against the unbeliever,"—p. 31. If it were a duty with which he complied *of his own accord, making himself to differ*, he might; but not else. I suppose Mr. Horne reckons himself a believer, and to have done some good in the world, by preaching and "defending the gospel;" and does he glory on this account? He may; but he cannot have *so learned Christ, if so be he have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus*.

If I could have access to the churches in Norfolk who are connected with Mr. Horne, I would affectionately and earnestly entreat their attention to the subject. Not that I wish them to embroil themselves and one another in furious contentions. Far from it! I should be very sorry to hear of any minister, whom I considered as embracing the truth, following Mr. Horne's example. It is not by converting the pulpit into a stage of strife, nor by availing ourselves of the silence which decency imposes upon an audience to pour forth personal invective, that truth is promoted. Such conduct may pass with some people for faithfulness; but in reality it is as mean as it is injurious. It is by reading, by calm and serious reflection, by humble prayer, and by a free and friendly communication of our thoughts to one another in private conversation, that truth makes progress.

I do not wish the churches in Norfolk, or any where else, to be engaged in unprofitable disputes; but if I could have access to them, I would address them in some such manner as the following:—

Be not led away, my brethren, by vain men. Judge for yourselves. If you choose to examine the subject to which Mr. Horne refers you, read, and read impartially, what has been written upon it.* Or if things of a controversial nature be disagreeable to you, read the lives of an *Edwards*, a *Brainerd*, and a *Pearce*; and know,—*not the speeches of them that are puffed up, but the power*. Above all, read your Bible, and carefully notice whether these things be so. Inquire whether the Scriptures do not exhort, admonish, and persuade sinners to those very things which, where they exist, are ascribed to the grace of God. Do not take it for granted that you are *sound in the faith* because such preachers as Mr. Horne exhort you to hold fast your present sentiments. That faith is sound, and that only, which accords with the Scriptures, and finds a use for every part of them. The Scriptures are not written systematically; yet they contain materials for a system. They resemble the stones which were wrought for the building of the temple, previously to their being laid in it? each was prepared for its proper place, and adapted

* Particularly, Booth's *Glad Tidings to Perishing Sinners*; Scott on *The Nature and Warrant of Faith*; and a work entitled, *The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation*.

to form a part of a beautiful whole. Some of these materials might have been worked up in any one of those "high places" which were a snare to Israel, or even in a "temple for Moloch;" but no other building than that which was erected according to the Divine pattern delivered to Solomon would have found a use for all. That fabric in which every material finds its place is the true temple of God.

Many writers and preachers have formed their favourite schemes, or adopted them from others, and been very eager in defending them; but, in so doing, a great part of the Bible has been thrown aside as useless, and has rarely been mentioned but for the purpose of explaining it away. Arminianism can find but little use for the doctrinal part of Paul's Epistles, in which free, discriminating, and effectual grace, is clearly taught; and false Calvinism looks with an evil eye on the exhortations, warnings, and invitations to the unconverted, in the four evangelists, and the Acts of the Apostles. Is not this a plain proof that neither of these systems is evangelical? That, I say again, is the true gospel which gives to every part of Scripture its fair and full meaning; and if the views we have hitherto entertained will not do this, we ought to conclude that, whatever we may have learned, we have yet to learn "the truth as it is in *Jesus*."

Judge impartially, my brethren, whether the doctrine taught by Mr. Horne, and others, will admit of such exhortations to the unconverted as occur in the preaching of John the Baptist, Christ, and his apostles. If the language in which they address their carnal hearers were uttered in your pulpits, and nothing added by the preacher to explain away its force, would you not begin to suspect him of error? Yet your so doing ought in reality to make you suspect yourselves; and to fear lest, while you think you are doing God service, you should be found fighting against him.

In calling the doctrine defended by Mr. Horne *false Calvinism* I have not miscalled it. In proof of this, I appeal to the writings of that great reformer, and of the ablest defenders of his system in later times—of all indeed who have been called Calvinists till within a hundred years. Were you to read many of Calvin's sermons, without knowing who was the author, you would be led, from the ideas you appear at present to entertain, to pronounce him an Arminian; neither would Goodwin, nor Owen, nor Charnock, nor Flavel, nor Bunyan, escape the charge. These men believed and preached the doctrines of grace; but not in such a way as to exclude exhortations to the unconverted to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. The doctrine which *you* call Calvinism (but which, in reality, is Antinomianism) is as opposite to that of the Reformers, puritans, and nonconformists, as it is to that of the apostles.

We do not ask you to relinquish the doctrine of salvation by grace alone: so far from it, were you to do so we would, on that account, have no fellowship with you. We have no doubt of justification being wholly on account of the righteousness of Jesus; nor of faith, wherever it exists, being the free gift of God. On such subjects we could say with Job, "We have understanding as well as you; we are not inferior to you; yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" But we ask you to admit other principles, equally true, and equally important as they are; principles taught by the same inspired writers, and which, therefore, must be consistent with them.

Doctrinal sentiments will have a great influence on the whole of our religion. They will operate powerfully in the forming of our spirit, and the regulation of our conduct. Many people have complained of the unchristian spirit discovered by Mr. Huntington and his followers. "We have not so much objection," say they, "to his doctrine; but such an awful degree of spiritual pride and rancour runs through all he writes—." For my part,

I never make such complaint: I should as soon complain of thistles and thorns for their bearing prickles. Mr. Huntington's spirit comports with his doctrine; and if we receive one, we must receive both.

False doctrine will "eat as doth a canker:" in individuals it will produce self-importance, self-will, and almost every other selfish disposition; and, if admitted into churches, it will be followed by a neglect of faithful discipline and holy practice. Such have been the effects of that doctrine for which Mr. Horne contends in many of the churches in the midland parts of the kingdom; and such, it is to be feared, have been its effects in some of yours.

Though the apostles of our Lord renounced all dependence upon the works of the law for justification, yet they did not "make void the law," but established it: accounting it "holy, just, and good;" and "delighted in it after the inner man:" but many preachers, who are eager in defending these principles, do not scruple to disown it entirely as *a rule of life*; and, though Mr. Horne has not done this, yet he continually confounds what the Scriptures distinguish, applying that which is spoken of the law as *a covenant*, or *term of justification*, to that which respects it as *the eternal standard of right and wrong*. But those who scarcely ever mention the law of God without disrespect are not far from disowning it as a rule of life; and those who disown it as a rule of life can hardly be expected to walk by it. Far be it from me to deal in indiscriminate censure. That good men have favoured these principles, I have no doubt; and, where the heart is upright, an erroneous sentiment, though it be very injurious, will not be the great governing principle of life. It is also allowed that bad men will be found under every form of religious profession. But, so far as my observation extends, there is a much larger proportion of such characters among ministers of this description than any others who are accounted evangelical. Many of them are not only known to be loose in their general deportment, but seem to have laid aside all honour and conscience towards the churches. Some, not having any stated employment, (as well they may not,) wander up and down the country, as if for a piece of bread, sowing the seeds of dissension, and raising a party for themselves, in every place where they come. Others, when invited to preach to a church on probation, after having divided and scattered it by their violence, have been necessitated to leave it; and, finding no other people who would employ them, have frequently been known to retire with a party of their adherents, and to set up an opposite interest in the same place, to the great injury and reproach of religion. Yet these men, if they be believed, are each "set for the defence of the gospel."

From the pen of an apostle and prisoner of Jesus Christ such language was proper; but the "words of the wise" are not *fitted in the lips* of every one. Whether these men wish to imitate Mr. Huntington, who takes for his motto the words of Job, "The root of the matter is found in me," or whether it be natural to them to proclaim to the world the high opinion they entertain of themselves, I cannot determine; but this is certain, that if they and he had each studied to imitate a certain impostor, who "bewitched the people, giving out that *himself was some great one*," they could scarcely have acted in stricter conformity to his example.

I have little or no acquaintance with your ministers; but I know something of those in other parts of the country who embrace the doctrine taught by Mr. Horne, and have reason to believe that their preaching is mostly composed of ludicrous rant and idle declamation. The principal objects against which they declaim are pharisaism and the devil; and the method taken to persuade their hearers that they are the greatest enemies to both is *telling them that they are so!* As to the former, if it consist in *trusting that we*

are righteous, and despising others, perhaps there are few religious professors who can prefer a better claim to it than themselves. And as to their boasting and brandishing against the latter, what serious mind, nay, what mind possessed of common understanding, can endure it? It may furnish the ignorant and light-minded with a laugh; but every man of sense must be disgusted by it. To hear the low and vulgar jokes which they are continually uttering against the grand adversary of God and man, both in the pulpit and out of it, one might be tempted to conclude that, instead of being his enemies, they were on terms of more than ordinary intimacy with him. Mr. Merryman may have high words with his master, for the amusement of the audience; but he will not hurt him: they understand one another. Sure I am, Satan has no objection to be thus treated.

So they have preached, and so too many have believed. Brethren, "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good! And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, soul and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

THE MORAL LAW THE RULE OF CONDUCT TO BELIEVERS.

[A Letter to a Friend.]

MY DEAR BROTHER,

You requested me to give you my reasons, in the brief compass of a letter, for considering *the moral law as the rule of conduct to believers*. It is painful that a question of this nature should ever have been started among professing Christians; but this, and other things of the kind, are permitted, that they who are approved may be made manifest.

You do not wish me, my dear brother, to encounter the foul dogmas of our pulpit libertines; but to state a few plain, scriptural evidences, which may be useful to some serious minds, who have been entangled in the mazes of their delusions.—Before I proceed to this, however, it will be proper to make a remark or two in a general way.

First, There is no dispute on the ground of our acceptance with God. We are not justified on account of any thing inherent, whether before, in, or after believing; but merely for the sake of the righteousness of Christ, believed in and imputed to us. As a medium of life, or (as our divines commonly express it) as a covenant, believers are dead to the law, and the law to them, being united to another husband.

Secondly, The question is not whether the whole of Christian obedience be *formally* required in the ten commandments. Certainly it is not. Neither the ordinance of baptism, nor that of the supper, is expressly required by them; and there may be other duties which they do not, in so many words, inculcate;—but the question is, whether it be not *virtually* required by them, and whether they be not *binding* on believers. If we allow our Saviour to be a just expositor, the sum of the ten commandments is *the love of God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and of our neighbour as ourselves*; and this includes all the obedience that can possibly be yielded by a creature. If we love God with all our hearts, we shall comply with every positive institute and particular precept which he hath enjoined in his word; and all such compliance contains just so much obedience as it contains love to him, and no more. Let an instance of Christian obedience be produced, if it can, which is not comprehended in the general precept of love.

In objecting to the perfection of the ten commandments, our adversaries would seem to hold with an extensive rule; but the design manifestly is to undermine their authority, and that without substituting any other competent rule in the place of them. In what follows, therefore, I shall endeavour to prove both the authority and perfection of the law; or that the commandments of God, whether we consider them as ten or two, are still *binding* on Christians, and virtually contain the whole revealed will of God, as to the matter of obedience.

First, To prove that the ten commandments are binding, let any person read them, one by one, and ask his own conscience as he reads whether it would be any sin to break them. Is the believer at liberty to have other gods besides the true God? Would there be no harm in his making to himself a graven image, and falling down to worship it? Is it any less sin for a believer to take God's name in vain than for an unbeliever? Are believers at liberty to profane the sabbath, or to disobey their parents, or to kill their neighbours, or to commit adultery, or to steal, or to bear false witness, or to covet what is not their own? Is this, or any part of it, the liberty of the gospel? Every conscience that is not seared as with a hot iron must answer these questions in the negative.

Secondly, It is utterly inconsistent with the nature of moral government, and of the great designs of mercy, as revealed in the gospel, that believers should be freed from obligation to love God with all their hearts, and their neighbours as themselves. The requirement of love is founded in the nature of the relation between God and a rational creature; and cannot be made void so long as the latter exists, unless the former were to deny himself. The relation between a father and son is such that an obligation to love is indispensable; and should the son, on having offended his father, be forgiven and restored, like the prodigal to his family, to pretend to be free on this account were an outrage on decency. Every one must feel that his obligations, in such a case, are increased, rather than diminished.

Thirdly, It was solemnly declared by our Saviour, "that he came, not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it;" yea, "that heaven and earth should pass away, but not a jot or tittle of the law should fail." A considerable part of his sermon on the mount is taken up in pointing out the true meaning of its particular precepts, and in enforcing them upon his disciples. To the same purpose the apostle Paul, after dwelling largely on justification by faith in Christ, in opposition to the works of the law, asks, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law." But if the law ceases to be binding on believers, Christ did come to destroy its authority over them, and faith does make it void in respect of them. The faith of those who set Moses and Christ at variance has manifestly this effect; it is therefore in opposition to the faith taught by our Saviour and the apostle Paul.

Fourthly, In executing the great work of redemption, our Saviour invariably did honour to the law; it was written in his heart. He did not ask for the salvation of his chosen at the expense of the law; but laid down his life to satisfy its righteous demands. Now, the essence of true religion is for the "same mind to be in us which was in Christ Jesus." Hence he prayed that they all might be *one*, as the Father was in him, and he in the Father, that they might be *one* in both. The Lawgiver and the Saviour were one; and believers must be of one mind with the former as well as with the latter: but if we depreciate the law, which Christ delighted to honour, and deny our obligations to obey it, how are we of his mind? Rather, are we not of that mind which is "enmity against God, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be?"

Fifthly, The apostle, in what he writes to the Romans and Galatians, (two Epistles in which he largely explodes the idea of justification by the works of the law,) enforces *brotherly love as a requirement of the law*. "Love one another," says he, "for love is the fulfilling of the law—Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another; for all the law is fulfilled in one word: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." If the liberty of the primitive Christians consisted in being delivered from an obligation to obey the precepts of the law, the reasoning of the apostle was self-contradictory: Ye are not obliged to love one another because God in his law requires it; therefore, love one another, because God in his law requires it!!

Sixthly, If the law be not a rule of conduct to believers, and a perfect rule too, they are under no rule; or, which is the same thing, are lawless. But, if so, they commit no sin; for "where no law is, there is no transgression;" and in this case they have no sins to confess, either to God or to one another; nor do they stand in need of Christ as an Advocate with the Father, nor of daily forgiveness through his blood. Thus it is that, by disowning the law, men utterly subvert the gospel. I am aware that those who deny the law to be the rule of a believer's conduct, some of them, at least, will not pretend to be lawless. Sometimes they will profess to make the gospel their rule; but the gospel, strictly speaking, is not a rule of conduct, but a message of grace, providing for our conformity to the rule previously given. To set aside the moral law as a rule, and to substitute the gospel in its place, is making the gospel a new law, and affords a proof how Antinomianism and Neonomianism, after all their differences, can occasionally agree. The Scriptures teach us that "by the law is the knowledge of sin;" which clearly implies that there is no sin but what is a breach of that rule. Hence sin is defined "the transgression of the law." But if sin be the transgression of the law, the authority of the law must be still binding; for no crime or offence attaches to the breach of a law which is abrogated or repealed; nor can it be known by such a law how much any man hath sinned, or whether he hath sinned at all. Moreover, if there be no sin but what is a transgression of the law, there can be no rule binding on men which is not comprehended in that law.

Seventhly, The apostle writes as if there were no medium between being under the law to Christ and without law, 1 Cor. ix. 21. If we be not the one, we are the other. Paul declares himself under *the* law to Christ, which implies that Christ has taken the precepts of the moral law as the first principles of his legislative code. Believers, therefore, instead of being freed from obligation to obey it, are under greater obligations to do so than any men in the world. To be exempt from this is to be without law, and, of course, without sin; in which case we might do without a Saviour, which is utterly subversive of all religion.—I have been told that believers are not to be ruled by the law, but by love; and that it is by the influence of the Spirit that they are moved to obedience, rather than by the precepts of the law. To this I answer—1. If a believer be ruled by love in such a way as to exclude obligation, this is the same as if a son should say to his father, I have no objection to oblige you, sir: I will do your business from love; but I will not be commanded! That is, what he pleases he will do, and no more.—No parent could bear such an answer from a child; and how can we suppose that God will bear it from us! "If I be a father, where is my honour?"—2. The question is not, What *moves* or *causes* obedience?—but, What is the *rule* of it? It is allowed that all true obedience is caused by the influence of the Holy Spirit; but that to which he influences the mind was antecedently required of us: He leadeth us "in the way that we should go."—

3. If the influence of the Holy Spirit on the mind be made the rule of obligation, and that influence be effectual, it will follow that believers are without sin; for whatever they are effectually influenced to do they do; and if this be all they are obliged to do, then do they comply with their whole duty, and so are sinless. Thus, methinks, we have arrived at a state of sinless perfection by a sort of back way! But let us not deceive ourselves: "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

After all, my dear friend, evidence, even that which is drawn from the word of God, will have little or no influence on minds which have drank deeply into these corrupt principles. Where men have found out the secret of happiness without holiness, there is something so bewitching in it, that you might almost as well encounter insanity as hope by reasoning to convince them. Indeed, I know of no character to whom the words of the prophet, though spoken immediately of idolaters, will more fully apply: "He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" There are, however, degrees in this kind of infatuation; and I doubt not but many sincere minds have been infected with it. If some of this description should be recovered, it is worth our utmost attention; and even those whose prejudices are the most inveterate are not beyond the reach of omnipotent grace.

STRICTURES ON SOME OF THE LEADING SENTIMENTS OF MR. R. ROBINSON.

LETTER I.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH AND A RIGHT BELIEF OF IT.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WHEN we consider the shortness of time, and the variety of weighty concerns which call for our attention during that transitory period, you will agree with me that whatever has not some degree of importance attending it has no claim upon our regard. Every object certainly deserves regard in proportion to its importance. If, then, truth and a right belief of it are things of no importance, or at most of very little, they can assuredly lay claim but to a small share of our attention. But if, on the other hand, truth—*Divine* truth I mean—should prove to be a matter of great, yea, of the highest importance, then inattention to it would be a conduct chargeable with the greatest culpability. Were you and I of that fashionable opinion—"that it matters not what we believe, if our lives be but good,"—all attempts to investigate religious sentiments, it should seem, would be to no purpose; for why need I put myself to the trouble of writing, and you of reading what I write, if, after all, it is very immaterial what we think or believe in these matters?

Though I know you have no such ideas of things, yet, seeing that *the importance of truth* is itself a truth on the belief of which our attention and attachment to all other truths depends, you will allow me to begin by establishing that.*

* If I am not mistaken, this is Mr. R.'s grand defect. He has all along professed himself, I suppose, a Calvinist; but never seems to have been in earnest in preaching or writing on these principles—never seems to have acted as though he thought they were of importance. How differently has he acted concerning the principles of nonconformity, and some other favourite subjects! How coldly has he treated those in comparison with these! Besides acknowledging Arians and Socinians as "mistaken brethren," and choosing rather

I have sometimes wondered why it should be thought more criminal to disobey what God commands than to disbelieve what he declares. Certainly, if any master of a family came into his own house and told a plain tale from his own knowledge, and if any of the family were to affect to doubt it, he would take it as ill as if they refused to do what he commanded. Yea, for aught I know, more so; for to call in question his integrity would probably be more heinous in his view, than merely to disregard his authority.

There are two passages of holy writ that have especially struck my mind on this subject. One is, that solemn piece of advice given by the wise man: "Buy the truth, and sell it not." He does not name the price, because its value was beyond all price. As when we advise a friend to purchase some very valuable and necessary article we say, "Buy it, give what you will for it, let nothing part you." So here,—Buy it at any rate! It cannot be too dear! give up ease, wealth, or reputation, rather than miss it! part with your most darling prejudices, preconceived notions, beloved lusts, or any thing else that may stand in the way! And, having got it, make much of it—*sell it not!* no, not for any price! make shipwreck of any thing rather than of faith and a good conscience! part with life itself rather than with Divine truth!—But why so tenacious of truth, if after all it is of little or no importance?

I remember not many years since hearing a minister preach at a certain ordination from Heb. x. 23, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." In enforcing his subject he made use of what might be supposed to be *the call of the martyrs from heaven*. He represented one as crying to us, "Hold it fast; I died in a dungeon rather than forego it." "Hold it fast!" says another, "I bled for it." "Hold it fast!" says a third, "I burned for it." These sentiments and motives, I own, met with my warmest approbation. But if, after all, it matters not what we believe, why all this ado?

The other passage that has especially struck my mind is that memorable commission of our Lord, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." He that believeth—what? The gospel, no doubt, which they were commissioned to preach. As if he had said, Go preach the gospel: he that shall receive your message, and evidence it by a submission to my authority, shall be saved; but he that shall reject it, let him see to it—he shall be damned!—This is very awful, and ought to excite us, instead of playing with truth and error, seriously to examine whether we be in the faith!

What is believing the gospel but heartily admitting what it implies and what it declares? What but admitting that God is an infinitely amiable Being, and that his law is "holy, and just, and good?" for, otherwise, the sacrifice of Christ for the breach of it would have been injustice and cruelty.

to be "a frozen formalist" than set on fire of hell," as he terms it, he openly avows his belief of the innocence of mental error: which, I think, is full as much as to avow the non-importance of truth.

Here, by the by, I think it must require a very large stretch of charity to acquit him of manifest known sophistry. After having called those who deny Christ's Divinity "mistaken brethren," he supposes an objector would say, But all this argues great coldness to your Lord! and in reply his words are—"I would rather be frozen into a formalist, than inflamed with the fire of hell: in the first case I should be a harmless statue; in the last a destroyer like the devil."—See his *Plea for the Divinity of Christ*, near the conclusion. Surely, he must know this to be evasive and sophistical. Could he be ignorant of a medium between cool indifference and a criminal heart? If he be, woe be to him! Need he be told that the word of God requires us to contend *earnestly*, though not angrily, for the faith? His answer is a vindication of one extreme by exclaiming against another. As though a man should say, when reproved for sloth, Better be a sluggard than a robber; for in that case I should do a world of mischief? True; but is there no medium? And is not that medium the position which every man ought to occupy?

What but admitting that sin is an infinite evil, and that we are infinitely to blame for breaking God's law without any provocation? for, if otherwise, an infinite atonement would not have been required: God would have accepted some other sacrifice rather than have given up his own Son. What but admitting that we are utterly depraved and lost, lying entirely at God's discretion? If he save us alive, we live; or if we have our portion with devils, with whom we have sided against him, he and his throne are guiltless. This is implied in the gospel of a crucified Saviour; for if we had not been utterly lost, we had not needed a Saviour—at least, such a great one. In fine, what is it but admitting that the plan of redemption is a plan full of infinite glory, the device of infinite wisdom, the expression of infinite love, the work of infinite power, and the display of infinite glory, justice, and faithfulness?—a plan originating in the heart of God, effected by means the most astonishing, and productive of ends the most glorious!—no less glorious than the eternal honour of its author, the triumph of truth and righteousness, the confusion of Satan, the destruction of sin, and the holiness and happiness of a number of lost sinners which no man can number!—a plan this, therefore, “worthy of all acceptation!” worthy of being approved and acquiesced in with all the heart! These, I think, are some of the principal truths which the gospel exhibits; and whosoever really believes them shall be saved.

On the other hand, what is it to *disbelieve* the gospel, but to remain under a persuasion that God is *not* such an infinitely amiable Being as to be worthy of being loved with all the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength?—that therefore his law is too strict, and if it must extend to the heart, too broad, requiring more than ought to be required, especially of fallen creatures?—that consequently a breach of it is *not* so very criminal as to deserve damnation?—that if God were to damn us, it would be a very hard and cruel thing?—that we are *not* so depraved and lost but that, if God were but to deal fairly with us, we should do very well without a Saviour, or at least without such a Saviour and such a salvation as is altogether of grace?—that there is *no* such excellence in the Saviour that we should desire him, *no* such glory in his way of salvation that we should choose it—so choose it, however, as to be willing to have our pride mortified, and our lusts sacrificed to it?—in fine, that there is no need for such an ado about the concerns of our souls—no need to become new creatures, to be at war with all sin, and to make religion our daily business? This I take to be nearly what the Scriptures mean by *unbelief*. However, be my ideas of the gospel right or wrong, that affects not the present question; for be the gospel what it may, the belief of it has attached to it the promise of salvation, and the disbelief of it the threatening of damnation.

You have observed, I dare say, that it is very common to represent truth, and the belief of it as of small account, and morality as all in all; nay, more, that the preaching of the former is the way to subvert the latter. And yet how easy were it to prove that this is no other than destroying the means in order to effect the end! Whatever may be pretended, I believe it will be found that all sin springs from error, or the belief of some falsehood; and all holy actions from the belief of the truth. The former appears in that the will of man is so constituted as never to choose any thing but an apparent good. It is impossible we should choose what appears to us at the same time and in the same respects unlovely. Therefore whenever we choose evil we must believe evil to be lovely; that is, we must believe a falsehood. This the Scripture represents as calling “evil good, and good evil.” And thus all vice springs from error, or false views of things.

On the other hand, whatever there may be of what is called morality, there is no real obedience to God, or true holiness, in the world, but what

arises from a conviction of the truth. Does holiness, for instance, consist in love to God? what love can there be to God, but in proportion as we discern the infinite excellency of his nature? Does it consist in abhorring sin? How can we do this any further than we understand and believe its odious nature? Does it consist in repentance for sin? certainly there can be nothing of this, but as we understand the obligations we are under, and the unreasonableness and vileness of acting contrary to them. Or does it consist in prizing salvation? this will be in proportion as we believe our lost estate. From whence spring those heavenly virtues of fear, contentment, diligence in Divine ordinances, acquiescence in the will of God, humility, &c., but from a conviction of the truth? God proclaims before the universe, "I AM THE LORD!" This truth realized, or heartily believed, begets a holy fear towards this fearful name. God in his word declares the vanity of all things under the sun, and the weight of future bliss. A belief of these truths damps inordinate anxiety, and raises our desires after a glorious immortality. God declares that a day in his courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. A belief of this will make us earnest and constant in our attendance—will make us leave our farms and merchandise, and all, to come and worship in his house. God has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;"—that "they who trust in the Lord and do good shall dwell in the land, and verily they shall be fed." A belief of this calms and composes the mind under the darkest providences. Thus it was with the prophet Habakkuk, chap. iii. 17, 18. God has told us concerning ourselves that we are "a generation of vipers,"—a race of abominable and filthy beings. A belief of this humbles us in the dust before him. In fine, he has told us that to us belongs nothing but "shame and confusion of face." A belief of this would prevent peevishness under adverse providences. Under the belief of such a declaration we should not wonder if God made us as miserable as we had made ourselves sinful. What in this world ever filled a soul with greater humility than a realizing view of a holy God filled Isaiah? Isa. vi. Then, as in a glass, he beheld his own deformity. It was this that made him exclaim, with the deepest self-abasement, "Woe is me! for I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Is it not a "beholding of the glory of the Lord" (which is no more than discerning and believing the truth, for God is glorious whether we believe it or not) that changes into the same image? 2 Cor. iii. 18. And is not our being made like Christ at last ascribed to our "seeing him as he is?"

In short, I believe it will be found that truth wants only to be universally realized in order to produce universal holiness. Should it be asked, Then why is not universal holiness found in good men who believe the truth? the answer is, Though they believe the truth, they believe not the whole truth, nor perhaps do they wholly believe any truth. When they shall be *perfectly* delivered from "an evil heart of unbelief," they shall possess perfect holiness.

You will naturally reflect—If these things are so, what an important thing is truth; and what awful evils are error and unbelief; and yet how prevalent are they in the world, and even in the best of men! True; and I will add one more reflection, and that is, if your thoughts coincide with the sentiments expressed in this letter, you will not only be open, but eager to hear any thing that may tend to bring it to light.

LETTER II.

ON THE CRIMINALITY OF MENTAL ERROR.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IF what has been already said be just, there will be no difficulty in maintaining our ground here. For certainly, the belief of that which ought to be bought and held fast at any rate cannot be a matter of indifference. An error which has no less than eternal damnation threatened against it must be criminal, and that in a high degree.

One main article in Mr. Robinson's creed is, that the Bible knows nothing of mystery, but is a plain book—so plain as to be level with the common sense of mankind. Whether the Scriptures contain any thing mysterious, or not, it appears to me altogether a mystery that any man of common sense should maintain two such opposite positions as *the simplicity of the Scriptures* and *the innocence of mental error*: asserting that the Bible is so plain a book that nobody, without either neglecting or doing violence to common sense, can mistake its meaning; and yet that even a thousand errors concerning this plain book are altogether innocent!*

I agree with Mr. R. in believing that, upon the whole, the Bible *is* a plain book, adapted to the common understandings of mankind; and that men in general may understand all they are required to understand, *if their hearts are rightly disposed*. At the same time, there *are* things revealed in the Scriptures which must be to us incomprehensible; as the incarnation of the Son of God, which even an inspired apostle declares to be “a great mystery.” There are some things also in the prophetic writings which can never be fully understood till their accomplishment. But then our not comprehending these things is not criminal, though the little attention we devote to them may be.

In proportion, however, as the Scriptures are plain, and easy to be understood, must be our criminality, if we be endowed with common sense, in not understanding them. If the way of salvation is so plain that “a way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein,” then the errors of men concerning it cannot be *innocent*. And the same is true of the perceptive parts of Scripture. If error arise not from the obscurity of Scripture, from its being beyond the capacity of men in general, it must arise from other causes; and what these can be besides *indifference, indolence, carelessness, prejudice, pride, or aversion*, I know not.

“Why do ye not understand my speech?” said our Lord to the Jews. Was it because it was not *important* enough to demand their attention, or because it was not *plain* enough to meet their capacities?—No. Mark the answer. Why? “Because ye cannot hear my word.” What, then, were

* “The New Testament is a book so plain, and the religion of it so easy, that any man of common sense might understand it if he would.” A person who has examined a Scripture doctrine, “and cannot obtain evidence of the truth of it, is indeed in a state in which his knowledge is imperfect; but his imperfection is innocent, because he hath exercised all the ability and virtue he has, and his ignorance is involuntary; yea, perhaps he may have exercised ten times more industry and application, though without success, than many others who have obtained evidence.”—*General Doctrine of Toleration, &c.*

“Any man of common sense might understand it if he would;” and yet many such men may examine it, “with all their ability and all their virtue,” and “not obtain evidence!” This is a mystery, let what will be plain. And such a man's imperfection is innocent, because he hath exercised all the ability and *virtue* he has! If our obligations are to be measured by the degree of *virtue* we possess, the way to get clear of all obligation is to become totally abandoned to vice. Far be it from me to attach to others more blame than I would acknowledge belongs to myself, if I continue in error. We are all imperfect; but let us not call our imperfections *innocent*.

they *naturally* deaf?—No. That had been their felicity. Better have *no* ears, than ears and *hear* not. Their deafness was like that of the adder, that “*will not* hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely.” Then would they not *listen* to his discourses? This does not appear. But they could not *receive* his doctrine. This is the import of the answer. And *why* could they not receive it? Evidently because of their pride, prejudice, and love of sin. The pride of their hearts could not bear the doctrine which represented them as slaves to ignorance and sin, and proposed their being made free by the knowledge of the truth. With a haughty, contemptuous air, they spurn the proposal; replying, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?” Their prejudice in favour of their old religion hardened them against conviction, and their love of sin set them against that gospel which laid the axe at the root of that evil tree. Our Lord, in effect, told them so. “Ye are of your father, the devil, and the deeds of your father ye will do.” As if he had said, You would rather continue slaves to Satan than that “the Son” should make you free!

There seems to be a beautiful propriety in our Lord’s parable of the sower. It is observable that, of the four sorts of ground, only one received the seed so as to bring forth fruit; and that one is explained of persons who have “good and honest hearts:” plainly implying that, if men’s hearts were but honest, they would be sure to embrace the word of God. Indeed, the nature of Divine revelation is such that its rejection implies a dishonest heart. For instance, does the word of God set forth the rights of Deity, and human obligation? This is what an honest heart loves. That heart cannot be honest which does not rejoice in every one having his due, and consequently in God’s having his. Does it represent man as having forfeited all claim to the goodness of God? An honest heart will acquiesce in this, and be willing to receive all as a free donation. Does it exhibit such a way of salvation as provides for the honour of injured Majesty? This is sure to be embraced by an honest heart: such a mind could not bear the thought of being saved at the expense of righteousness. To desire to receive mercy in any other than an honourable way indicates a dishonest heart. Whoever, therefore, does not cordially approve and embrace the salvation of the gospel, the reason is plain.

Perhaps it will be said these things are spoken of *wicked* men, and indicate the criminality of *their* errors. But surely the errors of *good* men arise from different causes. Surely they may be innocent. It must be allowed that good men have errors in judgment, as well as in practice; but that the former, any more than the latter, are *innocent*, does not appear. I wish not to think worse of any man’s errors than I do of my own, or of him than of myself, for being in error. No doubt I have mistaken apprehensions of some things, as well as other people; though wherein is unknown to me: but I would abhor the thought of pleading *innocence* in such affairs. If my mistakes, be they what they may, do not arise from the obscurity of Scripture, they must arise from some other cause. It is vain to allege that our errors arise from *weakness*; for the Scriptures can be no otherwise plain and easy than as they are level with common capacities. If the Scriptures were written for the bulk of mankind, and yet the generality of men are too *weak* to understand them, instead of being plain and easy, they must be essentially *obscure*.

The truth is, *our* mistakes, as well as the ignorance of wicked men, arise from our *criminal dispositions*. We are too *careless* about truth, and so do not search for it “as one searcheth for hid treasure,” Prov. ii. 1–9. Or we are *self-sufficient*, and think ourselves competent to find out the truth by our

mere reason; and so neglect to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Or we are *prejudiced* in favour of preconceived notions, and so are apt to stifle evidence. The prejudices of mankind, of both bad and good men, are almost infinite. There is not a mind in the world without prejudice, in a greater or less degree. And these are the causes why the truth of God's word is not believed and obeyed. We might as well plead *weakness* for not obeying God's commands as for not believing his declarations. The one, as well as the other, is a *moral* weakness; and that, strictly speaking, is not weakness, but *wickedness*. Doubtless, there is such a thing as *excusable* weakness, both in reference to obeying God's commands and to believing his sacred truth. If a man be *afflicted*, so as to be incapable of attending the house of God, or if he be detained by the afflictions of others, the command for publicly worshipping God ceases, at that time, to be binding. The same may be said of *mental debility*. If a man be in any way deprived of reason, his weakness, in proportion as it prevails, excuses him from blame, in not understanding and believing the truth. Nay, I think persons of *extremely weak capacities* are comparatively excusable. If they be *weak in other things*, as well as in religion, we are bound not to impute it to the want of a disposition, any further than their weakness in both may be imputed to the want of diligent application. The same may be said of persons, who never had *the means*, or the *opportunity* of knowing the truth. The heathen will not be condemned for rejecting the gospel, unless they have, or might if they would have heard it; but for rejecting the light of nature, Rom. i. 18-25.

But I believe, if we examine, we shall find the far greater part of our ignorance and error to arise from very different causes—causes of which our Lord complains in his own immediate disciples: “O fools, and *slow of heart* to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” Our ignorance and errors, like theirs, are owing in a great degree to that dulness to spiritual things of which the best Christians have sometimes reason to complain. The Lord Jesus, so remarkable for his tenderness, and especially to his disciples, would not have rebuked them so severely for an error wherein they were blameless. Besides, they were prejudiced in favour of another system. They had been long dreaming of an earthly kingdom, and, it is to be feared, of the figure they were to cut in it. Their pride, therefore, and carnal-mindedness, tended greatly to warp their judgments in this matter; so that all Christ had said (and he had said much) about his death and resurrection seemed to stand for nothing. Their foolish minds were so dazzled with the false ideas of a temporal kingdom that they were blinded to the true end of Christ's coming, and to all that the prophets declared concerning it.

Mr. R. says, “Variety of sentiment, which is the life of society, cannot be destructive of real religion. Mere mental errors, if they be not entirely innocent in the account of the Supreme Governor of mankind, cannot, however, be objects of blame and punishment among men.”*

So far as this relates to a cognizance of the *civil* powers, or *any* powers which inflict *civil penalties*, we are perfectly agreed. But I suppose Mr. R. means to extend it to the opinion and behaviour of churches towards individual members. If, for instance, a member of a church were to become a *Soenian*, and the church were to blame him for what they accounted apostasy from the truth, and ultimately, if he continued in this error, were to exclude him, this would include a part of what is meant by “*blame and punishment among men*.” And though it is expressly said, “*A heretic reject, after the first and second admonition,*” Mr. R. would deny that the

* Saurin's Sermons, vol. III. Pref.

church had any right to judge, in respect to others, what *is* heresy.* Herein I am of a different opinion: but as I may consider this subject more particularly in my next letter, on Liberty, I shall now offer a few more remarks on the above passage.

"Variety of sentiment is the life of society." True, as one person discovers one *truth*, and another another; as one views the same truth in this light, and another in that; and so all together become serviceable to each other: but this does not prove that a variety of *false* sentiments does any good. I greatly query if Mr. R., or any one else, would hold this, when it affected *themselves*. Suppose, for instance, a variety of sentiment concerning his character as a minister: one thinks he is a *worthy minister of Christ*, as well as a learned, ingenious man, and an honour to the dissenting interest; another thinks him, though *very* ingenious, not equally *ingenuous*; and a third, for variety's sake, might suggest that his principles were even *pernicious* in their tendency. Now it is very doubtful if Mr. R., however he may admire variety of sentiment, would in his heart consider *this* variety of sentiment good, either in itself, or as tending to enliven society. It is a question if he would not greatly prefer that people should plod on, in the old dull path of *uniformity*, and all cordially *agree* in believing him to be an honest man. And, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, this uniformity of sentiment *ought* to exist. But why in this case only? Why should not people be obliged to *unite* in thinking highly and honourably of the Lord and Saviour of men, as well as of a creature of yesterday?

"But Mr. R. does not *positively* affirm the *entire* innocence of mental error in the account of the Supreme Governor of mankind." True; but he writes as if he thought it *very nearly* innocent, and as if it were very doubtful whether it is not *entirely* innocent; and in one sense, it seems, it is *beneficial*, as tending to enliven society.

"But he guards his language, by saying *mere* mental error; by which, may he not mean such errors only as arise from *mental weakness*, and not from disposition?" If so, we are agreed as to its innocence. But, if so, he would not have scrupled to assert its *entire* innocence in the account of the Supreme Governor of mankind. It is plain, therefore, that by *mere mental error* he means errors which have their existence in the *mind* merely, or which relate to *principles*, in distinction from those which relate to practice. If he were accosted by a Calvinist, he might illustrate his meaning by an error respecting "the weight of the shekel," or an error in "chronology," or something of that kind; but follow him into the company of Arians and Socinians, and then his meaning extends to their peculiar sentiments! This is founded on *fact*, and not on supposition. Indeed, it is plain by his writings, life, and conduct, that he means to include Arianism and Socinianism. But to call these *mere* mental errors, in the *innocent* sense of the phrase, is begging the question; it is taking for granted what remains to be proved, that such sentiments (if they be errors) are in that sense merely mental. Certainly it cannot be pleaded, in behalf of the generality of those who embrace these sentiments, that they are endowed with the use of *reason*, or that they are persons of *weak natural capacities*, or that they have not *opportunity* to obtain evidence.

Should it be said that some of them have given proof of their being honest and sincere, by their frankness in declaring their sentiments, and relinquish-

* This is not mere supposition. It is well known that Mr. R. espoused the cause of some who were expelled from the Homerton Academy for what the tutors of that institution thought heresy. Of their principles I know little or nothing, and therefore cannot judge: but Mr. R. has not only endeavoured to vindicate them from the charge of heresy, but he has also denied that the Society has any right to judge *what is heresy*.

ing worldly emoluments for the sake of enjoying them; I answer, in the words of Waterland, "A man may be said to be sincere—1. When he speaks what he really thinks truth. 2. When he searches after truth with impartiality and perseverance." The former, we believe, many of these gentlemen possess; and we think it very commendable, far preferable to a mean-spirited concealment, or a doubtful and ambiguous declaration of sentiment. But to believe that *any* who fundamentally err, whether they or ourselves, "search after truth with impartiality and perseverance," is to disbelieve the promise of God, who declares, "the *meek* will he guide in judgment; the *meek* will he teach his way."

I wish it to be considered whether, if not the whole, a great part of Divine truth may not be included under some such general topics as these; viz. Truth concerning God, Christ, ourselves, sin, the world, heaven, hell, &c. Now of which of these is it innocent for me to think falsely? Am I at liberty to think more meanly of *God* than he has revealed himself?—Can I think him such a one as myself, without offending him? May I think more meanly of *Christ* than the word of God exhibits him? Can I detract from his excellence, and be blameless? Am I allowed to think more highly of *myself* than the word of God represents me? Can I be bloated up with false ideas of my own super-excellence, and be innocent? May I think better of *sin* than it deserves? Must I not view it as it is represented in the Bible? Am I at liberty to put a false estimate on *the good things of this life*? Is not too low an estimate of them ingratitude, and too high an estimate idolatry? And can either of these be innocent? May I undervalue *the life to come*? Or ought I not, seeing God has called it a "weight of glory," to give it its weight in determining my pursuits? Lastly, seeing that God has threatened *everlasting destruction* to the finally impenitent, am I at liberty to qualify these terms, and accommodate them to my own wishes and feelings, and so administer comfort to God's enemies, *as such*? Am I not bound to believe that God *means* what he says? May I presume that the threatenings of the Bible were never *intended* to be executed, but were uttered merely to frighten the vulgar? Ought I not to believe that God is as much in earnest when he threatens as when he promises? If the Bible is a *plain* book, can I misunderstand it and be *innocent*?

Let me conclude with one remark more. Much has been said, of late years, about the Scriptures being *the only rule of faith*, in opposition to all rules of human imposition. In this I agree. But let it be considered whether the avowal of the *innocence of mental error* be not a virtual denial of the Scriptures being *any* rule of faith at all. According to this sentiment, faith seems to have *no rule*—at least none that is *obligatory*; for there can be no obligation where deviation is no crime. If mental error be innocent, the mind can be subject to no law; and if the mind, which has so great an influence on the soul, and with which the will and all the other powers constantly act in concert—if this be without a law, it can be of very little consequence to the Supreme Legislator whether any thing else in man be left under his dominion or not. While we are so jealous, then, lest others should infringe on our liberty, it becomes us to tremble lest we infringe on the Divine authority. And while we are exclaiming, "Call no man master," let us not forget, "One is our Master, even Christ."

LETTER III.

ON LIBERTY.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It has long been the opinion of many persons, who are by no means unfriendly to liberty, that Robinson's notions of it are licentious and extravagant; and in this opinion I cannot help concurring.

Liberty seems to consist in *the power of acting without control or impediment*. But the term, being relative, must be understood in relation to the different objects which are supposed to be impediments.

Some have defined liberty *the power of doing what we please*; and this definition will doubtless apply to every kind of liberty except *moral*. But moral liberty, which is of greater importance than any other kind of liberty, does not consist in this. Though we *do* as we please in the exercise of moral liberty, this is not that by which it is distinguished from other things; no, not from *moral slavery* itself. Moral slavery is not that state in which a person is compelled to act *against his will*; but rather a state in which he is impelled to act against his *conscience*. A person may have the power of doing *what he pleases*, to the greatest possible degree, and yet be totally destitute of moral liberty, being a perfect slave to his own appetites.

Some persons, perhaps justly, have classed liberty under four kinds—physical, moral, civil, and religious. *Physical* liberty is the power of doing what we please without any natural restraints or impediments. If our actions are not the free result of our choice, that is, if they are directed or impeded by an influence contrary to our will, we are destitute of this liberty. *Moral* liberty is the power of doing what is right, without being impeded by sinful dispositions or passions. A libertine, with all his boasted freedom, is here a perfect slave. "While they promise themselves liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." *Civil* liberty, as it is commonly understood in Britain, is freedom from all fear of punishment contrary to law, and from subjection to any laws but those to which a man himself, by his representatives, gives consent. *Religious* liberty is the power of forming our religious sentiments, and conducting our religious worship, agreeably to the dictates of our consciences, without being liable to civil penalties.

Now, suppose Mr. R.'s notions of *civil* and *religious* liberty be just, yet surely he makes, if not too much of these, yet too little of that which is of far greater importance—*moral* liberty. This is the liberty of which the Scriptures chiefly speak; this is the glorious liberty of the gospel. This is that of which every unregenerate man is destitute, being a slave to sin and Satan. This is the liberty with which *the Son* makes us free; without which all other liberty is but a shadow and an empty boast. This is implied in the reply of our Lord to the boasting Jews, who said they were never in bondage to any man: "If *the Son* make you free, then are ye free indeed." It is allowed, indeed, that *religious* liberty, or a freedom to think and act according to our consciences, without fear, is of great value, and perhaps we none of us prize it sufficiently; but what is this to *moral* liberty? Suppose a man liberated from the tyranny of sin and Satan, and deprived of all religious and civil liberty, groaning under the yoke of powerful persecution, would he not be in an unspeakably better situation than another man, possessed of all the liberty he desired, whose soul was enslaved to sin?

Is it not strange, then, that whenever Mr. R. finds the term *liberty* in the New Testament he should reduce it to a simple liberty of doing as we please? And is it not passing strange that "the glorious liberty of the sons of God"

should be thus explained? Rom. viii. 21. Mr. R., having given us several quotations on the text from Greek and Latin writers, sums up the whole in English, by adding—"The amount, then, is this: The heathens expected some great revolution to be brought about by some extraordinary person about St. Paul's time. St. Paul was well acquainted with their opinion: it is natural, therefore, to suppose that the apostle would speak on this article, and direct the eyes of the pagans to Jesus Christ. The passage is capable of such a meaning, and it is highly probable that this is the sense of it. The Gentiles are earnestly looking for *such a liberty* as the gospel proposes to mankind." "The question is," continues Mr. R., "what liberty the gospel does bestow on mankind." Very good; and now let us see what his "glorious liberty of the sons of God" amounts to. "In days of yore," says he, "divines were not ashamed to affirm that liberty of judging and determining matters of faith and conscience was a prerogative of the papal tiara"—and so on; a long story of this kind, for four or five columns, reducing "the glorious liberty of the sons of God" to a mere liberty of "judging and determining for ourselves in matters of faith and conscience;" a freedom from the control of creeds and systems—as though it did not signify what we imbibed so that we acted *freely*. Suppose this freedom were included, yet surely it is not the whole of the meaning. Probably the apostle alluded especially to the redemption of the bodies of believers at the resurrection. But if Mr. R. were right in applying the passage to the Gentile world, surely he might have conceived of a more glorious liberty than that of thinking and acting for ourselves—a *moral* liberty—a freedom from the bondage of sin and Satan, particularly from the slavery of idolatry and superstition. This were a liberty worth while for the Son of God to come from heaven to bestow.

Mr. Robinson may be right in censuring the bishops "for sacrificing Christianity to save episcopacy;" but let him beware of undervaluing moral liberty for the sake of that of which he is so tenacious, of an inferior kind. Christianity is of greater importance than nonconformity. A remark of Mr. Whitefield, when he had attended one of the synods of Scotland, and had heard one of the associate presbytery preach, may not be inappropriate:—"The good man," says he, "so spent himself in talking against prelacy, the Common Prayer Book, the surplice, the rose in the hat, and such like externals, that when he came to the latter part of his subject, to invite poor sinners to Jesus Christ, his breath was so gone that he could scarce be heard." This passage Mr. R. introduces into his *arcana* with great approbation, and adds—"This will always be the case: *that* learning, eloquence, strength, and zeal, which should be spent in enforcing 'the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith,' will be unprofitably wasted on the 'tithing of mint, anise, and cummin'—on discarding or defending a bow to the east, or a rose in the hat,"—p. 109. How far this describes Mr. R.'s subsequent conduct, I leave you to judge.

But not only has he neglected weightier things in defending those of inferior importance, but it appears to me that his notions of liberty are latitudinarian, unscriptural, and unreasonable.

Though in regard to men, we are at liberty to act and think as we please in religion, this is not true in regard to God. He requires us to believe the truth, as well as to obey his commands. He has given us a rule of faith, as well as of practice, and requires us to think and act according to it; and, moreover, it is at our peril that we allow ourselves in the contrary. This, however, is a distinction which I never knew Mr. R. to have made; though I could scarcely have thought he would have avowed the contrary, had he not told me in conversation that *no man was bound to believe the gospel*—

that their only duty was to examine it—and that to make it their duty to believe, as well as to examine, would destroy their liberty, and render their errors criminal! But what can be made of such a liberty as this, unless it be a *Divine right to do wrong*? This Mr. R. ridicules in politics (Claude, vol. ii. p. 42): is it not a pity he should retain it in Divinity?

Further, there is a material difference between my being at liberty to believe and act in religious matters without being accountable to the civil authorities, or to any fellow creature as such; and my having a right, be my religious principles what they may, to a place in a Christian church. If I act with decorum in my civil capacity, I have a right, whatever be my religious principles, to all the benefits of civil government; but it does not therefore follow that I am entitled to the privileges of the house of God. Mr. R. blames the Church of England for not allowing avowed Socinians to continue in its service and receive its emoluments (Claude, vol. ii. p. 212); and not long since, unless I am misinformed, he declared in public company, at an ordination, that no church had a right to refuse any man communion, whether he were an Arian, a Sabellian, a Socinian, or an Antinomian, provided he was of good moral character!

If, however, this notion consist with either Scripture or common sense, I must confess myself a stranger to both. The church of God is represented as a city—a city with walls and bulwarks; a city with gates, of which they themselves have the care and keeping.—It is true they are commanded to open the gates—but to whom? To the righteous nation “who keep the truth.” These, and these only, are to enter in, Isa. xxvi. 1, 2. I know the objection Mr. R. would make to this; viz. Who is to be judge what is truth? But, on this principle, we may doubt of every thing, and turn sceptics at once; or else consider that to be truth which any man thinks is truth. But if it be indeed so difficult to ascertain the truth as that we must needs give over judging in that matter, and that must pass for truth which every person thinks to be such, then surely the Bible cannot be such a plain book as Mr. R. represents. Besides, we might on the same principle refrain from judging between right and wrong; for there are various opinions about these, as well as about truth and error. Suppose, for instance, a person were to apply to a Christian church for communion who approved and practised polygamy, or who should think that Scripture sanctioned concubinage, and therefore practised it; upon this principle, the church must be silent, for should they object to such practices as immoral, it might be replied—I think they are right; and who are *you* that *you* should set up for judges of right and wrong in other men's conduct?—Mr. R. therefore, need not have been so squeamish in his proposed reception of Arians and Socinians as to provide for their good moral character. Upon his principle, the want of character ought to be no objection, provided they are so abandoned in vice as to *believe* that evil is good, or so versed in hypocrisy as to *say* they believe so, whether they do or not.

I do not see how the church at Pergamos could have been blamed by the Lord Jesus for *having those among them* that held the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes, unless they were authorized, and even required, to judge of right and wrong, truth and error, in relation to those whom they received as members. On Mr. R.'s principles, they might have excused themselves in some such manner as this:—“Lord, we never apprehended we had any thing to do in judging of the doctrines that people held who became members with us: we came together upon the liberal principles of universal toleration, and never expected to be called to account about any one's sentiments but our own, whatever we were for these.” But in reply to

all such pleas as this, it is sufficient to say—"Thus saith He that hath the sharp two-edged sword, I have somewhat against thee."

As to the bugbear frequently held up—that if we presume to judge in these matters we assume to ourselves infallibility, to what does it amount? On this principle all human judgment must be set aside in civil as well as in sacred things. No man, nor any set of men, can pretend to this; neither need they. It is sufficient that they act to the best of their capacity, availing themselves of all the means of information they possess. All men, undoubtedly, are fallible; it becomes them, therefore, to judge with meekness and fear; and to consider that their decisions are not final—that they must all be brought over again, and themselves be tried with them at the great assize! But does it thence follow that all human judgment must be laid aside? Surely not.

The great outcry that Mr. R. has made of our Lord's words—"Call no man master," &c., is no more to his purpose than the other. Surely it is one thing to dictate to a man what he shall believe, and persecute him if he does not; and another to require a union of principles, in order that we may unite with him in church fellowship, and have communion with him in the ordinances of Jesus Christ. As an individual, we have nothing to do with him: to his own Master he standeth or falleth; and we the same. But if he propose to have Christian fellowship with us, it is right that we should inquire whether his principles so far coincide with ours as that the end proposed may be accomplished. Is there not a wide difference between my persecuting, or wishing to persecute, a deist, and refusing to unite with him in church fellowship?

I believe also that Mr. R.'s principles are as opposed to *right reason*, to *common sense*, and to *the rules of society in general*, as they are to Scripture.

In *large societies*, the government of a nation for instance, they are obliged to be very general, and cannot maintain such a minute regularity as in societies of less extent. But even here some union of sentiment is required. Suppose a Jacobite, for example, were to insist that King George was not the rightful possessor of the throne, would he have a right to form one of his majesty's ministry? And suppose he were to express his intention, if opportunity offered, of uniting to dethrone him, would not the government have a right to banish him the kingdom? Whether they would invariably *use* their right is another thing; but the right itself they would undoubtedly possess.

In *smaller societies*, where persons unite for the sake of obtaining certain ends, it was always expected that they should agree in certain leading principles necessary to the accomplishment of those ends. Hence, there is scarcely a society formed without *articles*, testifying the agreement of the members in certain fundamental particulars. Suppose, for example, a *common club*, united for the purpose of assisting each other in time of affliction. It is supposed to be a leading principle of such a society, that the lesser number of members should, in all matters of debate, submit to the greater; and another that a certain sum of money should be paid by each member at certain times. Now, just suppose any one member should dissent from the rules; common sense suggests the necessity of his being convinced or excluded. But it seems a Christian society has not the authority of a common club!

It cannot be difficult to prove that a union of faith respecting the proper Deity of the Great Author of our religion, and the object of our worship, is of quite as much importance in religious society as any of the above in civil society. Surely, the dethroning of the Son of God, by the denial of his essential Deity, cannot be less pernicious in the gospel dispensation, than the

denial of his majesty's authority, and the endeavour to dethrone him, would be in these realms.

Some of the grand ends of Christian society are, unitedly to worship God—to devote ourselves to the blessed Trinity by Christian baptism—and to acknowledge the atonement made by the Redeemer, by a participation of the ordinance of the Lord's supper. But what union could there be in worship where the object worshipped is not the same—where one party believes the other to be an idolater, and the other believes him to be a *degrader* of Him who is “over all, God, blessed for ever?” What fellowship could there be in the *Lord's supper*, for instance, (not to mention baptism,) where one party thought sin to be an infinite evil—that they, being the subjects of it, deserved an infinite curse—that no atonement could be made but by an infinite sacrifice—that the sacrifice of Christ was such, and an instance of infinite grace and love—and that the design of the sacred supper is to revive in our minds these affecting truths;—and where the other party believed none of these things—had no conception that sin was so great an evil as to deserve infinite punishment, or to need an infinite atonement—that, in fact, they are not such great sinners as to need not only a Saviour, but a great one? That which is to the one “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” is to the other foolishness, and an insult, forsooth, upon his dignity!

If ever any professed Christians differed in the *essentials* of religion, Calvinists and Socinians do. I wish to conduct myself towards a Socinian no otherwise than I believe a Socinian ought to conduct himself towards me, on the supposition that I am in error. Dr. Priestley acts more consistently, and more like an honest man, than Mr. R. He denies the propriety of Unitarians and Trinitarians uniting together in Divine worship, and exhorts all of the former class to form separate societies. This I cordially approve; for verily, whatever esteem we may entertain for each other as men, *in religion* there can be no harmony. Either we are a company of idolaters, or they are enemies to the gospel—rendering the cross of Christ of none effect. Either they are unbelievers, or we are at least as bad—rendering to a creature that homage which is due only to the Creator; and, in either case, a *union* is the last degree of absurdity.

Whatever then, my dear friend, Mr. R. or any one else may suggest, under the specious pretence of liberality of sentiment, I trust you and I shall ever give heed to the better reasonings of an inspired apostle:—“What fellowship hath righteousness and unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? and what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

LETTER IV.

ON THE NECESSITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR THE RIGHT UNDERSTANDING AND BELIEVING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I DO not know, from any thing Mr. R. has *written*, unless it be his sermon on “The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures,” that on the subject of the present letter there is any difference between his sentiments and my own. That sermon, which I read sometime since, appears to me to contain some things, obscurely expressed, of which, I confess, I can form very little judgment. But I have been lately informed by a friend of unquestionable judgment and veracity, and who was far from being prejudiced against Mr. R.,

that such sentences as this not unfrequently escape him:—"What more than common sense is necessary to understand the Holy Scriptures? Not the Holy Spirit; for then Judas could not have understood them." So also, I have been informed, by equally good authority, that he denies any thing of a *principle* being created or produced in the soul in regeneration. In the sermon just alluded to he seems to ridicule the idea: "A positive act of power (he says) would produce an occult quality, for which we have no name, and of which we know no use."—Occasional Sermons, V. p. 98.

However, if he would adhere to what he says in his notes to Claude, vol. ii. p. 320, I am inclined to think we should agree. "*The Holy Spirit proposes truth in the Scriptures, and formeth, in those who believe, dispositions to admit it.*" By this, it would seem as if he thought something more than common sense was necessary to the reception of Divine truth; viz. *dispositions formed by the Holy Spirit*. With this I am perfectly satisfied. What ideas some may have entertained of the production of a Divine principle I know not; but the whole idea that I have of it is, that it is *the formation of a disposition*.

With this representation of the work of the Spirit I am satisfied. For aught I see, it is clear and comprehensive. And I only wish Mr. R. would adhere to it. It supposes *three* things, on each of which I shall offer a few remarks:—1. That holy dispositions are necessary, in order to the admission of Scripture truth. 2. That men by nature have no such disposition. 3. That the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary to produce it.

First, *Holy dispositions are necessary in order to the admission of Scripture truth*. This, I think, Scripture and common sense concur to prove. Really and properly to understand any writer, it is necessary that we enter into his spirit, sentiments, and feeling. Thus, to understand Sir Isaac Newton, we must have a *taste for philosophy*; otherwise, though we understand the words and sentences abstractedly, we shall never enter into his spirit and views. The writings of a philosopher must be *philosophically discerned*. So, without a *taste for poetry*, we shall never enter into the views and feelings of a Milton; his writings must be *poetically discerned*. And, by a parity of reasoning, properly to understand the inspired writers, we must enter into *their* views and feelings, and be, in a sort, inspired too. We must have, in some degree, the same spirit in reading as they had in writing. Hence the apostle Paul, in perfect agreement with the principles of right reasoning and common sense, declares that the things of God, which are spiritual things, must be *spiritually discerned*. To suppose the Scriptures within the comprehension of an abandoned, vicious mind, would be to their reproach rather than to their praise—a far greater reproach than would attach to the writings of the most profound philosopher, were they supposed to be within the comprehension of an idiot. It would be to the eternal dishonour of the sacred writings, if they did not exhibit a beauty and a life utterly incomprehensible to an unholy mind, and to which such a mind is an absolute stranger.

Secondly, *Men by nature have no disposition to admit Divine truth*. The gospel contains a system of principles directly levelled against the evil bias of the human heart. Wherever Divine truth is admitted, pride must be abased, lust be mortified, and every sinful enjoyment abandoned. No wonder, therefore, that the carnal mind should be indisposed to the reception of this truth. It would be a much greater wonder if it were *not* thus indisposed. But this aversion blinds the understanding, and warps the judgment. Take, for example, four or five Scripture truths—the evil of sin—the justice of God in punishing it with everlasting destruction—the unspeakable love of God in the gift of his Son—the grace of God in saving sinners—and the beauty and bliss of a holy life. Now what unholy mind can receive these

truths? He that receives one will receive all; but he that is blind to one will be blind to all.

Common sense proves a number of dispositions necessary to the right understanding of Divine truth, of which Scripture and experience prove men by nature to be destitute. One thing absolutely necessary is an *earnestness of spirit* after it. We must have a *heart* to know God, Jer. xxiv. 7. We must search for Divine knowledge as one searcheth for hid treasure. "If thou wilt *incline* thine ear unto wisdom, and *apply thine heart* to understanding—if thou *criest* after knowledge, and *liftest up thy voice* for understanding—if thou *seekest* her as silver, and *searchest* for her as for hid treasures—*then* shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God," Prov. ii.

But he that is under the dominion of sin is generally under the dominion of *carelessness* and *indifference* to Divine truth; and, so long as this is the case, all the common sense in the world will be of no avail. A *price* is, indeed, put into his hand to get wisdom; but it is a price in the *hand of a fool*, seeing he has *no heart* to possess it. His attention is absorbed by carnal objects; what cares he for religion? Hence the complaint—"Whom shall he teach knowledge? whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are *weaned* from the milk, and *drawn* from the breasts." So long as people are *careless* about spiritual things, and know no pleasure beyond that of drinking at the fountains of sensual enjoyments, "precept may be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line," over and over again; but they will not hear, Isa. xxviii. 7-13.

Or suppose carelessness and sensual indulgences be not the obstacle—suppose a diligent attention to the acquirement of religious knowledge—still how many want a spirit of *meekness*, *openness to conviction*, *self-diffidence*, and *impartiality*! all which are necessary to a right understanding of Divine truth. The Bereans not only searched the Scriptures daily, but received the word with *readiness of mind*. God declares "*the meek* he will guide in judgment; *the meek* he will teach his way." But the natural man, with all his common sense, is not emptied of *self-sufficiency*. On the contrary, his heart puffeth him up; and, while he "thinketh he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing as he ought to know." This, I apprehend, was the case with Balaam and Judas, and every other naturally but not divinely enlightened sinner. With all their knowledge, they know not God; nor can they, in such a state of mind, enter into the spirit of his word.

I have sometimes wondered that the words of the apostle Paul should seem so difficult to be understood:—"The natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither can he know them; for they are spiritually discerned."

Any man may affirm, and no man misunderstand him, or doubt the truth of the assertion,—that a *careless* man cannot find out knowledge, that a *self-conceited* man cannot be wise, or that a man under the influence of *prejudice* will not ascertain the truth; why, then, should the words of the apostle be accounted mysterious, and their truth be called in question, or explained away?

In any common quarrel among men, it is sure to be the case that he that is in the wrong is blind to truth and reason. To a bystander the matter appears plain; but should he attempt to mediate between the parties—to reason with the offender, and convince him of his evil—he will soon find that a *right spirit* is necessary to render his mediation successful. The man cannot see this, nor *understand* that; he cannot *perceive* wherein he was to blame in this thing, or *so much* in fault in the other. And why? Surely not for want of a natural capacity; for he is exceedingly ingenious in finding excuses.

Should the mediator proceed on the supposition of the man's being wholly and greatly to blame, and require satisfaction to be made, proposing, however, from his regard for the offender, as well as to equity, to make satisfaction for him, only insisting that the offender should *acknowledge* the offence, and *ask pardon*; so long as the man indulged a *wrong spirit*, all this would be inexplicable. True, he *must* admit the generosity of the mediator; but he cannot see what *necessity* there is for such a proposition, and especially why *so much* should be made of it; and as to his falling under, and asking pardon, these are terms to which he cannot submit, and the propriety of which he cannot discern. Should these terms be proposed to him in writing, it is a hundred to one but he puts *some other meaning* upon the words than that apparent to an impartial person, and so excuses himself. If, however, the offended party be a person of *power*, so that the offender *must* yield, self-interest may dictate a feigned submission; but, after all, he will *secretly think* the whole an unfair procedure. The application of this to the quarrel between God and the sinner, the mediation of Christ, and the reception given to it by the unregenerate, is perfectly easy. The sinner has *no disposition* to see things in their true light.

Thirdly, *The work of the Holy Spirit is necessary to produce a right disposition for the reception of the gospel*. This accords with our Lord's representations to Nicodemus. We have no reason to think that this "ruler of the Jews" was destitute of common sense. Yet Jesus told him that, unless he was born again, he could not see the kingdom of God. If ever we have a heart to know God, it must be of God's giving, Jer. xxiv. 7. A man may read his Bible, and be mightily pleased with himself for the discoveries he makes by the mere dint of common sense; but if he have no other perception, with all his ingenuity he will be blind to its *real glory*. Our own times furnish us with too many exemplifications. Let us tremble, lest we grieve the Holy Spirit by undervaluing his influences. If those who think they can do without the Spirit were left to their own ingenuity, He would be just, nor could they complain. I wish our character be not drawn in that of the *Laodiceans*: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; but knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." May we hearken to the counsel given to that deluded people, and apply to the true source of all spiritual light, for "*eye-salve* that we may *see*." They were wonderfully enamoured with their *discernment*; but Christ pronounced them *blind*. They had applied to the wrong source for light. If they wished for knowledge worth obtaining, they must apply to *him* for it. Oh that we had a heart to hearken to this counsel!

You will not understand, by what I have written, that I think there is *nothing* in the Scriptures which a man may discern by common sense without the Holy Spirit. Doubtless this is the case with many of the facts of Scripture. All I mean to affirm is, *that there are truths in the Holy Scriptures—truths, too, which constitute the essence and glory of the gospel—truths the discernment and belief of which form the essence of true religion, which cannot be admitted without an answerable disposition; and that this disposition must be produced by the Holy Spirit*.

Whoever may think lightly of his influences, and fondly imagine they can do without them, may it be your prayer and mine—"Take not thy Holy Spirit from me"—"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

LETTER V.

ON THE CANONICALNESS OF SOLOMON'S SONG.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is an important observation of an inspired writer, "Happy is the man who condemneth not himself in the thing which he alloweth." Such is the darkness, and such are the prejudices, of the present state, that a consistent character is a rarity. I am naturally led to these reflections by a survey of the course pursued by Mr. R. in relation to the word of God. It is well known that, for many years, he has levelled all his artillery against the practice of sacrificing Scripture to creeds and systems. So far he has done well; but, alas! how much easier is it to ridicule the foibles and propensities of others than to keep in subjection our own. Here, I think, he has failed. There *was* a time when he did *not* hold that there is nothing mysterious in Scripture; as witness the postscript to his plea for the Divinity of Christ, on mystery. But of late years two capital articles of his creed are, "*That the Scriptures contain in them nothing mysterious—nothing but what common sense alone is sufficient to understand; and that to explain them in a way of allegory is all froth and nonsense.*" He lately preached a sermon from Micah ii. 5, which was taken down in short-hand, in which he pronounced, among other things, that "Rome first attached the idea of mystery to religion." Now it is easy to see that, if Solomon's Song be a Divine allegory, (which it certainly is, if canonical,) it bears very hard upon both these positions. As to the first, I suppose that Mr. R., with that great share of common sense of which he is undoubtedly possessed, would find some things here, like what Peter said of some things in Paul's Epistles, "hard to be understood." And as to the latter, if this Song be Divine, it must either be entirely neglected, or an allegorical style of preaching, occasionally, is unavoidable.

That I have not misrepresented Mr. R. is evident from his own words, in his Dissertation on Preaching, prefixed to the second volume of Claude: "The fathers were fond of allegory; for Origen, that everlasting allegorizer, had set them the example. I hope they had better proofs of the canonicalness of Solomon's Song than I have had the pleasure of seeing." The amount of which is, "The fathers were fond of allegory—Solomon's Song supported them in it—I do not like allegory—I reject Solomon's Song."

Far be it from me to countenance all that has appeared in the world in the way of *spiritualizing* Scripture, as it is called. Whether the "fathers," or the children, were the publishers, it matters not. Doubtless the greater part deserves no better name than that of "*froth and nonsense.*" Yet there are parts of Scripture which cannot, without doing violence to "*common sense,*" be understood otherwise than as types or allegories. The whole Jewish ceremonial, if thus understood, bespeaks the wisdom of its author, has an intrinsic glory, and answers to the New Testament exposition of it. But if otherwise, to say the least, it must have been an intolerable load of *unmeaning ceremonies*.

One would think that no Christian could doubt whether the *sacrifices*

* Before these letters were penned a review of "Williams on Solomon's Song" had appeared in the "Biblical Magazine," containing the following query—"Had Solomon in writing this poem any spiritual intention in reference to the Messiah, or was it *accommodated* by some pious teachers in the Jewish church to illustrate the sublime connexion between the Son of God and his church, as the domestic relation of Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, do that of the two covenants?" To this Mr. Fuller wrote a brief reply, which it is not thought necessary to retain in the present edition of his works, as it is embodied and every topic more amply discussed in this letter.—ED.

under the law were instituted for the purpose of pointing to the great sacrifice under the gospel; or that the manna of which the Israelites partook, and the water of which they drank, had a typical allusion, 1 Cor. x. 3, 4. And if any entertain doubts whether their *ceremonial purity* (consisting in eating none but *clean* creatures—in their priests wearing none but *clean* garments—and in their frequent *washings*) were intended to typify *moral purity*, they may have those doubts removed, if they wish, by inquiring of an inspired apostle. Compare 1 Pet. i. 16, with Lev. xi. 44.

To account for these ceremonial injunctions, as Mr. R. does, in his "Christian Doctrine of Ceremonies," by suggesting the necessity of linen garments, frequent washings, &c., because they had so much "*butchery and dirty work to do*," is neither to the honour of God, nor of his people Israel. To suppose the Most High to deliver such injunctions and prohibitions, and to annex such awful penalties, in accommodation to a system of "*butchery*," is not much to the honour of his character, or his consummate wisdom. And to suppose that the people of Israel did not know how to do "*dirty work*," without such a body of laws and penalties to instruct and to awe them, is not much to the credit of their common sense. I submit to you whether the apostle to the Hebrews had not a much better notion of things, when he styled the whole Jewish ceremonial "a shadow of good things to come?" Heb. x. 1. And what but an allegorical meaning can be attached to the forty-fifth Psalm? The "*King*," of whom David sang, can be none other than the Son of God, Heb. i. 8. And throughout the whole Psalm he is described under precisely the same character as in Solomon's Song.

But, not longer to exercise your patience, by remarks on types and allegories in general, allow me to offer a few reasons why I think the Song of Solomon a Divine allegory.

It is allowed on all hands that this Song was esteemed canonical by the Jewish church before and at our Lord's coming. This is evident by its being retained in the Septuagint; and nothing appears that in the least degree invalidates the conclusion that it was always received by the Jews as authentic.

There are two things which render this fact of weight in determining the question:—1. *That to the Jewish church, until their rejection of the Messiah, were committed the oracles of God* (Rom. iii. 2); to keep them, no doubt, from all additions and diminutions. Now, had they betrayed their trust, surely our Lord would not have overlooked a matter of such importance. Since, therefore, he never charged them with any such thing, there is every reason to conclude that in this matter they were blameless. It is true, they invented a number of traditions, by which they made void the law of God; but they never pretended that these were *Scripture*, but simply what they were—the *traditions of the rabbies*. For making void the law, by these traditions, Jesus rebuked them in the severest terms; but he never once hinted that they had corrupted, added to, or diminished from *the Scriptures*. On the contrary, 2. *Jesus and his apostles, in addressing the Jews, appealed to those very Scriptures of which they had possession, for the truth of their doctrine*. "Search the Scriptures," said our Lord, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me." By *Scriptures* undoubtedly they must have understood him to mean *all the books, at that time in their hands, accounted canonical*. Had he meant any thing else, he should, and doubtless would, have explained his meaning. For Christ to inveigh so sharply and so frequently as he did against traditions, which were never pretended to be canonical, or a part of the inspired writings, and at the same time know that the Jews had added a mere love-song to the sacred canon, and yet say nothing about that—but on the contrary, by appealing to their

Scriptures in the bulk, *allow* their purity—is most unaccountable, quite unworthy of such a Divine Instructor, and past all belief. The same may be said of the apostolic declaration, “All Scripture is given by inspiration,” &c. By “all Scripture” the apostle must have meant to include either *all* those books which the Jews accounted canonical, or only a *part* of them. If the former, the point is granted; and the apostle may be considered as *setting his seal to all the writings of the Old Testament*. If the latter, then it became him, as an inspired guide, to detect and expose the forgery, and not to speak of the Scriptures in the gross, knowing that so idle an affair as a mere love-song was universally received as a part of them.

In fine, if the Song of Solomon is a corrupt addition to the Bible, either Christ and his apostles were *ignorant* of the fact, or thought it *unimportant*, or *designedly avoided* its exposure. The *first* of these suppositions is totally inadmissible, unless we deny the omniscience of the Son of God, and the inspiration of the apostles. The *second* would imply that they were indifferent to the great end of their mission, viz. to *seal up the vision of prophecy*, and to perfect the holy canon; and render null and void all those solemn charges and awful threatenings, to those who should presume to *add to* or to *take from* it. And, to suppose *the last*, is deliberately accounting Christ and his apostles a company of impostors; and then, to adopt Mr. R.’s own words on another occasion, (Plea for Divinity of Christ, p. 50, first edition,) “What becomes of all their fine professions of declaring *the whole* counsel of God—of keeping back *nothing* that might be profitable—of imparting *their own souls*—and so on? Are not all these rather romantic?”

I have no doubt that the *veil, covering, or colouring* of this Song, is borrowed from an *Epithalamium*, or marriage song. This certainly appears to be carried on throughout, as it is also in the forty-fifth Psalm; and probably the speakers introduced, in addition to the bridegroom and the bride, allude to the *companions* who usually attended at Jewish marriages. Yet it is easy to see, in several expressions scattered, probably on purpose, throughout the Song, marks of its sacred meaning; expressions which are totally inapplicable to any thing but what is Divine. This is observable in many of the Psalms, particularly in the sixteenth, wherein are many things applicable to David, and which the reader would naturally apply to him, without thinking of Christ. But as he proceeds, he finds *some things* which *cannot* apply to David—such as that God would not suffer his Holy One to see corruption; but show him the path of life; in his presence, fulness of joy; and at his right hand, pleasures for evermore. Hence it is evident that, though many things were true of David, yet the main design of the Holy Ghost was, under the form of a prayer of David, to furnish a glorious prophecy of the Messiah—his resurrection, ascension, and glorification at the right hand of the Father. Thus the apostles Peter and Paul understood it, and thus they reasoned from it, Acts ii. 25–36; xiii. 35–37. Other instances, equally in point, might be quoted, but this is sufficient. And so here, in this Song of Solomon, it is easy to observe (and that without the help of a wild imagination) a *Divine glory*, the beams of which are too bright not to be seen through the veil, too resplendent for all this covering to conceal.

To begin with the introduction of the poem—“The song of songs, which is Solomon’s.” It is allowed, I suppose, whether it be canonical or not, that Solomon was the author. Now for him to compose a song abounding with idleness and impurity, which is insinuated of this, and to style it “The song of songs,” that is, the most excellent of all songs, bears hard on his character either as a *good* or a *wise* man. If he knew the whole was dictated by wantonness, and yet, by setting out with such high pretensions, gave the reader to expect great and glorious things, he was an impostor. Or, if he

did not intend any imposition, but really thought his poem, though not a Divine allegory, yet a *most excellent song*, then it proves him, so far from being the *wisest* of men, little better than a fool; for however, in some parts, it may abound with finer language, equal, and perhaps superior, to any other human composition, yet the *self-commendation* which, upon this principle, runs through the whole, renders it in the last degree fulsome and disgusting. "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley—white and ruddy—the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely," are expressions, I will venture to say, impossible to drop from the pen of any mere creature, if applied to himself, but a stark fool. And either of the above suppositions would invalidate, not this Song only, but the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes; which are referred to as canonical by an inspired apostle. Compare Heb. xii. 5, 6, with Prov. iii. 11, 12. And not only so, but the Old Testament, as such, would be invalidated, for representing him as a *wise and good man*.

Many other things are uttered in this Song, of which I may instance a few, which *cannot* comport with the idea of a mere love-song. For example: in chap. i. 4, the bride is represented as saying to her beloved, "The *upright* love thee." This, if applied to Christ, is eminently true, and conveys this glorious sentiment—that such is the excellence of his person, character, and conduct, that every "upright" heart must needs love him. But apply this to mere creatures, and what uprightness of character is required? Especially apply it to Solomon and some of his associates—I presume *they* were not pre-eminently "upright" that loved him?

Immediately after, the bride is represented as calling herself "*black, but comely*:" and, by black, it is evident she meant the very opposite of comely; seeing she further compares herself to the black and beggarly "tents of Kedar," as well as to the beautiful "curtains of Solomon." This, if applied to the church of Christ, sets forth, in a most lively manner, her *external meanness and deformity* in the estimation of the world, and her *spiritual beauty* in the eyes of Christ. Thus, in the forty-fifth Psalm, the king's daughter is represented as "all glorious within." But apply the language to a female as such, and I see not how she *could* be both black and comely, repulsive and beautiful; and, if this were possible, it is scarcely conceivable that she should so freely *acknowledge* her uncomeliness, any more than that, consistently with modesty, she should sing of her beauty. Especially apply this to one of Solomon's wives; and it is scarcely conceivable that she should be a *sunburnt vineyard keeper*!

Again, in the ninth verse, the bridegroom is represented as comparing his bride to "a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot." This, if applied to the church of Christ, is a fine representation of her *union, order, and activity*, in her social capacity. But how a female, as such, can be likened to a *company of horses*, I am at a loss to conceive.

Again, the bride is represented as endeavouring to endear her beloved to others, setting him forth in all his beauty; and the consequence is, they are taken with him; and instead of the scornful question, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" they change their note, and ask very respectfully, "Where is thy beloved, that we may seek him with thee?" This, if applied to Christ and the church, is a beautiful representation of that concern which occupies every pious breast that others should know and love the Saviour as well as themselves, of their eagerness to proclaim his excellencies, and of the good effects which frequently follow, as in the case of the woman of Samaria. But, to apply it to one of Solomon's wives endeavouring to excite the admiration of others, is most extraordinary, and far enough from the way in which female affection ordinarily works!

Again, the bridegroom, in expressing his admiration of the bride, declares her to be "terrible as an army with banners." How this could be a recommendation of one of Solomon's wives I cannot conceive. But apply it to the church of Christ, and it beautifully sets forth the terror with which their testimony, attended with *unity, order, zeal, and inflexible piety*, strikes the enemies of God. Mary, queen of Scots, declared that she feared the prayers of John Knox more than an army of ten thousand men!

"But is it not an *unseemly* allegory?" I answer by asking, Is there any thing unseemly in virtuous love? Has not the Holy Ghost made use of this imagery throughout the Scriptures? The forty-fifth Psalm will stand or fall with this Song.—See also John iii. 29; Eph. v. 23–32. Moreover, did not the Holy Ghost, in inspiring the sacred writers, make use of their natural propensities, so that each writer wrote according to his turn and taste? Thus David, who had a taste for music, tuned his harp, and wrote an inspired Psalm book. John, who was naturally amiable, treated largely on love. And Solomon, who was famed for wisdom, wrote the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Nor was this the only prominent feature in the character of Solomon. God had made him susceptible of the tenderest and most endearing affections, which, under the dominion of virtue, are productive of the happiest social effects. And under the dominion of virtue these affections in Solomon, doubtless, were for a time; and during that time he was inspired to compose this Song.

"But does it not contain *indelicate* imagery?" Suppose it should appear so in our age and country, it does not follow that it was so when and where it was written. It is well known that words become indelicate in one age which were in another considered pure. Words are but arbitrary signs, and their meaning varies according to the variations of custom. Custom, which is governed by ten thousand accidents, may affix ideas to a word in one age which in another it never included. There are words which our fathers used in English which would offend a modern ear, and which would now convey very different ideas from what they did then. It is also well known that *Eastern* imagery is widely different from ours, in respect of what we account delicacy, as well as boldness. They would have scorned, if I may so say, to have truckled to our finical rules. If we reject all the scriptures which do not accord with these rules, we must reject much more than Solomon's Song.

Mr. R. enumerates a long list of Scripture phrases which he accounts indelicate to repeat in this age and country, and tells of a young clergyman of his acquaintance to whom the mention of some such in a sermon had well nigh proved an emetic!—Claude, vol. ii. p. 32. I must confess, I am so attached to Scripture phraseology, that I am not so apt to sicken at the sound as some people may be. Mr. R. has much better expressed my mind on this subject in another page of the same volume, (p. 341.) where, speaking on "*finical delicacy*," he says, "We may observe, on the one hand, that purity and simplicity of manners are generally accompanied with a blunt, rough, rank speech; and, on the other, that depravity of manners generally hides itself under an affected refinement and delicacy of style. The old prophets spoke bluntly, but they were very holy. Modern courtiers speak refinedly; but they are, behind the curtain, extremely vicious."

However, as he has selected a number of expressions to be excluded from the pulpit, without rejecting the books whence they are taken as uncanonical, why should he not do the same by Solomon's Song? Two or three passages at most would have sufficed. Or, if a whole book must be rejected, on account of its containing such and such expressions, why does he not reject the other parts of Scripture, and commence deist at once?

Surely I might appeal to all *serious* Christians whether the reading of this poem has had an improper influence on their minds. I believe, were it not for some wanton would-be-wits, encouraged, I am sorry to say, by such critics as Mr. R., the sentiments of this sacred Song would never have been so awfully perverted. *Holy men* have, in all ages, found in it a *holy tendency*—a tendency to raise in their minds a flame of genuine and ardent affection towards *Him* who is the subject of the Song—"The chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely!"—"To the pure all things are pure!"

LETTER VI.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF SATAN UPON THE HUMAN MIND.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN reply to your observations on the influence of Satan on the human mind, I am free to acknowledge that it is a subject of such a nature that in speculating upon it we may presently lose ourselves. But this is true of every subject connected with the operations of spirit.

To the opinion of Mr. R. on this subject I was not wholly a stranger; nor, probably, are you ignorant that it is one of the tenets of Dr. Priestley and the modern Socinians. That writer thus expresses himself:—"The word *devil*, or *Satan*, in the Old and New Testaments, signifies only the principle of natural or moral evil, personified by a well-known figure in rhetoric. The devil is only an allegorical personage."

I presume Mr. R. would not go quite so far as Dr. P., to deny the *existence* of evil spirits; yet he is very little behind him in denying their *influence* on the human mind.

It is no contemptible instance of Satan's policy to get the notions of his existence and influence exploded; well knowing that, in that case, no prayers would ascend to heaven, and no vigilance be exercised on earth, against his allurements. Nothing would discover more admirable policy in a thief or a murderer, who was prowling about the outskirts of a town for the purposes of plunder, than to quiet the alarms of the people by procuring the circulation of an opinion, either that no such person existed, or that, if he did, he could not possibly enter their houses; in fact, that the whole was a popular prejudice, invented by designing priests, and perpetuated by a few old women, to frighten the vulgar.

It is allowed that the devil has no power over our minds without Divine permission; yea, further, that he has no such power over us as to draw us into *sin* without our own consent. I will not say that he cannot suggest sinful thoughts without our consent; but certainly he cannot, without our consent, draw us into sin. If we yield not, we may be said to be *tempted*, as Christ was; but *sin* does not consist in being tempted, but in *falling in* with the temptation.

Further, It is allowed that the principal and immediate objects of our dread ought to be the snares and allurements of the world. These are sometimes called temptations, being the means adopted by the god of this world to draw away the heart. But not a fish that swims need fear the most subtle and expert fisherman, *provided it keep clear of his nets and baits*.

Once more, It is allowed that the doctrine of Satanic influence has been greatly *abused* by some who profess to maintain it; as when they consider themselves merely passive, and that all the evil of their minds is to be charged upon foreign agency; thus imputing all their wickedness to the devil, for the purpose of exonerating themselves. But this is no proof that the doctrine itself is not true. Multitudes abuse the doctrine of *human depravity*; and by imputing their sinful conduct to their poor wicked hearts,

or to the old man, as they express themselves, endeavour to elude the blame. But shall we, on this account, deny that doctrine? Surely not.

You will receive my present thoughts on Satanic influence under three observations.

First—*The language of Scripture on this subject is such that nothing but an absolute impossibility of its being understood literally should render any other sense admissible.*

The language of inspiration, it must be allowed, not only represents the devil as a real intelligent agent, but describes him as having an influence on the human mind. Among others, let the following passages be seriously considered: "The God of this world blindeth the minds of them that believe not.—The prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.—Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.—That they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil who are taken captive by him at his will.—For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.—Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat.—Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.—Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil: for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness (or wicked spirits) in high places."

In considering the above testimonies, it is only necessary that Satanic influence, literally speaking, is *possible*; and no man ought to dispute it, unless he can prove it *absolutely impossible*. But by what mediums will that be attempted? Can it be proved that Satan *cannot* communicate ideas to the human mind? That simple finite spirits can convey ideas to *each other*, and influence *each other*, cannot be denied, without denying the possibility of reciprocal communication between angels, and between the spirits of just men made perfect. And that simple spirit can influence spirits *dwelling in bodies* cannot be denied, without denying the influence of the Holy Spirit on the souls of men. If there be any impossibility in the matter, it must consist in this: for a *finite* simple spirit to convey ideas to another spirit *dwelling in flesh*. But wherein consists the impossibility of this? He that can prove it so, let him undertake it. But let him reflect that, in proving this, he will also prove that there has been no fellowship between the spirits of just men made perfect and the spirits of Enoch, Elijah, and our Lord; for *their* spirits inhabit bodies. On this principle the translation, instead of the death, of Enoch and Elijah, is a disadvantage rather than a privilege; and the resurrection of our Lord's body must occasion, for the present, an unspeakable loss to the church above. I am inclined to think the man is not yet born who will undertake to prove the *impossibility* of Satanic influence on the human mind.

I have been given to understand that Mr. R. does not reject the sentiment on the ground of its impossibility, but rather on *this* principle:—"that there is *no need* to impute that to infernal agency which can be accounted for in a more simple way." Now, if we had no other source of information on the subject than our own observation, this maxim might be a good one; but if *God has told us* that Satan has an influence on the human mind—(and this, if words have any meaning, he most certainly has)—that ought to put the matter out of all doubt. Otherwise it will amount to this:—That though God *declares* that such things are the effects of such causes, yet there is no need for *believing* this, provided we can discover what we conceive to be a more simple way of accounting for them! And that, having made

this important discovery, we are at liberty to explain away the literal sense of the Scriptures, and understand them metaphorically! But this is setting up our own wisdom as the standard whereby to try the wisdom of God, which is the very essence of Socinianism—the main pillar on which their system rests. Thus they metaphorize the Word, or Son of God, in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, and every thing else that stands in their way. This is the rock on which they split. Mr. R. himself says, “The difference between the Socinians and our churches, on this article, seems to be this: we apply reason to the *evidences* of revelation; and they to all its *doctrines*: according to us, reason has done its office when it has obtained evidence *that God speaks*; according to them, reason is to *reject what is spoken, if they cannot comprehend it*.”—Claude, vol. i. p. 153.

In short, considering the plain import of the forecited passages to any reader of common sense and common honesty, if no such influence existed it would be difficult to vindicate the writers from being either ignorant men, carried away with vulgar prejudices; or, what is worse, designing impostors, pretending to use great plainness of speech, when, at the same time, the whole current of their writings tended much more to deceive mankind, and to conjure up a number of imaginary bugbears, than to convey solid and useful instruction. Mr. R. himself adopts this reasoning on another subject. See his “Plea for the Divinity of Christ,” the first two arguments from the language of the New Testament.

Secondly—*If the Scriptures on this subject are not to be understood literally, but metaphorically, the influence of Satan meaning no more than moral evil—then the writers must have been metaphor mad.*

According to this they first metaphorize things into persons, and then again metaphorize these persons into things! It is well known that the devil, in his influence upon men, is represented under the names of a serpent, a lion, fowls of the air, &c. These representations, if descriptive of the influence of a real intelligent agent, are proper and beautiful. They are metaphors. But if they are intended to describe a mere principle of moral evil, where is the beauty, where the propriety? Is it not all confusion? First moral evil is personified, or converted into a devil; and then this devil is metaphorized into a serpent, a lion, &c.

To suppose Christ, in his explication of the parable of *the sower*, for instance, when he was stripping it of its parabolical clothing, and giving the plain, literal meaning, to explain one dark metaphor by another equally dark, is most extraordinary. “When any one heareth the word, and understandeth it not,” says he, “then cometh *the wicked one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in the heart: this is he which received seed by the way-side.” A very curious explanation indeed, on this principle! The wicked one taking the word out of their hearts must have been quite as obscure as the fowls of the air devouring it—an explanation which itself needed explaining!

The same might be observed of the parable of *the tares*. It is said that, while men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. In giving the plain and real meaning of this parable, our Lord said the enemy that sowed them was the devil. This, we may presume, he thought sufficiently plain. But if Satan has no influence on the mind, this was *perplexing* the subject, not explaining it.

In fine, it is easy to see from hence that the *existence* and the *influence* of evil spirits must stand or fall together. If the one is metaphorical, so is the other. The word of God speaks as explicitly and unequivocally in favour of the latter as of the former; and if the one be abandoned, so must the other. And thus the Scripture account of “angels who kept not their

first estate being reserved to everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day," may be all nothing.

There may be no such beings in reality; the whole may be metaphorical. And, in that case, the whole testimony of Scripture is reduced to uncertainty; and hell, yea, heaven itself, may be an eastern metaphor—a poetic fiction!

Thirdly—*If a series of actions take place, which discover some great design, we naturally suppose an agent equal to those actions, as exercising such design.*

Every design must have a designer, every contrivance a contriver. Thus we prove the being and superintending providence of God. We see a creation—a system full of design; and we conclude that there must be a Creator. We see also, in the affairs of the world, a wonderful combination of events, operating in many cases without the knowledge of those who are instruments in bringing them to pass, and concurring to produce the most astonishing results; and hence we infer that there must be a Supreme Being, who sits at the helm of affairs, and controls the whole with an invisible hand.

Now just apply this reasoning to the case in hand. The *opposition* carried on against the cause of God, from the very beginning, bears evident marks of *design*—of design far superior to theirs who were the visible and immediate instruments.

When God instituted *sacrifices*, to teach mankind the necessity of an atonement, they were presently *perverted to purposes of idolatry*.

When all people were become idolaters, and God separated a people to himself, to serve him, every measure was adopted to *oppose and crush that people*. Thousands of them were murdered in Egypt in infancy, and the remainder cruelly oppressed. When in the wilderness, enchantments and divinations were employed to curse them. And, from their first settlement in Canaan, until the coming of the Messiah, the surrounding nations were leagued together against them. Jerusalem especially, the place where Jehovah had fixed his name, was the mark of their hot displeasure. "Raze it—raze it to the foundation!" was their cry.

A most marked opposition was discovered to the great Corner-stone of the church—*Christ Jesus*. When he came into the world the children of a whole town must be slain, in the hope of slaying *him*. When he entered on his ministry, an especial effort was made to draw him into sin, to taint his holy mind with distrust, presumption, and vain-glory; and when that temptation failed, the main object was to get him despatched.

After his ascension, every opposition that could be made to *the church of God* was pursued with greediness. Persecution raged in the first three centuries with relentless fury, carrying off its thousands and tens of thousands by the most cruel deaths. At a very early period, heresies and animosities found their way into the bosom of the church. Even the apostles were fully employed in stemming the torrent; and, after their decease, a variety of corrupt notions and idle ceremonies tarnished the glory of the church, and introduced that flood of iniquity—the papal apostacy.

The same mighty mischief has been planned and executed against the church ever since. In every age, they have been desolated by cruel persecution, poisoned by pernicious principles, or torn in pieces by intestine divisions.

If ever any opposition can be said to be carried on by *design*, surely this must. An opposition so long in duration, and maintained so uniformly, and by such complicated and opposite measures, could not have been conducted without an *intelligent agent* at the head of it. And, if any credit is to be

given to the word of God, such an agent does exist. Of this we have, in the word of God, several striking intimations.

The *perversion of sacrifices* to idolatrous purposes appears very much like a design on the part of Satan to draw off the attention of mankind from the Lord Messiah. Indeed, this seems to be intimated by the sacrifices of idols being designated by an inspired apostle—"The sacrifices of devils," 1 Cor. x. 20, 21.

The *opposition of the nations to Israel* may be ascribed to the same cause. In the days of David they repeatedly made war against them, but in vain; for we read that "the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went." But when Satan could obtain no advantage over Israel by the sword of his heathen vassals, he took the field himself; and the next news we read is, that "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." He vented his malice against them by moving their chief to sin, and to sin of such a kind as should provoke the Lord to diminish their numbers. And it proved that, by drawing David into sin,—inflating his heart with pride on a review of his numerous forces, Satan slew more Israelites in a few days than his vassals, the heathen princes, could in a succession of years, 1 Chron. xviii. 13; xxi. 1.

The efforts that were made to *draw Christ into sin*, as recorded in the fourth chapter of Matthew, are expressive of the same design. They were natural, from one whose main object was to overthrow the work of human redemption. It might be supposed he would try all he could to undermine the foundation of the church, well knowing that in that case the structure must fall. This is intimated in that memorable saying of our Lord—"On this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The *crucifixion of Christ* is also attributed to the devil, who is represented as *entering into Judas*, for the purpose of getting the Son of man betrayed into the hands of sinners. Tormented, it seems, with the success of our Lord, and perceiving that his gospel was silently insinuating itself into the hearts of men, he determines to get him despatched out of the way. Every circumstance of this tragical affair unfolds *design*, all bearing on one point, the crushing of the rising interest.

Just suppose Satan to have reasoned with himself:—What shall I do? If I let him alone, the world will believe in him. I cannot draw him into sin: he has baffled me in every effort. I will get him despatched; and the more effectually to make an end of him, and of all future attachment to him, I will get him executed in the most shameful manner. He shall be hanged as a common malefactor, at the place of public execution; so that his name shall be had in execration to the end of time. Yea, and, that his memory may be covered with everlasting infamy, I will stir up his own countrymen, the Jews, the only religious people in the world, to put him to death; and not merely the rabble, but the sanhedrim, the scribes and Pharisees, the very gods of the people, whose reputation is such that all the world will conclude that if he had not been a malefactor he had not been put to death—and thus I hope to overcome him! Were we to suppose, I say, that Satan had reasoned thus, the supposition would only correspond with the facts of the case.

This, moreover, seems to be intimated in those scriptures which speak of the sufferings of Christ—as "the hour and power of darkness—breaking the serpent's head—spoiling principalities and powers—making a show of them openly—triumphing over them in his cross."

It was glorious, indeed, that at *the very hour* when hell was just ready to burst forth into triumph, then it should receive its fatal shock; and that

those very means which were designed to crush the Lord Jesus and his rising interest, and overturn the work of human redemption, should be made to subserve the overthrow of Satan's empire, and lay the foundation of that very work which they were intended to destroy! This was killing Goliath with his own sword—this was making a show of him indeed!

The *persecution* that raged against the church, and the *heresies* that were introduced, are also ascribed to the devil, and equally marked by *design*. It was said to the church at Smyrna—"The devil shall cast some of you into prison." And the persecutions which raged are represented as *a flood coming out of the mouth of the great red dragon, that old serpent called the devil and Satan, against the woman and her seed*, Rev. ii. 10; xii. 9, 14-17. Not, indeed, that Satan assumed the office of *justice of the peace*; but he stirred up his vassals, as he had previously moved Judas, to betray the Lord.

When, in the days of Constantine the Great, the Roman empire became Christian, and so an end for a time was put to persecution, then the devil betook himself to another method. Popery, that *mystery of iniquity*, which had long begun to work, now made its appearance, and was soon openly *revealed*, in a grand though gradual apostacy, 2 Thess. ii. 7, 8. Arianism, Pelagianism, and the whole farrago of popery, soon overrun the church. False doctrines are called *the doctrines of devils*: and the beast of Rome is said to receive his power from *the dragon*, 1 Tim. iv. 1; Rev. xiii. 2.

And now I leave you to judge, and to consider whether those who deny the influence of evil spirits on the human mind are very far from denying the influence of the Good Spirit, and whether the one may not very naturally pave the way for the other. Indeed, if it be just to metaphorize the Scriptures in the one case, it is equally just in the other. They do not speak more fully and decidedly of the one than they do of the other. Paul was sent forth to turn men "from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God," Acts xxvi. 18. But if the power of *Satan* be a metaphor, the power of *God*, in delivering men from it, may be so too. In short, if such a liberty is to be taken in metaphorizing Scripture in this instance, it may in any other; and then nothing will be able to stand before it. There is not a doctrine in the Bible but may be thus metaphorized away.

I have made my observations with freedom. My desire is that you should do the same in perusing them. Read them, not with the partiality of a friend, but with the non-prepossession of an indifferent person. I may in some things be mistaken. Receive nothing but in proportion to evidence. Though you are bound implicitly to believe *God*, you are not bound *so* to believe me or any other creature. Whether all I have said be approved or not, believe me, I am, and desire to remain, your sincere friend,

ANDREW FULLER.

ON SPIRITUAL DECLENSION AND THE MEANS OF REVIVAL.

It is a matter of complaint too common, as well as too well founded, that the bulk of Christians in the present age are very deficient in spirituality, and come far short of the primitive Christians in a close walk with God. We lament over our unfruitfulness, our want of growth in grace and increasing conformity to Christ. Complaints of this kind, if they arise from the integrity of our hearts, are necessary and proper; but complaining alone will not effect a cure. *We may sigh and go backward to the last period of our lives.* One necessary means of effecting a cure is to inquire into the *cause or causes*

of the complaint. An investigation of this nature may, through a Divine blessing, answer some good end upon the minds of those whose desire it is to be searched and tried, that every evil way may be detected.

It is not here intended to inquire into all the different causes of unfruitfulness, but only to point out a few of those which are the most obvious. That which I shall insist upon in this paper is, *THE WANT OF A PROPER REGARD TO THE WORD OF GOD.* It has been the pleasure of God to "magnify his word more than all his name;" and if we are under the influence of a right spirit, we shall magnify it too. It is by the knowledge of its sacred truths that we are *freed* from the slavery of sin, and our spirits *sanctified*. In it, as in a glass, "we behold the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of God."

In almost all the remarkable declensions in the church of God, a neglect of the Scriptures has been at the root. On the contrary, in all the seasons of revival and reformation, the Scriptures have been the grand means of their being brought about. During the long and wicked reign of Manasseh, the book of the law of the Lord was lost, was lost even in the temple; and then it was that idolatry prevailed: when Josiah came to the throne, and a reformation was brought about, the lost book was found, and read, and regarded. During the captivity, the word of God seems to have been neglected. In the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, a glorious reformation was brought about; but by what means? The sum of the account is this: *Ezra and his companions stood upon a pulpit of wood, read the law, and gave the meaning; and the people understood the law, and wept bitterly, and entered into a covenant with their God.* Religion was reduced to a low state at the time of our Lord's coming; and one cause assigned for it was, that the Pharisees, by their traditions, had "made void the law of God." On the contrary, the glorious revival which then succeeded, by the ministry of John the Baptist, Christ, and his apostles, was by means of their disseminating the true knowledge of God as revealed in the Scriptures. It is true, they themselves were inspired, but yet even the Lord Jesus Christ appealed to the word, calling upon his hearers to "search the Scriptures." To what can we attribute the great anti-christian apostacy, but to a disregard of the word of God? The original cause, as prophetically given us by the apostle himself, was this, "*Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.*" The foundation of popery was laid in a disregard to the Bible, and an overweening attachment to traditions and unscriptural ceremonies. As the apostacy ripened, the Scriptures were neglected; and at length, when it arrived to its height, they were utterly discarded, being absolutely forbidden to be read by the common people even in their own language. On the contrary, by what means was the glorious Reformation effected? Was it not by translating, exposing, and preaching the Scriptures? From the foregoing facts, we ought at least to suspect that a want of regard to the Holy Scripture lies at the foundation of our departures from God.

There are several ways in which a want of proper regard to God's word is discovered. I shall mention three in particular:—

First, By a neglect of *reading, meditating, and praying* over it. We have great advantages for knowing the mind of God. He hath told us all his heart. Our advantages are superior, not only to heathens, who walk in the dark, without a revelation, but to those of the church of God itself in any former period. Old Testament saints valued the Scriptures "more than thousands of gold and silver," more than their necessary food; and yet they had but a small part of the sacred canon to what we have. That which has crowned all, and brought life and immortality to light, was then wanting.

The most glorious of all the displays of God has been added since their death. Christians themselves, in former ages, had not our advantages. Till the art of printing was discovered, it must have been very difficult for many families to obtain a Bible; and no doubt a great number of Christians, who were generally a poor people, were denied the pleasure of having those sacred books in their families. Since then circumstances are altered; we have now, through a kind providence, the most easy access to the Scriptures. But whether we have more of a spiritual understanding into the mind of God than our predecessors had may be questioned; yea, whether the word of God, upon the whole, is read more now by Christians than it was then, may be a matter of doubt. Does not its being common and easy of access seem to diminish its value in our eyes? Are we not apt to think light of it, as Israel did of the manna when rained in plenty round their tents?

The sacred Scripture is a rich mine abounding with substantial treasures; but it is a mine that must be *worked*. If we would read it to advantage, it must be with *prayer* and *meditation*. "My son," said the wise man, "if thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." A blessing is pronounced upon the man "who meditates in God's law by day and by night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which bringeth forth fruit in its season." If any think to excuse themselves by alleging that they were never taught to read; I answer, if they were interested in a common will, or testament, they would never think of remaining ignorant of its contents. If they could not read, they would procure some person to read it to them; or if that could not be done, rather than not know its real meaning, they would be at some considerable pains to learn to read it themselves. Now shall all this regard be shown to a common will, and that spontaneously of our own accord; and no more respect be paid to the invaluable testament of our dying Redeemer? Where then is the sincerity of our religious profession? "Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also."

Secondly, By not reading it for the *ends* and *purposes* for which it was written. What those ends are, we are expressly informed in the book itself. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for *doctrine*, for *reproof*, for *correction*, for *instruction in righteousness*." To read the Scripture for *doctrine* is to learn our religious sentiments from it, and form them by it. So far as we are under the influence of prejudice, or receive systems on human authority; and go to the Scripture not so much with a desire to be instructed in what we know, as to strengthen ourselves in what we have already imbibed, be it right or wrong; so far we exercise a sinful disregard to the Scriptures, and may justly be given up of God to our own deceptions. If we read the word of God to any good purpose, we must suppose beforehand that we do not know every thing, that we are liable to error in judgment and evil in practice; how else shall we read it for *reproof* or for *correction*?

If we set up our *own reason*, so as to resolve to admit of nothing as Divine truth but what shall be within its comprehension, we despise God's word, and cannot be said to read it either for *doctrine* or *correction*. It is not enough that we "call no man master;" we must have "one Master, even Christ." Our *own reason* is also another word for our *own creed*; and we are as much in danger of being ruined by our own creed as by that of another man. It matters not by what name we call it, our reason or our creed; if the infallible dictates of the Holy Spirit are to give way to this,

adieu to all religion. Where such presumption begins, it may truly be said, religion ends.

In reading the *preceptive* part of Scripture, it will be but of little use to us, unless we read it with an intention and determination, through Divine assistance, to form our conduct by it. To read for *instruction in righteousness* is the same thing as searching to know what is the good, perfect, and acceptable will of God, with a design to do it, let it grate ever so much with our carnal inclinations. It answers but a poor end to read a chapter once or twice a day in the family, merely for the sake of decency, without so much as an intention of complying with what shall be found to be the mind of God.

If our judgment or conduct is formed by *dreams, visions*, or supposed *immediate revelations from heaven*, and not by the plain meaning of the word of God as it stands in our Bibles, then do we slight the word of God, and God may justly give us up to our own delusions. It is no just plea in behalf of these supposed revelations, that they often come *in the words of Scripture*. If we infer any thing from certain words of Scripture being impressed upon our mind, either in favour of ourselves, or for the guiding of our conduct, which cannot be proved to have been the meaning of Scripture independent of that impression, it is no other than real enthusiasm, and will in the great day be found to be a disregard and perversion of the Scripture itself.

Thirdly, By forming a low opinion of the *importance of the truths contained in it*. It seems to be very much the spirit and opinion of the present age, that it matters not how polluted the fountain is, if the streams are but pure; but the question is whether the streams *can* be pure, if the fountain is polluted. Actions materially good and beneficial to society may flow from a heart at essential variance with the doctrines of revelation; but it wants proof that any action can be truly good and acceptable in the sight of God, unless it originate in evangelical principle. On the contrary, the Scripture is express, that "without faith it is impossible to please God."

Some good people have contracted a strange prejudice against the doctrines of the gospel, accounting them *dry* and *uninteresting* matters. They like *experimental* religion the best, they tell us. But I do not understand the distinction of religion into doctrinal and experimental after this sort. I would ask such a person, What is experimental religion? Is it any other than *the influence of truth upon the mind* by the agency of the Holy Spirit? You love to *feel* godly sorrow for sin; so do I: but what is godly sorrow for sin but the influence of truth upon your heart? Is it not the consideration of *the great evil* of sin, its *contrariety to what ought to be*, its being committed against *light, love, &c.*, that dissolves your heart in grief? Were you not to realize these *truths*, it would be impossible for you to weep over your sin. But you love to feel joy and peace in believing; so do I: but must you not have an object to believe in? Take away the great doctrine of the atonement, and all your faith, joy, and peace are annihilated. Much the same might be said of other gospel doctrines; instead of being opposed to experimental religion, they are essential to its existence. That some doctrinal sermons have been *dry* and *uninteresting* is granted; but that must have been the fault of either the preacher or the hearer. If Scripture doctrines were delivered in their native simplicity, and heard with a heart suitable to their importance, they could not be *dry*; they must be like the doctrine of Moses, which "dropped as the rain upon the grass, and as the dew upon the tender herb."

There is another prejudice against the doctrines of the gospel in the minds of many people. They imagine them to be unfriendly to practical religion. That practical religion may be neglected through an excessive attachment to favourite opinions is allowed; but if we imbibe and inculcate the truths

of the gospel according to the lovely *proportion* in which they stand in the Bible, and adhere to them, not because we have once imbibed them, but because God hath revealed them, such a reception of the truth and adherence to it, instead of enervating practical godliness, will be found to be the life of it. Doctrinal, experimental, and practical religion are all necessarily connected together; they can have no existence separate from each other. The influence of truth upon the mind is the source of all our spiritual feelings, and those feelings are the springs of every good word and action.

The above are some of the different ways in which we are liable to be wanting in our regard to the word of God; and, in proportion as these prevail, it is natural to suppose we shall be wanting in *spirituality* and *communion with God*: instead of growing in grace, we shall dwindle like the unwatered plant in the drought of summer. This may be expected on *two* accounts. *First*, As an awful chastisement for our sin in such disregard. God's word is indited by his Holy Spirit; a want of proper regard to that word must therefore be one of those evil things by which the Spirit of God is *grieved*; and where that is the case, it is natural to suppose he will withdraw his reviving, fructifying influences, the consequence of which will ever be a discernible want of spirituality. I call this an *awful* chastisement; and such it is, because of a spiritual kind. As the Holy Spirit is the sum of spiritual good, so his withdrawalment is the completion of every spiritual evil. When David was threatened with the loss of all that was dear to him, he deprecated this more than any thing beside: "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me!" "Woe unto them," saith the Lord, "if I depart from them!" *Secondly*, As a natural consequence of it. God's word is that to those who "meditate in it by day and by night" which "the rivers of waters" are to a tree planted by their side. It is that by means of which they "bring forth fruit in their season." From the want of a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with God's word proceeds a *want of religious principle*; and this seems to be the case of multitudes of professors in the present age. From want of religious principle proceeds a more than ordinary liability to *errors in judgment*: the house that was *empty*, though swept and garnished, was ready for the reception of unclean spirits. From errors in judgment proceed *errors in spirit and conduct*; if once the truths of God sink into disesteem, his precepts in the spirituality of them will not continue to be regarded. Little sins, as they are accounted, will be indulged, and the most difficult and self-denying duties neglected. And then, if things come to this, that we give way a little, we shall soon go further; want of universal obedience will soon lead to a universal want of obedience; and thus, if infinite mercy prevent not, we shall *wax worse and worse*. This is no other than the high road to apostacy, towards which it is to be feared great numbers of professors are verging, and in which great numbers are already walking! Happy should I be if any one by these hints might be led to reflection, and recover himself out of the snare of the devil, by whom he is led captive at his will!

I have only one thought more to add. If a regard to the word of God is of such great importance to Christians, what must it be to *ministers*! A defection in a private character nearly terminates in himself; but a defection in a minister may affect many thousands. If as ministers we sink into a disregard for Divine truth, to say the least, we shall not preach it with that ardour which is necessary, if at all. It becomes us to tremble, and to inquire whether the defections among our people be not owing in part to the wholesome truths of God being withheld from them, or delivered in a languid and careless manner; and, if so, it behoves us further to consider how we shall endure that cutting rebuke, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee,

that thou shalt be no priest to me; seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children!"

IN the last paper it was supposed that one cause to which declensions in religion might be imputed was *a disregard to the word of God*; in this I shall attempt to prove that another cause is *the manner in which we attend to the duty of PRAYER*. Prayer is the ascending of the heart to God. It is one of the ordinary means of our communion with God. A great part of the religious life consists in the exercise of it, either in public or in private, either vocal or mental. It may be supposed that our spiritual prosperity will bear some proportion to the degree of fervour and constancy with which this duty is attended to. All our spiritual life is derived from Christ, as that of the branch is from the vine; and prayer is that by which we receive of his fulness grace for grace. If this duty is either restrained before God, or performed in a careless, carnal manner, our souls must of course dwindle away and lose their fruitfulness.

But as the persons to whose consideration these papers are humbly recommended are such as profess godliness, I shall take it for granted that they make a point of prayer, and shall say nothing of its being omitted, but confine my remarks *to the manner in which it is performed*.

It is a fact, to which I suppose many can subscribe, that it is very common for us to pray to the Lord, and yet for our prayers to remain unanswered. We pray, for instance, that the kingdom of Christ may increase in the world, and yet we see but little of that kind taking place: that our sins may be forgiven, and yet sin remains upon our consciences from time to time; and we lose it, not so much by its being blotted out by God's pardoning mercy, as worn out by our own forgetfulness: that our graces may be lively and active, yet we remain wretchedly insensible and formal: in a word, that we may enjoy communion with God, and conformity to him; and yet the degree that we possess of either is so small that we have reason to be greatly ashamed, and to tremble lest it should be said of us at last, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

But how is it that our prayers should be thus unanswered? "Is the Lord's arm shortened, that it cannot save; or his ear heavy, that it cannot hear?" Or is he slack concerning his promise of hearing and answering the prayers of his people? None of all these; he himself hath told us the reason: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss." "If I regard iniquity in my heart," said the psalmist, "the Lord will not hear me." Let the following questions be seriously considered.

First, *When we pray, do we really and earnestly desire what we pray for?* It is awful to think of approaching the Searcher of hearts without meaning as we speak; and yet it is to be feared that a spice of this solemn mockery runs through many of our petitions. It were well for such persons as always pray in a *set form* of words to examine whether they mean what they say. It is granted that a person *may* as really pray in the words of others, provided they do but express his case, as in his own; but cases are so numerous in different persons, and so various in the same person at different times, that it is not to be expected that any set of words of human composition should fully answer the end proposed by it. Nor is formality in prayer confined to those who use a form. Persons who pray extempore may fall into a habit of repeating words without meaning, or words which, however good and proper in themselves, are not the expressions of the heart. Prayers offered up in public are very liable to this abuse, and that both in the speaker and hearer. The speaker is under a temptation to forget the God he

approaches, and to consider himself barely as in the hearing of men, and so to ask, not for such things as he really desires, but such as next occur to his mind, as things, if I may so speak, *that will do to be prayed for*; and the hearer is apt to consider himself as not immediately concerned in the petitions of another, and so to indulge his mind in wandering after other things; whereas, by joining in public prayer, we solemnly profess to unite with it: he that prays is to be considered as the mouth of the assembly to God.

There is one considerable evidence that we do not mean what we say in many of our approaches to God, and that is the want of what the apostle calls *watching unto prayer*. If a poor man in real necessity ask relief at a rich man's door, he will not think it sufficient to repeat over a few words and return without an answer; no, he *watches* and looks with longing expectation after that for which he has been petitioning. And if the party to whom he applies should have previously invited him, and even laid his commands upon him whenever he is in want to repair to him, the poor man in that case will not be so apt to consider his applications so much in the light of duties as privileges. It is easy to apply this to our approaches to God. Are we of such a spirit in those approaches as to reckon them a privilege, or do we satisfy ourselves with having gone through the exercise, and performed, as we think, our duty, without waiting, or scarcely thinking of our petitions being granted? When we say *Amen, so be it*, at the close of our prayers, do we really desire that so it *should be*? It is a dangerous state of mind to be praying daily for keeping and quickening grace, and yet to be easy without it; to rest contented with asking communion with God, instead of enjoying it. The least that can be supposed in such cases is that God will punish our indifference, not to say our hypocrisy, by withholding the blessings for which we make request.

Secondly, *Are we not apt to be less earnest in matters wherein we should take no denial, than in others wherein it would become us to be submissive?* There are two sorts of mercies for which we have to pray; mercies which God hath *not* bound himself to bestow, even though we pray for them in ever such a right spirit—and mercies which he *hath*. Of the former class are all our earthly comforts, and some things in the religious life; of the latter are all those spiritual blessings essential to salvation. David prayed for the life of his child: God did not reprove him for praying, yet neither did he grant him his request. David desired also to build God a house; God took it well that it was in his heart, yet he denied him the thing he desired. In neither of these cases had God promised to grant the desire of his servant, and he saw fit to counteract it: but, in respect to spiritual and eternal blessings, God has bound himself to grant the desire of the righteous, and to perfect that which concerns his praying people. Now, if things are so, it is easy to see that when we are praying for the one sort of blessings a peculiar submission to the will of God becomes us, which is not required in the other. If we pray, with Jabez, to have our coast enlarged in temporal things, we ought to feel a contented mind, and submit to God, though our prayers should be unanswered; but if we are praying for an interest in Christ as our spiritual and everlasting portion, contentment of mind is not there required. God does not require us to be willing to be lost for ever: for that would be the same thing as to be willing to be for ever employed in cursing and blaspheming, instead of blessing, his holy name. Again, if we adopt the latter part of the prayer of Jabez—"Oh that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!"—if by *evil* we understand the evil of affliction, a resignation to the will of God becomes us; but if by evil we understand the evil of sin, resignation would then become criminal. But

if we inspect the generality of our prayers, I am afraid there is more resignation, as it is accounted, in respect to the enjoyment of spiritual blessings, where it is not required, than there is in temporal blessings, where it is required. In those things wherein we should take no denial, we are too easy; but in those wherein resignation would become us, we are too urgent. The phrase, "If it be thy will," which so often occurs in prayer, is perhaps more frequently applied to things in which God requires us to be all importunity than to things wherein such language would be suitable.

Thirdly, *When we pray for good things, is it always to a good end?* It is possible we may go to God, and really desire the things we ask, and yet, not desiring them to a good end, we fail of obtaining our desires. We may pray for blessings upon our worldly engagements, and it is very right we should do so; but such prayer may be merely for the purposes of sensual gratification. Thus the apostle James speaks: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." And thus the Lord charged Israel, before they entered into the Promised Land, saying, "I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear." If these be our ends, our prayers can be no other than abomination in the sight of God. We may even pray for the success of the gospel, and it is doubtless right that we should do so; but it is possible such desires may be uttered, not out of regard to the prosperity of Christ's cause, but of *our own*; and, if so, it is a low and carnal end, and we cannot expect that God should hear us.

Fourthly, *When we confess our sins, and pray to be restored, do we really lament them, and mean to forsake them?* I fear too many of our petitions are unanswered, because they do not arise from godly sorrow. We confess from custom or conscience, but do not feel our hearts go out against the sin, so as to return to the Lord with all our soul. Confession is of the nature of a solemn oath, an oath of abjuration; and it is awful to think that we should ever use it without a desire and determination to forsake! Where this takes place, it is no wonder that prayer for the forgiveness of sins and communion with God should be unanswered. This is regarding iniquity in our hearts; and then we are assured the Lord will not hear us.

Fifthly, *When we pray for Divine direction in matters of faith or practice, are we sincerely determined to follow the dictates of God's word?* We may pray to be led into all *truth*, and yet feel a prejudice in favour of sentiments already imbibed, and against others which may be proposed: in this case, while we pray and search the Scriptures, we shall feel a secret wish to have them speak according to our preconceived ideas of things, not knowing how to endure the shame of having been mistaken. Much the same may be said of things which relate to *practice*. There is such a thing as to go to God for direction in doubtful matters, not with a resolution to be determined by the word of God, but with a hope to find God's word in favour of our inclinations. This was the motive of Ahab in sending for Micaiah, to know whether he should go up to Ramoth-gilead to battle; and of the Jews left in Judea, to know whether they should tarry there, or go down to Egypt. In both these cases they had determined what to do; their asking counsel of God, therefore, was mere hypocrisy. "Son of man," said the Lord to Ezekiel, concerning such characters, "these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say, Thus saith the Lord God, Every man—that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols."

Sixthly, *Are we not greatly wanting in what may be called religious public spirit in our prayers?* It is a fact that a great number of Christians in the present day are perpetually harassed in determining the reality of their own Christianity; they are all their lifetime poring upon that subject, and perhaps die at last full of fear and anxiety. The primitive Christians do not seem to have been so much troubled with these thoughts as with their want of conformity to Christ. Christ taught his disciples to approach *daily to God as their Father*; and, by the accounts we have, it would seem they generally did so; but such sweet freedom is now rarely to be found, even among the godly. How is this to be accounted for? There is no doubt that such darkness of mind is in a degree pitiable, and that such persons require to be dealt with in a way of wisdom and tenderness. It is a thought, however, that deserves consideration, whether one great cause of this darkness of mind may not arise from *an excessive attention to our own safety*, to the neglect of *the glory of God* and the prosperity of Christ's kingdom. Christ enjoins us to pray, "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom," before we ask for the forgiveness of our sins, or even for our daily bread. A person that is employed in scarcely any thing else but recollecting former evidences, for the purpose of being able to answer the question, Am I a Christian? is not likely to gain his object. The means he pursues tend to defeat their own end. Self-examination, however necessary in a degree, yet if attended to, to the neglect of other things, is like the conduct of a man in trade, who should spend three-fourths of his time in casting up his accounts that he may determine whether he has gained or lost. It is doubtless very desirable to enjoy a full satisfaction respecting our interest in Christ, and such a satisfaction is to be enjoyed in the present life; but the question is, What are the means by which it is to be obtained? Like reputation, and some other things, to pursue it as an end is the way to lose it. If we care so little about God's glory as to pray scarcely at all for the advancement of his kingdom in the world, but are continually taken up about our own safety, it is right that God should so order things as that we should be disappointed. If we wish for satisfaction on that head, it must be sought only as a *secondary object*. If we were to seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, these would be among the things that would be added unto us. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee."

Lastly, *Do we ask blessings wholly in the name of Christ?* I do not mean to ask whether we conclude our prayers in so many words, but whether we come to God under a full persuasion of our utter unworthiness, knowing and feeling that while we implore the best of blessings we deserve the heaviest of curses; and desiring all to be given, not for our sakes, but wholly for the sake of Christ. We have reason to believe that if our prayers were more presented in the name of Christ they would be more successful, seeing that it stands on sacred record, *whatsoever we ask in his name, it shall be given us*.

IN the last paper, I considered the manner in which the duty of prayer is attended to as one considerable reason of spiritual declension; in this I shall propose to consideration another cause, as contributing to the same end: it is that of *sin lying on the conscience unlamented*. When the apostle Paul wrote his First Epistle to the church at Corinth, they were sunk into a most wretched condition indeed. With admirable faithfulness, wisdom, patience, and tenderness, he wrote that Epistle with a view to reclaim them. Many of them were reclaimed; but some, it seems, continued insensible, which induced him, when he wrote his Second Epistle to that church, to express

himself thus: "I fear lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you; and that I shall bewail many who have sinned already, and have not repented of their deeds.

Sin, if not habitually lamented, and removed by repeated applications to the cross of Christ, is like poison in the bones; it rankles within us, and is destructive of our soul's prosperity. So long as sin remains unlamented, so long we have an habitual liking to it; and so long, to say the least, God has a controversy with us. To assist any one who wishes to make strict inquiry into this matter, I would state a few *evidences* by which it may be known whether we have sinned and not repented, and point out *the danger* of such a condition.

If there is any particular evil to which we have been especially addicted, and that evil is still *persisted in*, we may be certain that we have not lamented it sufficiently, or to any good purpose. Saul confessed his sin unto David; but his persisting in it but too plainly proved that he never truly repented of it. How often soever we may have confessed our sins before God, if these confessions are not attended with a forsaking of them, we are none the nearer, but perhaps the farther off: it is an awful state of mind indeed to be able to persevere, at the same time, in sinful indulgences and religious exercises.

Further, though we should refrain from the evil as to practical compliance, yet if such refraining arises from mere *prudential considerations*, we may certainly conclude that we have never truly repented of it. If the bias of the heart is towards an evil, and we are withheld merely, or principally, by regard to our reputation, or worldly interest, or fear of hell, and not by the fear and love of God, our condition is very dangerous. If, when we are plied with temptation, the arguments we use to repel it are taken, not so much from its evil nature, or its God-dishonouring tendency, as from the consequences it will produce, let us tremble: surely we stand upon the brink of a tremendous precipice. "That man," says Dr. Owen, "who opposes nothing to the seduction of evil in his own heart, but fear of shame among men, or hell from God, is sufficiently resolved to do that evil if there were no punishment attending it; which, what it differs from living in the practice of sin, I know not!"

Again, Suppose we have been guilty of no one particular sin, either of commission or omission; yet we may have accumulated a load of guilt by small degrees. This is the more likely to go unlamented, because, being contracted by little at a time, it has obtained a place in the heart almost unnoticed. But as little and repeated colds, when they settle upon the constitution, will in the end bring on a fit of sickness, so will these little neglects and indulgences bring on a sore disorder upon our souls. There is not a day passes but we are contracting fresh guilt: unless therefore we maintain an habitual communion with Christ, daily bewailing our sins at the foot of his cross, we may certainly conclude that we have sinned and not repented.

Further, If past evils are *remembered* with pleasure and approbation—if the thoughts and imaginations are fed by dwelling upon them—or if we can take a pleasure in *speaking* of our former sinful exploits, though it may be at the same time we would be thought to disapprove of them—these are but too forcible a kind of evidence that we have not yet repented of our deeds. To say the least, if we have repented, we have again made the evils our own, by a recommission of them in the mind; which requires renewed repentance and application to Christ, as otherwise we are as much under the guilt of them as ever. True repentance is attended with a holy *shame*, a shame that will teach us to wish our evil ways annihilated, and the very name of them buried in oblivion. There are some sins which expose us to shame among men; and these it is natural for us to wish to have buried in forget-

fulness, whether we repent of them or not: but there are others, very offensive to God, which yet will gain the applause of men; and here it is the temptation in question lies. True repentance will make us ashamed to repeat these, as well as others. "Thou shalt remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."

In fine, If we have not with holy abhorrence confessed and rejected our sin, we have not yet repented of it. There is such a thing as the conscience being habitually burdened with guilt, and the spirit depressed with long-continued dejection, and yet the soul not be brought to a thorough contrition. The heart seems now ready to dissolve, but yet not altogether come to a point. Such a state of mind is tenderly described by David in the 32d and 38th Psalms. Both these Psalms were probably written after his repentance for his remarkable fall; and in them he describes, not only the breakings forth of godly sorrow, but the previous operations of his mind during the time of his lying under the guilt of that great sin. "When I kept silence," saith he, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer! Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore."—"My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness." Now he comes to the crisis: "I am ready to halt; my sorrow is continually before me! I will declare my iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin."

The state of mind last described is far less dangerous than any of the above, because it promises to come to a speedy and happy issue; but yet things are never safe till the soul, dissolved in grief, lies prostrate at the feet of Jesus. We have reason to think that a great deal of remorse of conscience and depression of mind may come on and go off again; and there is nothing that we have greater reason to dread than a being so given up of God as that the guilt of our consciences shall *wear* away by degrees, instead of being *washed* away by an application to the blood of Christ.

A few additional observations, on the *danger* of having sinned and not repented, shall close this paper. In the first place, *it weakens and enervates our graces*, and by consequence *spoils our usefulness*. Godliness, in all its lovely forms, is a tender plant: sin indulged in the soul, like weeds in the garden, will impoverish it, and cause the tender plant to dwindle away. Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot flourish together. Experience but too plainly proves that carnality indulged damps the flames of love, kills holy resolution, joy and peace fly before its malignant influence, hope sickens into fear, and faith loses sight of invisible realities. When this is the case, of what use are we? what in the family? what in the church? what in the world? where is now the savour with which our spirit and conversation should be attended? Alas, we are but too much like salt that has lost its savour, fit for neither the land nor the dunghill!

Further, *It cuts off all communion with God*. The joys of salvation were withdrawn from David when he withdrew from God. It is well if prayer and all close dealing with God is not neglected; or, if we approach to God in form, still while iniquity is regarded in our hearts the Lord will not hear us. We may go morning and evening, and oftener; but the Lord is not there! The pleasures of religion are fled. Our soul is removed far off from peace, and we soon shall have forgotten spiritual prosperity. There are only two states of mind which we now alternately experience: we are either locked up in *insensibility*, or pierced with *self-reflection*.

Again, *It gives Satan a great advantage over us*. It tempts the tempter to apply to us with renewed force. While sin lies unlamented upon the

conscience, we are like a besieged city, enfeebled by famine, sickly, and without a heart to resist; and this must needs invite the besieger to renew his onsets. It is by resisting the devil that he flies from us; and so, *vice versa*, by dropping resistance he is encouraged to approach towards us. This in fact is the case with us; while sin remains unlamented there are generally more temptations ply the mind than at other times. When Samson slept and lost his strength, the Philistines were soon upon him. And now put these all together: our strength gone, the Holy Spirit departed, and temptation coming upon us with redoubled force: alas! where are we? Well did the psalmist exclaim, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,—and in whose spirit there is no guile."

Again, Secret sins indulged will, in all probability, soon become *manifest and open*. It is not in human nature to be able for a long continuance to conceal the ruling bias of the heart. It will come out in some way or other, and it is fit it should. A wise Providence has so ordered it that the heart and conduct shall not be at perpetual variance. It is worthy the character of a holy and a jealous God to show his abhorrence to secret sin, by suffering the party to be rolled in the dirt of public reproach. If we regard not the honour of God's name, can we wonder if he regards not the honour of ours? "Him that honoureth me I will honour; but he that despiseth me shall be lightly esteemed."

Once more, Does it not hereby become a matter of doubt how it is with us as to *our state before God*? Though no true Christian will ever sink into total apostacy, yet while sin is unlamented we are in the direct road to it, the same road that those have trod who have apostatized. They once thought themselves right as well as we, and began to sin by little and little: yes, they went on, and presumed it may be that they should be some time or other *restored*; but, instead of that, have gone on and on, till death has cut them off, and beyond the grave they have found their dreadful disappointment.

These things should make us tremble, and consider the danger of trifling with sin, and presuming upon being reclaimed, and so making ourselves easy in impenitence. If we go on in sin, have we not reason to think things were never right with us from the first? If the waters are naught, does it not seem to indicate that the spring has never been healed?

HAVING, in the three foregoing papers, pointed out some of the *causes* of spiritual declension, I come now to inquire into *the means of revival*. But, before any thing can be said by way of direction, two or three things must be premised.

1. That in the use of all means we consider them but *as means*, place no dependence upon them, but entirely upon the Spirit of God as the first cause. We can of our own accord find the way out of God's path, but if left to ourselves we shall never find our way in again.

2. If we have so backslidden from the Lord as to live in the indulgence of any known sin, whether of omission or commission, that we *immediately put away* these idols, and that without reserve. God will not hear us while iniquity is regarded in our hearts. If any or all of those things pointed out in the foregoing papers as causes of declension are so indeed, those causes must be lamented and forsaken, or depend upon it the effects will not be removed.

3. In whatever mode we have departed from God, that there be a *real*

desire of returning to him again. Without this, all directions will be in vain, and all means without effect. "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." It may be we are *accustomed* to live without close communion with God, and are almost *contented* with such a kind of life. Perhaps we *lay our accounts* with going through life without habitual close walking with God. If so, I only say this, Let us not at the same time lay our accounts with dwelling forever with him at last.

But if the above three things may be supposed, there are then other Scriptural directions which may be given. That which I shall insist upon in this paper is as follows: *That we closely consider the evil nature of that sin which is committed after our conversion to God.*—As our first return to God begins with conviction of sin, so must every other return. The ordinary means of obtaining conviction of sin, together with a mournful sense of it, is by seriously and closely reflecting upon its evil nature and aggravating circumstances. "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies."—"Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities, and for your abominations."

Perhaps we cannot obtain a more affecting representation of the evil of our backslidings from God than that which is given us by the prophet Jeremiah, in his address to Israel, contained in the second chapter; and as advice from such a quarter comes with Divine authority, I do not think I can do better than to refer the reader to Jer. ii. 1-13, on which I shall now make a few remarks.

From this affecting passage we may observe *four* things in particular, which are represented as aggravating those sins which are committed after we have known the Lord; they are committed in violation of the most solemn *vows*, without any the least *provocation*, are expressive of the blackest *ingratitude*, and the most extreme and singular *folly*.

First, They are committed in violation of all those *solemn vows and covenant engagements* which we made and into which we entered at our first conversion. Not only was there a covenant between the Father and the Son before time, but as well there is a covenant between Christ and his people in time.

Conversion is a marriage wherein (with reverence be it spoken) Christ resigns up himself, with all he is and has, to us, and we resign ourselves, with all we are and have, to him. Such a union is here alluded to. The love we bore to Christ at that time might fitly be called *the love of our espousals*. Was there not a time when we scarcely wished for any other pleasure than what was to be enjoyed in communion with himself and his saints—when his name was as ointment poured forth—when we loved the very image of it? And, when we have seen those who we thought bore most of that in their spirit and conduct, has it not been as though we had seen an angel of God? Was there not a time when closet exercises were reckoned our highest privileges—when the return of public ordinances was waited for with eager expectation—in short, when we took Christ's cause for our cause, his people for our people, his will for our law, his glory for our end, and himself for our portion? Now these were times from whence we may each say, "Thy vows, O God, are upon me!" But have we not since then strangely forsaken him? How is this? Did we love him too well then? Is he not as worthy now as then? If a prince espouse a poor miserable outcast, and give himself with all he is and has to her, and only require her heart in return, shall she refuse him that? shall she be the first that shall be dissatisfied? must she go after other lovers, and that in spite of all her solemn vows? And yet may each backslider say, Thus it has been with me! "O

my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art *my* Lord;" thou hast taken him for thy lawgiver and thy portion: how is it that thou shouldst bow down to other lords, and seek satisfaction in that which is not God?

Secondly, Whatever departures from God have taken place, they have been *without any provocation whatever*, on his part. "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?" This is a question that ought to cut us to the very soul, and open every spring of sensibility and self-abhorrence! While we were in open rebellion against him, was he wanting in *forbearance*? When he saw us in our impoverished and ruined condition, and gave his own Son to die for us, did he act an *unfeeling* part toward us? Was it hard on our side that Christ should be "made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him?" Since we have been engaged in his service, has he been a *hard master*? Has his yoke been galling to us? Did he ever prove to us a barren wilderness, or a land of drought? Was ever the path of obedience a barren path? Is it better with us now than formerly? Has he been a *churlish father* to us? Did he ever refuse us free access to him in a time of need? When we have asked for bread, did he ever give us a stone? When he has smitten us, was it not always with a mixture of mercy, and all to do us good in the latter end? Whenever we have returned to him with our whole heart, has he not been always ready to receive us, and to bury all in forgetfulness?—Methinks I hear him appeal to the very *rocks* and *mountains* (as being less insensible than we) for the equity and goodness of his cause: "Hear, O ye mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel: O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me!" Alas, what shall we say unto the Lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us belongeth confusion of face, as it is this day!"

Thirdly, Sins after conversion are attended with circumstances of peculiar and horrible *ingratitude*.—This was a part of God's charge against Israel. He had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, had led them through the wilderness, through a *dangerous, barren, and lonesome* wilderness; "a land of deserts and of pits; a land of drought, and of the shadow of death; a land where no man passed through, and where no man dwelt." He had brought them also into a plentiful country; but they had polluted it, and even made his heritage an abomination. It is true, God has not done the self-same things for us as he did for them: he has not given Egypt for us, nor Ethiopia for our ransom; but he has given what is of infinitely greater account—his own blood! Neither has he redeemed us from Egyptian thralldom; but he has "delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." We never were supported by miracle, in the dangerous, barren, and lonesome deserts of Arabia; but we have been led and supplied by a kind hand, both in a way of providence and grace, through a wilderness equally lonesome and barren, and much more dangerous. We never were possessed of the land of Canaan, that plentiful country, that rest for the weary Israelites; but we were born in a country but little inferior to it, even as to the enjoyments of this life; and the *rest* of gospel privileges into which we are entered, with a glorious inheritance into which we hope to enter, abundantly transcend every thing of that sort, and lay us under far greater obligations. If we have any thing ingenuous left in us, surely a spirit and conduct that has slighted and dishonoured a God of such love as this, must, on reflection, deeply wound us.

Fourthly, Such departures from God are expressive of the most extreme

and singular *folly*. The Lord charged Israel with folly; and such it doubtless was. We should think so of any people who, in want of water, should remove their tents from an overflowing fountain, and promise themselves a greater fulness by settling in a desert, and hewing out cisterns which, after all, could hold no water. And yet this is no more than we have done, as well as Israel. We have sought happiness in the creature, to the neglect of God; and all created comforts, when possessed in that way, are but broken cisterns. We have found them so: let us be ashamed of our folly, and return to the Fountain of living waters.

Departing from God, and indulging ourselves in sinning against him, is a kind of exchange, but it is a foolish one; it is an exchange of liberty for drudgery and slavery, of peace of conscience for bitter remorse, of joyfulness and gladness of heart for sorrow and anguish, and of abundance of all things for hunger, thirst, nakedness, and want of all things. It is a being weary of the government of the Prince of peace, whose yoke is easy, and whose burden is light, and a putting our necks under the iron yoke of a tyrant, which tends to our destruction.

Israel was not only charged with folly, but with *singular* folly. "Pass over the isles of Chittim, saith the Lord, and see, and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit!" There are some foolish people in the world who never know when they are well, but will always be changing and exchanging, though they always continue to lose by it. To be compared to these were enough to shame us; but this is not the worst. Notwithstanding the fickleness of the human mind in lesser matters, they seem in general, each nation, to be firm to their gods, even though they were no gods; so firm, I suppose, that if they could have exchanged wood for silver, or stone for gold, they would not have complied. But Israel, the only people upon the earth who had a God worth cleaving to, Israel must be the only people who desire to change! Well may it be added, "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be ye horribly afraid!" Shall the people of the only true God, and only they, prove untrue?

But, alas! we wonder at the sottish stupidity of Israel, and forget that in them we see our own picture. Extreme and singular as their folly might be, in their idolatries, it was not more so than is ours, when we feel reluctant to draw near to God in close communion, and fly for happiness to sensual and carnal gratification.

As one great cause of our departures from God has been supposed to be a neglect of the word of God, it will ill become me, in writing on the means of returning to him, to forget to make use of that unerring guide. Hence it is that I have endeavoured, as much as possible, to introduce some particular part or parts of the word of God, as the ground of what has been advanced on every subject.

There is much advice given in Scripture respecting the return of backsliders, both as individuals, and as collective bodies. But that which I shall here notice is the counsel of Christ to the church of Ephesus, who had fallen under rebuke for having left their first love. "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent; and do the first works."

The first thing observable in this piece of sacred counsel is, that we *remember from whence we are fallen*. This might have a tendency to convince us of our sad defects, if it were to compare our spirit with that of the *primitive Christians* and consider the difference. They are frequently de-

scribed as "little children," denoting, no doubt, their littleness in their own eyes, their love one to another, their readiness to forgive injuries, their modesty, and above all their godly simplicity. Like little children, they were unacquainted with the arts of dissimulation and intrigue. "Laying aside all malice, and guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, as new-born babes they desired and fed upon the sincere milk of the word, and grew thereby." Is there nothing in this picture of a primitive Christian that makes us blush? Sure I am it ought, whether it does or not. In them surely we must see and "remember from whence we are fallen."

Another picture of primitive Christianity is given us in Acts ii. 42, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers." From this account we may learn, 1. That primitive Christians looked upon *soundness in the faith* as of great importance. They were strangers to that spirit of indifference to truth which loves to represent its doctrines as mere matters of speculation, and insinuates that "*it matters not what a man believes, if his practice be but good.*" They would have trembled at the thought of deviating from that gospel which had been made the power of God to their salvation. 2. That the fellowship which they maintained with one another arose out of *a union of sentiments in apostolical doctrines*. They were full of charity; but their charity was not of that kind which led them to have fellowship with men of all principles. They loved the souls of men too well to deceive them by countenancing what they believed to be pernicious and destructive errors. 3. They exercised a religious regard to the *positive institutions* of Christ, as well as to the doctrine of salvation through his name. They not only listened to his instructions as their Prophet, and relied upon his atonement as their Priest, but cheerfully complied with his institutions as their King. 4. They were men that dwelt much with God in *prayer*. Having obtained mercy themselves, they joined in supplicating the Divine throne for the salvation of others. Nor did they confine their devotions to the church, but carried them into their families and their closets. Let this lovely picture of primitive Christianity be closely reviewed; and let us, by this means, "remember from whence we are fallen, and repent."

Further, it might be of no use to compare our spirit and conduct with that which prevailed at *the Reformation*. It may be difficult to ascertain with precision the difference between that age and the present. But there are two things which I think may be pointed out, which are self-evident. 1. The *principles* they imbibed and preached were very different from what at this time generally prevail. The doctrines which the generality of the Reformers held were such as follow: a trinity of Persons in the Godhead; the Deity and atonement of Christ; justification by faith; predestination; efficacious grace; the certain perseverance of the saints, &c. These doctrines they preached, and looked upon them as consistent with a free and unreserved address to unconverted sinners. How far the body of the reformed churches are gone off from them, I need not say. It is true, the Reformers imbibing these or any other sentiments is no proof of their being Divine; but there is one thing that deserves notice, viz. their *moral tendency*. Have the reformed churches, in proportion as they have forsaken the doctrines of the Reformers, forsaken also that purity, zeal, and ardour, that uprightness before men, and close walking with God, for which they were distinguished? 2. Their *attachment* to what they accounted Divine truth was very different from ours. To maintain the doctrines and ordinances of Christ, in their primitive simplicity, they hazarded the loss of all things; and great numbers of them actually resigned their lives rather than give them up. It was to enjoy these that they threw off the yoke of popery, and claimed

the right of private judgment. We also claim this right, and so far we do well; yea, herein we exceed them, particularly in allowing to others that right which we claim for ourselves. But though we understand religious liberty better than they did, yet it is too evident we make a much *worse use* of it. Instead of using it as a *means* for obtaining truth, great numbers among us rest in it as an *end*. Religious liberty, however equitable and valuable it is in itself, is certainly of no further use *to us* than as it is applied to the discovery of truth, and the practice of righteousness. But the spirit of the present age is to boast of the liberty of thinking for ourselves, till we lose all attachment to religious principles, except an overweening one towards our own conceits, be they right or wrong; and this is the same thing as to boast of a means till we have lost the only good end to be answered by it. The temper of the present age, so far as I have had opportunity to observe it, is loudly to cry up the right of judging for themselves, which undoubtedly all men ought to have; but then they very unjustly infer from this that it matters not what they believe, if they are but sincere in it; that is, if a man's thoughts are but his own, it matters not whether they be right or wrong! Another false inference which they draw is, that because they have a right to think for themselves, without being called to account for it by their fellow creatures, therefore they have the same right in regard to the Governor of the world. The indifference of truth and error being thus admitted, the mind becomes susceptible of any thing that offers; and thus the great truths of revelation are slighted, perhaps, if for no other reason, because they occupied a place in the creeds of their forefathers. A comparison of times, on these subjects, may assist us in *remembering from whence we are fallen*.

Once more, It would be profitable to recollect *the best parts of our lives, and compare them with what we now are*. Think, backsliding Christian, what an effect those sacred truths have had upon your heart, which since, it may be, you have held with a loose hand, and have been almost inclined to abandon: think what delight you have taken in those ways which you have since neglected; what abhorrence you have felt against those sins in which you have since thought there was no great harm, and so have yielded to them: how you have been grieved when you have seen other Christians degenerate into carnality, sloth, pride, or worldly-mindedness: think—ah! where shall I stop? Do not forget to ask your soul at the close of every thought, *Is it better with me now than then?* We are not only counselled to “remember from whence we are fallen,” but also called on to “repent.”

Repentance is a godly *sorrow* for sin; and if ever there be any true revival of religion, it must originate in this. When Judah returned to the Lord, after their captivity, it was with bitter weeping: “Going and weeping, they sought the Lord their God.” There can be no well-grounded peace or joy restored to our mind while the idols of our hearts remain unlamented. God insists upon these being given up; and that, not in a way of secret reluctance, but with holy abhorrence. Nor are we called upon to lament merely on account of positive acts of sin, but even for our sins of *omission*—because we have “forsaken our first love.”

Some professing Christians seem to have no notion of any obligation that they are under to love Christ and Divine things. It is the work of God, say they, to affect our hearts, and enable us to love Christ; we cannot command the influence of the Spirit, nor keep our own souls alive. This is very true, but not in the sense in which they plead it. The hearts of men, even of the best of men, are so very bad that unless a kind of perpetual miracle be wrought in them their love will be sure to expire. To preserve alive a spark in the midst of an ocean would not be so great a wonder as preserving the love of Christ in our hearts. But if nothing be obligatory on us but what

we *can do of ourselves*, or, in other words, what we, in this our corrupted state, *can find in our own hearts to do*, it must follow that we are not obliged to do any good thing whatever; for "without Christ we can do nothing;" and so it must follow that we have no cause for self-reflection for the contrary, but have a good right to make ourselves easy, and to be contented with that degree of love and holiness which we have, seeing it is such a measure as God pleases to bestow upon us. But, in this case, there could be no propriety in the church at Ephesus being rebuked for having left their first love, or called upon to repent for it. Repentance, if genuine, will lead us to the other part of Christ's advice; namely, "Do the first works." The first works are the works of the best ages of the church, and the best times in our life. If there be any considerable revival in the church, or in the souls of individuals, it will be when the diligence, disinterestedness, tenderness of conscience, generosity, and faithfulness of those times are imitated.

IN the last paper I attempted to point out some of the means of returning to God, founded on the advice given to the church at Ephesus; in this I shall make a few observations upon the address to the church at Laodicea; whose character, I am afraid, bears but too near a resemblance to that of the present age. The address of Christ to that *lukewarm* and *self-sufficient* people is as follows: "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear: and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

Laodicea seems to have been a place of trade. Trade usually produces riches; and riches, pride, indifference in divine things, and spiritual wretchedness. There were *three* things of which these people had very wrong notions; namely, *riches*, *beauty*, and *discernment*. They thought an increase of goods made them *rich*; that the splendid figure which on that account they cut among the churches made them *beautiful*; and that their philosophical knowledge, it is probable, made them *wise*. But they had been for each of these commodities, if I may so speak, to a wrong market; namely, to the world. If they would possess either, they are told to deal with Christ for it. The counsel of Christ is as if he had said, Trade with me. Part with all your own frippery for spiritual things, and learn to derive these from me. They are articles with which none else can supply you. Count my grace your *riches*, and part with your dross for it; my righteousness your *ornament*, and part with your own for it; and my word and Spirit that which is able to make you *wise* unto salvation, and come to me as fools in your own eyes.

Britain, like Laodicea, is a place of trade; trade has produced riches; and riches, pride, indifference, and spiritual wretchedness. If there is any people therefore in the world to whom the counsel to Laodicea is applicable, rather than to others, it seems to be the churches of Britain. What is addressed to them, therefore, I shall understand as if it were immediately addressed to us.

The principal thing contained in this counsel is that we **DEAL WITH CHRIST**; and this is the subject with which I shall close this paper. As Christ is the only way to which we are to point lost sinners to repair for salvation, so he is the only way in which we can make any progress in real religion. "As ye have received Christ Jesus," says the apostle, "so walk

ye in him." Neither is there any other way of returning to God, when we have backslidden from him. To return home to God is to return to a close walk with him, to a serving him "acceptably, and with godly fear;" and, to this end, we must "have grace;" but there is no way of obtaining grace but by dealing with Christ. "It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;" and it is "out of his fulness that we all must receive, and grace for grace."

Christ is a believer's *life*; the bread of life, the water of life, the tree of life, the vine that communicates life to the branches. Each of these metaphors implies that we cannot live at all spiritually without union to him; so neither can we be lively and fruitful, without close communion with him. If we be strengthened "with might in the inner man," it must be by Christ's "dwelling in our hearts by faith," or, in other words, by his having place in our thoughts, desires, and best affections.

Those three things concerning which the church at Laodicea was counselled—namely, spiritual *riches*, spiritual *beauty*, and spiritual *discernment*, can neither of them be obtained but by dealing with Christ. It is not enough for us to be once interested in pardoning and justifying grace; if we would be *rich* in the sight of God, we must be dealing with Christ as guilty, self-condemned sinners for forgiveness and acceptance. It is not enough that we reckon upon going to heaven when we die; our conversation must be there even now; there must be a correspondence kept up between Christ and our souls, or we shall be *poor* and *miserable* indeed! Nor is it enough that we confess our sanctification, or spiritual *beauty*, to come from him; there must be a daily dealing with Christ for the mortification of sin, and for the increase of grace and peace. Our garments are not to be "made white," or beautiful, but by being "washed in the blood of the Lamb." There are very few, if any, of us who are sufficiently sensible of our entire dependence upon Christ for sanctification. But whatever methods we may take to promote it short of dealing with him, they will not do. We may become beautiful in our own eyes, like Laodicea; but shall be miserable and naked in the sight of God.

What is the reason of the multitude of contradictory sentiments at this day, even upon the great doctrines of the gospel, which are written in the Scriptures so plain that "he that runs may read" them? Is it not for want of dealing with Christ for wisdom? We may think, and reason, and dispute all our lifetime; but unless we become fools in our own eyes, and rely upon the *word* and *Spirit* of God for instruction, we shall be wretchedly blind to the real glory of the gospel. Spiritual things must be "spiritually discerned." Without this eye-salve, whatever be our conceit of ourselves, we shall not be wise. It is by an unction from the Holy One that we know all things, and without that unction we "know nothing as we ought to know it." We are not to abandon either thinking, reasoning, or on all occasions even disputing; but to take heed that they be so exercised as not to interrupt, but promote, our correspondence with Christ.

There are certain *sentiments* and *feelings* which are necessary and encouraging in our returning to God; such as a deep sense of the evil nature of sin, godly sorrow for it, and a hope of forgiveness on our return; each of which is produced and promoted by a dealing with Christ.

Where can we learn the evil of sin so as it is to be seen in the death of Christ? True, it is to be seen in the glass of the law, and in the moral character of God: but it never was seen, nor can be seen, in so odious a light as that in which it appears on Calvary. And here indeed it is that we not only see the evil of sin, but view the law and moral character of God in all their glory. What an idea must it afford us of God's displeasure against

sin to see him pouring out his wrath upon his dear and only begotten Son, exposing him whom he loved more than all the creation together to ignominy and death, rather than suffer it to go unpunished! Christian, the more thou art acquainted with Christ, the more bitter, unnatural, disingenuous, and shameful will thy sin appear to thee.

What will open the springs of godly sorrow for sin like an intimate and close dealing with Christ? If any thing will dissolve the hardness of our hearts, it is the consideration of his dying love. If we are brought to "mourn as one that mourneth for an only son, and to be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born," it is "looking upon him whom we have pierced." Come, backsliding Christian, come but to the Saviour's feet, and thou shalt soon be able to wash them with thy tears.

Finally, What can afford us any *hope* and *encouragement* to return to God, but the name of Christ? It is in him alone that we can obtain forgiveness. He is the Advocate with the Father, to whom they that have sinned are encouraged to look for relief. It was his blood in which David prayed to be washed from his uncleanness and blood-guiltiness. Under all our guilt, darkness, and confusion let us not despair. We have an "Intercessor for transgressors before the throne; a faithful and merciful High Priest, who was tempted in all points like unto us, yet without sin; and in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Let us consider how he interceded for those that were "in the world." "I am no more in the world, but these are in the world: holy Father, keep them!" Think of the Lord's having "laid upon him the iniquity of us all;" even of such as "like sheep have gone astray, and turned every one to his own way"—of his being "able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him," seeing he "*ever liveth* to make intercession for us." Think how he expostulates with us, invites us to return in the most melting language, and stands with open arms to receive us: "Oh that there were such a heart in them! that they would love me and fear me, and keep all my commandments always!—Oh that my people had hearkened to my voice! then had their peace been as a river, and their righteousness as the waves of the sea!—Set thee up way-marks, make thee high heaps; set thine heart toward the highway, even the way that thou wentest.—Return, O thou backsliding children, for I am married unto you, saith the Lord.—Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.—I will heal your backslidings; I will love you freely. I will be as the dew unto Israel; and he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.—Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?—I am like a green fir tree: from me is thy fruit found."

If this, or any of the foregoing papers, should be the means of reclaiming any from the error of their ways, either mental or practical—if they should tend to excite either myself or others to a closer walk with God, I shall enjoy the satisfaction of not having written in vain.

THE BACKSLIDER:

OR AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE, SYMPTOMS, AND EFFECTS OF RELIGIOUS DECLENSION, WITH THE MEANS OF RECOVERY.*

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding: and lo! it was all grown over with thorns; nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction."—SOLOMON.

WHETHER the present age be worse than others which have preceded it, I shall not determine; but this is manifest, that it abounds not only in infidelity and profligacy, but with great numbers of loose characters among professing Christians. It is true, there are some eminently zealous and spiritual, perhaps as much so as at almost any former period: the disinterested concern which has appeared for the diffusion of evangelical religion is doubtless a hopeful feature of our times; yet it is no less evident that others are in a sad degree conformed to this world, instead of being transformed by the renewing of their minds. Even of those who retain a decency of character, many are sunk into a Laodicean lukewarmness. Professors are continually falling away from Christ: either totally, so as to walk no more with him; or partially, so as greatly to dishonour his name. Alas, how many characters of this description are to be found in our congregations! If we only review the progress of things for twenty or thirty years past, we shall perceive many who once bid fair for the kingdom of heaven now fallen a prey to the temptations of the world. Like the blossoms in the spring, they for a time excited our hopes; but a blight has succeeded: the blossom "has gone up as the dust," and the "root" in many cases appears to be "rottenness."

It is one important branch of the work of a faithful pastor to strengthen the diseased, to heal the sick, to bind up the broken, to bring again that which is driven away, and to seek that which is lost, Ezek. xxxiv. 4. If these pages should fall into the hands of but a few of the above description, and contribute in any degree to their recovery from the snare of the devil, the writer will be amply rewarded. It is a pleasure to recover any sinner from the error of his way; but much more those of whom we once thought favourably. The place which they formerly occupied in our esteem, our hopes, and our social exercises, now seems to be a kind of chasm, which can be filled up only by the return of the party. If a child depart from his father's house, and plunge into profligacy and ruin, the father may have other children, and may love them; but none of them can heal his wound, nor can any thing satisfy him, but the return of "him that was lost."

In pursuit of this desirable object, I shall describe the nature and different species of backsliding from God—notice the symptoms of it—trace its injurious and dangerous effects—and point out the means of recovery.

ON THE GENERAL NATURE AND DIFFERENT SPECIES OF BACKSLIDING.

ALL backsliding from God originates in a departure of heart from him: herein consists the essence and the evil of it. "Thine own wickedness

* This treatise was occasioned by the writer's observing several persons, of whom he had formerly entertained a favourable opinion, and with whom he had walked in Christian fellowship, having fallen, either from the doctrine or practice of pure religion. A view of their unhappy condition made a deep impression upon his mind. If he has been enabled to describe the case of a backslider to any good purpose, it has been chiefly owing to this circumstance. He hopes that, though it was written with a special eye to a few, it may yet be useful to many.

shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: Know, therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that *thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God*, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts." But the degrees of this sin, and the modes in which it operates, are various.

The backsliding of some is *total*. After having made a profession of the true religion, they apostatize from it. I am aware it is common to consider a backslider as being a good man, though in a bad state of mind; but the Scriptures do not confine the term to this application. Those who are addressed in the passage just quoted had not the fear of God in them, which can never be said of a good man. Backsliding, it is true, always supposes a *profession* of the true religion; but it does not necessarily suppose the existence of the thing professed. There is a "*perpetual backsliding*," and a "*drawing back unto perdition*," Jer. viii. 5; Heb. x. 39. Such characters were Saul, and Abithophel, and Judas. Many persons have in a great degree declined the practice of religion who yet comfort themselves with an idea that they shall be brought to repentance before they die; but this is presumptuously tempting God. Whosoever plunges into this gulf, or continues easy in it, under an idea of being recovered by repentance, may find himself mistaken. Both Peter and Judas went in; but only one of them came out! There is reason to fear that thousands of professors are now lifting up their eyes in torment, who in this world reckoned themselves good men, who considered their sins as pardonable errors, and laid their accounts with being brought to repentance; but, ere they were aware, the Bridegroom came, and they were not ready to meet him!

The nature and deadly tendency of sin is the same in itself, whether in a wicked or in a righteous man; there is an important difference, however, between the backsliding of the one and that of the other. That of the hypocrite arises from his "having no root in himself;" therefore it is that in the time of temptation he falleth away: but that of the sincere Christian respects the culture of the branch, and is owing to unwatchfulness, or remissness in duty. The former, in turning back, returns to a course which his heart always preferred; the latter, though in what he does he is not absolutely involuntary, for then it were innocent; yet it is not with a full or perfect consent of his will. He does not sin *wilfully*; that which he does *he allows not*; it is against the *habitual disposition* of his soul; he is not himself, as we should say, while so acting.* Finally, The one, were it not for the remorse of conscience which may continue to haunt him and disturb his peace, would be in his element in having made a full riddance of religion; but this is not the case with the other. A life of deviation and distance from God is not his element, nor can he enjoy himself in it. This difference is remarkably exemplified in the cases of Saul and David. The religion of the former never appears to have fitted him; he was continually acting awkwardly with it, and presently threw it aside. If, in addition to this, he could have forgotten it, and lived without being terrified by the apprehension of consequences, he would doubtless have been much the happier for having cast it off. But when the latter had sinned, he was not like the raven which went forth of the ark, and came no more; but like the dove which could find no rest for the sole of her foot till she returned. The thirty-second and thirty-eighth Psalms express the wretchedness of his mind till he confessed his sin and obtained mercy.

* It is usual to denominate a character by his habitual or ruling disposition, and not by occasional deviations from it. Thus when we hear of him who was famed for *meekness* speaking *unadvisedly* with his lips, we say, This was not Moses: or of him who was distinguished by his courageous avowal of his Lord denying with oaths that he knew him, we say, This was not Peter. Both these great characters, in these instances, acted *beside themselves*. It was not *they*, as it were, but sin that dwelt in them. See Heb. x. 26; Rom. vii. 15-25.

But whatever difference there be between a partial and a total departure from God, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the party himself, at the time, to perceive it. So long as any man continues in a backsliding state, the reality of his religion must remain uncertain. He may not be without hope, nor ought he to be without fear. The Scriptures know nothing of that kind of confidence which renders men easy in their sins. Paul stood in *doubt* of the Galatians, and they ought to have stood in doubt of themselves. The species of backsliding are various; some respect doctrine, others practice; but all are the operations of a heart departing from the living God.¹

In some, a backsliding spirit first appears *by a relinquishment of evangelical doctrine*. Where truth is treated merely as a matter of speculation, or as an opinion of no great moment, it is not *held fast*; and where this is the case, it is easily surrendered. If a plausible book in favour of deism, or any of those vain systems which nearly approach it, fall in their way, they are ready to yield; and by reading the performance a second time, or conversing with a person who favours it, they make shipwreck of their faith, and are driven on the rocks of infidelity. Such was the process in the days of the apostles; those who "received not the love of the truth" were given up to "believe a lie," 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11.

If these departures from evangelical principles were closely examined, it would be found that they were preceded by a neglect of private prayer, watchfulness, self-diffidence, and walking humbly with God; and every one may perceive that they are followed with similar effects. It has been acknowledged, by some who have embraced the Socinian system, that since they entertained those views they had lost even the gift of prayer. Perhaps they might draw up and read *an address to the Deity*; but they could not pray. Where the principles of the gospel are abandoned, the spirit of prayer, and of all close walking with God, will go with it. The confession of Peter that Jesus "was the Christ, the Son of God," is thought to be that which our Lord denominates the *rock* on which he would build his church. We are sure that the belief of this article of faith was required as a kind of test of Christianity; and who can look into the Christian world with attention, and not perceive that it still continues a sort of key-stone to the building? If this give way, the fabric falls. Backslidings of this nature are infinitely dangerous. He that declines in holy practice has to labour against the remonstrances of conscience; but he that brings himself to think lightly of sin and meanly of the Saviour (which is what every false system of religion teaches) has gone far towards silencing the accusations of this unpleasant monitor. He is upon good terms with himself. The disorder of his soul is deep; but it is of a flattering nature. The declension of serious religion in him is no less apparent to *others* than that of the constitution by a consuming hectic; yet, as is common in such cases, the party himself thinks he shall do well. In short, "the light which is in him is darkness;" and this is the greatest of all darkness!

In others, a departure of heart from God is followed by *falling into some gross immorality*.—There are instances in which a sudden misconduct of this sort has been overruled for the awakening of the mind from its stupor, and divesting it of its self-confidence. It was manifestly thus with the apostle Peter. The stumbling of such persons is not that they should fall; but rather that they should stand with greater care and firmness. But the greatest danger arises from those cases where some lust of the flesh has gradually obtained an ascendancy over the heart; so that when the subject of it falls, in the eyes of the world, it is only appearing to be what he has long been in secret; and the first wrong step that he makes, instead of alarming him, and occasioning his going aside to weep bitterly, is only the prelude to a succession

of others. This is not the fall of one who is "overtaken in a fault;" but of one who is entangled in the net of his own corruptions. One sin prepares the way for another. Like the insect infolded in the spider's web, he loses all power of resistance, and falls a prey to the destroyer. Some have fallen sacrifices to intemperance, not by being overtaken in a single act of intoxication, but by contracting a habit of hard drinking. First it was indulged in private, perhaps under some outward trouble, instead of carrying it to a throne of grace. In a little time its demands increased. At length it could no longer be kept a secret; reason was enslaved to sense, and the Christian professor sunk below the man! Others have indulged in impurity. Intimacies which may have arisen from nothing worse than a few improper familiarities—yea, which in some instances have originated in religion itself, have been known, through the corrupt propensities of the human heart, which turns every thing it touches into poison, to produce the most fatal effects. Passions of this sort once kindled will soon possess all the soul. They leave no room for any thing that should resist them; not only consuming every spiritual desire and holy thought, but banishing from the mind even the sober dictates of reason, reducing the most exalted characters to the rank of *fools in Israel*. Near these rocks are seen many a floating wreck; and among these quicksands numbers who once bade fair for the haven of everlasting life.

Another way in which a departure from God very often operates is by *the love of the world*.—It is not uncommon for persons who once appeared to be zealous, affectionate, and devoted to God, when they come to be settled in life, and to enter into its necessary avocations, to lose all heart for religion, and take no delight in any thing but saving money. This, it is true, is not generally considered by the world as disreputable; on the contrary, provided we be fair in our dealings, it is reckoned a mark of wisdom. "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." Such a one, say they, is a discreet man, and one that knows how to secure the *main chance*. Yet the Scriptures are very decisive against such characters. This is the sin which they denominate "the lust of the eye." The cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, are described as *choking the word*, and rendering it unfruitful. It is worthy of special notice, that when our Lord had warned his followers "to take heed and beware of covetousness," the example which he gives of this sin is not of one that was a plunderer of other men's property, an unfair dealer, or an oppressor of the poor; but of a "certain rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully;" and whose only object appeared to be, first, to acquire a handsome fortune, and then to retire from business and live at his ease. This also appears to be the character which is *blessed* by wicked men, but *abhorred of God*, Psal. x. 3. A man who deals unfairly with men gains not their blessing, but their curse. Men in general regard only themselves; so long, therefore, as any person deals justly with them, they care not what his conduct is towards God. But it is affecting to think that the very character which they bless and envy, God abhors. The decision of Heaven is nothing less than this, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." So far is the love of this world from being the less dangerous on account of its falling so little under human censure, that it is the more so. If we be guilty of any thing which exposes us to the reproach of mankind, such reproach may assist the remonstrances of conscience, and of God, in carrying conviction to our bosoms; but of that for which the world acquits us we shall be exceedingly disposed to acquit ourselves.

It has long appeared to me that this species of covetousness will, in all probability, prove the eternal overthrow of more characters among profess

ing people than almost any other sin; and this because it is almost the only sin which may be indulged, and a profession of religion at the same time supported. If a man be a drunkard, a fornicator, an adulterer, or a liar—if he rob his neighbour, oppress the poor, or deal unjustly—he must give up his pretensions to religion; or, if not, his religious connexions, if they are worthy of being so denominated, will give him up: but he may “love the world, and the things of the world,” and at the same time retain his character. If the depravity of the human heart be not subdued by the grace of God, it will operate. If a dam be placed across some of its ordinary channels, it will flow with greater depth and rapidity in those which remain. It is thus, perhaps, that avarice is most prevalent in old age, when the power of pursuing other vices has in a great measure subsided. And thus it is with religious professors whose hearts are not right with God. They cannot figure away with the profane, nor indulge in gross immoralities; but they can love the world supremely, to the neglect of God, and be scarcely amenable to human judgment.

And whatever may prove the overthrow of a mere professor may be a temptation to a good man, and greatly injure his soul. Of this the case of Lot, when he parted with Abraham, furnishes an affecting example. When a situation was put to his choice, “he lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where;” and he took up his residence in Sodom. He had better have dwelt in a wilderness than among that debauched people; but he consulted worldly advantages, and the spiritual well-being of his family was overlooked. And what was the consequence? It is true, he was a righteous man, and his righteous soul was grieved with the filthy conversation of the wicked from day to day: but he could have very little influence over them; while they, on the contrary, found means of communicating their odious vices to his family. Some of his daughters appear to have been married while in Sodom; and when the city was to be destroyed, neither they nor their husbands could be persuaded to make their escape, and so probably perished in the overthrow. The heart of his wife was so attached, it seems, to what she had left behind, that she must needs *look back*; for which she was rendered a monument of Divine displeasure. And as to his two single daughters, though they escaped with him to the mountain, yet they had learnt so much of the ways of Sodom as to cover his old age with infamy. This, together with the loss of all his substance, was the fruit of the “well-watered plain,” which he had fixed his eyes upon, to the neglect of his spiritual interest. Yet how frequently is the same part acted over again! In the choice of settlements for ourselves, or our children, how common is it to overlook the immorality of the place, the irreligiousness of the connexions, or the want of a gospel ministry; and to direct our inquiries only to temporal advantages! From the same principle also, many have dealt largely in speculation, and plunged into engagements far beyond their circumstances. The hope of making a fortune, as it is termed, by some lucky hit, draws them into measures which ruin, not only themselves, but many who confide in them. That mere worldly men should act in this manner is not a matter of surprise; but that men professing to fear God should imitate them . . . “this is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.”

Further, Many have fallen sacrifices not only to the love of the world, but to a *conformity to it*.—These are not the same thing, though frequently found in the same person. The object of the one is principally the acquisition of wealth; the other respects the manner of spending it. That is often penurious; this wishes to cut a figure, and appear like people of fashion. The former is “the lust of the eye;” the latter is “the pride of

life." We need not affect singularity in things indifferent; but to engage in the chase of fashionable appearance is not only an indication of a vain and little mind, but is certainly inconsistent with pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. The desire of making an appearance has ruined many people in their circumstances, more in their characters, and most of all in their souls. We may flatter ourselves that we can pursue these things, and be religious at the same time; but it is a mistake. The vanity of mind which they cherish eats up every thing of a humble, serious, and holy nature; rendering us an easy prey to temptation, when solicited to do as others do in an evil thing. A Christian's rule is the revealed will of God; and, where the customs of the world run counter to this, it is his business to withstand them, even though in so doing he may have to withstand a multitude, yea, and a multitude of people of fashion: but if we feel ambitious of their applause, we shall not be able to endure the scorn which a singularity of conduct will draw upon us. Thus we shall be carried down the stream by the course of this world; and shall either fall into the gulf of perdition, or, if any good thing should be found in us towards the Lord God of Israel, it will be almost indiscernible and useless. In short, such characters are certainly in a backsliding state, whether they be ever recovered from it or not. The case of the Laodiceans seems to approach the nearest to theirs of any thing which in Scripture occurs to me. They were "neither cold nor hot;" neither the decided friends of Christ, nor his avowed enemies: they could not relinquish the world in favour of religion, yet neither could they let religion alone. They were vainly puffed up with a notion of their wealth, their wisdom, and their finery; saying, "I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing:" but, in the account of the faithful and true witness, they were "poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked." Such a decision ought to make us tremble at the thought of aspiring to imitate people of fashion.

Finally, There is another species of departure from God which it becomes me to notice, as many in the present age have fallen sacrifices to it. This is, *taking an eager and deep interest in political disputes.*—The state of things in the world has of late been such as to attract the attention, and employ the conversation, of all classes of people. As success has attended each of the contending parties, the minds of men, according to their views and attachments, have been affected; some with fear and dismay, lest their party interests should be ruined; others, with the most sanguine hopes, as if the world were shortly to be emancipated, war abolished, and all degrees of men rendered happy. This is one of those strong winds of temptation that occasionally arise in the troubled ocean of this world, against which those who are bound to a better had need to be on their guard. The flattering objects held out by revolutions were so congenial with the wishes of humanity, and their pretences to disinterested philanthropy so fair, that many religious people, for a time, forgot their own principles. While gazing on the splendid spectacle, it did not occur to them that *the wicked*, whatever name they assumed, *would do wickedly*. By observing the progress of things, however, they have been convinced that all hopes of the state of mankind being essentially meliorated by any means short of the prevalence of the gospel are visionary, and have accordingly turned their attention to better things. But some have gone greater lengths. Their whole heart has been engaged in this pursuit. It has been their meat and their drink: and, this being the case, it is not surprising that they have become indifferent to religion; for these things cannot consist with each other. It is not only contrary to the whole tenor of the New Testament, but tends in its own nature to eat up true religion. If any worldly matter, however lawful in itself, engage our

attention inordinately, it becomes a snare; and more so in matters that do not come within the line of our immediate duty. But if, in attending to it, we are obliged to neglect what manifestly *is* our duty, and to overleap the boundaries of God's holy word, let us look to it: beyond those boundaries is a pit, in which there is reason to fear great numbers have been lost. There were many, in the early ages of Christianity, who "despised government," were "not afraid to speak evil of dignities:" but were they good men? Far from it. They were professors of Christianity, however; for they are said to have "escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of Christ;" yea, and what is more, they had attained the character of Christian *teachers*. But of what description? "False teachers, who privily brought in damnable heresies, denying the Lord who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction"—whose *ways*, though *followed by* many, were *pernicious*, occasioning "the way of truth to be evil spoken of." To copy the examples of such men is no light matter.

When a man's thoughts and affections are filled with such things as these, the Scriptures become a kind of *dead letter*, while the speeches and writings of politicians are the *lively oracles*: spiritual conversation is unheard, or, if introduced by others, considered as a flat and uninteresting topic; and leisure hours, whether sitting in the house or walking by the way, instead of being employed in talking and meditating on Divine subjects, are engrossed by things which do not profit. Such are the rocks among which many have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

Whatever may be the duty of a nation in extraordinary cases, there is scarcely any thing in all the New Testament inculcated with more solemnity than that individuals, and especially Christians, should be obedient, peaceable, and loyal subjects; nor is there any sin much more awfully censured than the contrary conduct. It requires not only that we keep within the compass of the laws, (which is easily done by men of the most unprincipled minds,) but that we honour and *intercede with God* for those who administer them. These duties were pressed particularly upon the Romans, who, by their situation, were more exposed than others to the temptation of joining in factions and conspiracies, which were almost continually at work in that tumultuous city.

Nor does the danger belong exclusively to one side. We may sin by an *adherence* to the measures of a government, as well as by an opposition to them. If we enlist under the banners of the party in power, *considered as a party*, we shall be disposed to vindicate or palliate all their proceedings, which may be very inconsistent with Christianity. Paul, though he enjoined obedience to the existing government, yet was never an advocate for Roman ambition; and, when addressing himself to a governor, did not fail to "reason on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." It is our duty, no doubt, to consider that many things which seem evil to us might appear otherwise, if all the circumstances of the case were known; and therefore to forbear passing hasty censures: but, on the other hand, we ought to beware of applauding every thing that is done, lest, if it be evil, we be partakers of other men's sins, and contribute to their being repeated.

While some, burning with revolutionary zeal, have imagined they could discover all the wonderful events of the present day in Scripture prophecy, and have been 'nearly blinded to the criminality of the principal agents; others, by a contrary prejudice, have disregarded the works of the Lord, and the operations of his hand. Whatever may be said of means and instruments, we must be strangely insensible not to see the hand of God in the late overturnings among the papal powers; and if we be induced by political attachment, instead of joining the inhabitants of heaven in a song of praise, to

unite with the *merchants of the earth* in their lamentations, are we not carnal? There is no need of vindicating or palliating the measures of men, which may be wicked in the extreme; but neither ought we to overlook the hand of God.

The great point with Christians should be, an attachment to government *as government*, irrespective of the party which administers it; for this is right, and would tend more than any thing to promote the kingdom of Christ. We are not called to yield up our consciences in religious matters, nor to approve of what is wrong in those which are civil; but we are not at liberty to deal in acrimony or evil speaking. The good which results to society from the very worst government upon earth is great when compared with the evils of anarchy. On this principle it is probable the apostle enjoined obedience to *the powers that were*, even during the reign of Nero. Christians are soldiers under the King of kings; their object should be to conquer all ranks and degrees of men to the obedience of faith. But, to do this, it is necessary that they avoid all those embranglements and disputes which retard their main design. If a wise man wishes to gain over a nation to any great and worthy object, he does not enter into their little differences, nor embroil himself in their party contentions; but, bearing good-will to all, seeks the general good: by these means he is respected by all, and all are ready to hear what he has to offer. Such should be the wisdom of Christians. There is enmity enough for us to encounter without unnecessarily adding to it.

If a Christian be under the necessity of siding with a party, undoubtedly he ought to act in favour of that which appears to him the best; but even in this case it is not becoming him to enter with eagerness into their disputes. Let worldly men, who thirst after preferment, busy themselves in a contested election—(they have their reward)—but let Christians, if called to appear, discharge their duty, and retire from the tumultuous scene.

By entering deeply into the *party* contentions of the nation, religious people will be charged, on both sides in their turn, with disloyalty; and, it may be, not always without a cause. Fifty years ago that party was out of power which at present is in power. At that time the charge of disloyalty was directed against them; and they were then denominated *patriots*. It is possible that many who now seem to abhor a spirit of disaffection towards administrative government, would be themselves not the best affected were the other side to recover its authority. But if we enter into the spirit of the gospel, though we may have our preferences of men and measures, we shall bear good-will to all; and, whoever be at the head of affairs, shall reverence “the powers that be.” Whatever be our private opinion of *the men*, we shall respect and honour *the rulers*. That loyalty which operates only with the prevalence of a party, whichever it be, is at a great remove from the loyalty of the Scriptures.

By standing aloof from all parties *as such*, and approving themselves the friends of government and good order, by whomsoever administered, Christians would acquire a dignity of character worthy of their profession, would be respected by all, and possess greater opportunities of doing good; while, by a contrary conduct, they render one part of the community their enemies, and the other, I fear, derive but little spiritual advantage from being their friends.

SYMPTOMS OF A BACKSLIDING SPIRIT.

It was reckoned a matter of consequence in cases of leprosy, real or supposed, that the true state of the party should be examined, and judgment given accordingly; and by how much a moral disease is more odious, con-

tagious, and dangerous, than one that is natural, by so much is it more necessary to form a true judgment concerning it. Every spot was not a leprosy; and every sinful imperfection in a Christian professor does not denominate him a backslider. Paul had to lament the *body of death*; he had not attained, nor was he already perfect; yet he *pressed forward*; and while this was the case he could not be said to draw back. On the other hand, every departure from God must not be reckoned a mere imperfection which is common to good men. We are extremely apt, in certain cases, to flatter ourselves that our spots are only the spots of God's children, or such as the best of men are subject to, and therefore to conclude that there is nothing very dangerous about them. We do not pretend to deny that we have our faults; but are ready to ask, "What have we done so much against thee?" This self-justifying spirit, however, so far from indicating any thing favourable, is a strong mark of the contrary. It is said of Ephraim, "He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich: I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin." A more finished picture of a modern oppressor could not be drawn. He studies to keep within the limits of the law, and defies any man to impeach his character: he has imperfections, but they are only such as are common to good men; there is nothing criminal to be found in him: yet he is carrying on at the time a system of iniquity.

The apostle Paul speaks of a certain state of mind which he feared he should find in the Corinthians; that of their "having sinned, and not repented of their deeds." This it is which denominates a man a backslider; and which, so long as it continues, deprives him of any scriptural foundation for concluding himself interested in forgiving mercy.—What are the particular symptoms of this state of mind is the object of our present inquiry.

If our departing from the Lord have issued in some outward misconduct, there is no need of inquiring into the proofs of it, as the thing speaks for itself; but if its operations have been at present only internal, the inquiry may be highly necessary, that we may become acquainted with our condition, and that the disease may be healed ere it finishes its operations. Further, though it may be out of all doubt that we have sinned, yet it may be a matter of uncertainty whether or not we have repented; if we imagine we have when we have not, the consequence may be of the most serious nature. Let the following observations, then, be attended to.

First, *If religious duties are attended to rather from custom or conscience than from love*, we must either never have known what true religion is, or, in a great degree, have lost the spirit of it.—It is possible that we may have been guilty of no particular outward evil, so as to have fallen under the censure of the world, or of even our nearest connexions, and yet have so far lost the spirit of religion as to be really in a backsliding state. The exercises of prayer, reading the Scriptures, hearing the word, and giving something to the poor, may be kept up in form, and yet be little, if any thing, more than a form. The church of Ephesus was not accused of any particular outward misconduct; but they had "*left their first love.*" Where this is the case, however, much will be neglected, especially of those parts of duty which fall not under the eye of creatures. It is supposed of the church just referred to that they had relaxed, if not in the actual performance, yet in the manner of performing their religious exercises; therefore they are exhorted to "repent, and to do their first works." A departure from our first love is commonly the first step of a backsliding course. Perhaps, if the truth were known, there are few open falls but what are preceded by a secret departure of heart from the living God.

Secondly, *If we have fallen into any particular sin, which exposes us to the censures of our friends, and instead of confessing it with sorrow are employed in defending or palliating it*, it is a certain proof that we are at present under the power of it.—There are some sins that cannot be defended; but there are others which will admit of much being said on their behalf; and it is admirable with what ingenuity men will go about to find excuses where self is concerned. People that you would hardly think possessed of common sense, will, in this case, be singularly quicksighted, discerning every circumstance that may make in their favour, or serve to extenuate their fault. The cunning of the old serpent, which appeared in the excuses of our first parents, seems here to supply the place of wisdom. This self-justifying spirit is a very dangerous symptom: while it continues there is no hope of a good issue. We read of the *deceitfulness* of sin; and truly it is with great propriety that deceit is ascribed to it. Perhaps there are few persons who are employed in justifying their failings, but who are first imposed upon, or brought to think, somehow, that they are, if not quite justifiable, yet very excusable. Sin, when *we* have committed it, loses its sinfulness, and appears a very different thing to what it did in others. David's indignation could rise against the man that had taken an ewe-lamb, while to his own conduct, which was much more criminal, he was blinded! When any sin is committed by *us*, it is common for it to assume *another name*; and by means of this we become easily reconciled to it, and are ready to enter on a vindication of it. Covetousness will admit of a defence under the names of prudence, industry, or frugality; conformity to the world may be pleaded for as an exercise of sociability and good breeding; unchristian resentment, as necessary self-defence; foolish levity, as innocent mirth; malignant contentions, as zeal for the truth; and indifference to the truth, as candour or liberality of sentiment.

Thirdly, *Though we do not defend or palliate our sin in words, yet, if we continue in the practice of it*, we may be certain we have not repented.—All true repentance is followed by a *forsaking* of the evil, and where this effect is not produced, there can be no scriptural ground to hope for forgiveness. There are sins, as before observed, which will admit of no defence. If a person be convicted of them, he can do no other than own himself in the wrong, or at least be silent; yet he may feel no sorrow on their account, nor scarcely any intention to forsake them. When Samuel reproved Saul for his rebellion against the commandment of the Lord, assuring him that God had rejected him from being king, and had given the kingdom to a neighbour of his that was better than he, he was confounded, and compelled to say, "I have sinned;" yet the only concern he discovered was on account of having lost his *honour*; and as soon as he suspected who was his rival, he sought to slay him. Even Solomon discovered a very similar disposition. Instead of lamenting and forsaking the sin for which he had been reproofed, as soon as he knew that Jeroboam had been anointed by the prophet Ahijah, he "sought to kill him." A sullen silence under reproof, and a perseverance in the evil, are certain signs of a hard and impenitent heart.

Fourthly, *Though we should refrain from the practice of the evil, yet if it be only a temporary effect of conviction*, there is no true repentance.—It is very common for persons, when they first fall into any gross sin, to feel ashamed and alarmed, to wish they had not acted as they have, and to resolve that they will do so no more; and this, though the love of the evil be the same, and on the first temptation that returns it is committed again, is nevertheless frequently mistaken for repentance. When Saul's life was spared by David, and his groundless malice against him detected, his heart seemed to relent: he felt ashamed, owned his sin, lifted up his voice and wept, and

promised to do so no more; but this was not repentance. David appears to have suspected it at the time; for he would not trust himself in his hands; but gat him up into the hold: and the event justified his conduct. The first opportunity that offered, Saul returned to the folly that he had condemned.—A temporary abstinence from evil may also be produced by some *alarming providence*. When judgments overtake us, and conscience tells us that it is the hand of the Lord stretched out against us for our sin, the mind is appalled with fear, and so ceases to be in a state to pursue its favourite devices. But if, as soon as the pressing hand of Providence is removed, the heart returns, like a spring, to its former position, there is no reason to consider its temporary depression as containing any true repentance.

Dr. Owen has expressed these sentiments with that unction of spirit, and deep insight into the human heart, which is peculiar to himself:—

“There are two occasions,” says he, “wherein men who are contending with any sin may seem to themselves to have mortified it.—First, When it hath had some sad eruption to the disturbance of their peace, terror of their consciences, dread of scandal, and evident provocation of God. This awakens and stirs up all that is in the man, and amazes him, fills him with abhorrency of sin, and himself for it; sends him to God, makes him cry out as for life, to abhor his lust as hell, and to set himself against it. The whole man, spiritual and natural, being now awakened, sin shrinks in its head, appears not, but lies as dead before him. As when one that hath drawn nigh to an army in the night, and hath killed a principal person, instantly the guards awake, men are roused up, and strict inquiry is made after the enemy; who, in the mean time, until the noise and tumult be over, hides himself, or lies like one that is dead, yet with firm resolution to do the like mischief again upon the like opportunity.—Secondly, In a time of some judgment, calamity, or pressing affliction. The heart is then taken up with thoughts and contrivances of flying from the present troubles, fears, and dangers. This, as a convinced person concludes, is to be done only by relinquishment of sin, which gains peace with God. It is the anger of God in every affliction that galls a convinced person. To be quit of this, men resolve at such times against their sins. Sin shall never more have any place in them; they will never again give up themselves to the service of it. Accordingly sin is quiet, stirs not, seems to be mortified; not indeed that it has received any one wound, but merely because the soul hath possessed its faculties whereby it should exert itself, with thoughts inconsistent with the motions thereof; which when they are laid aside, sin returns again to its former life and vigour. Of this we have a full instance in Psal. lxxviii. 32-38, ‘For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their Rock, and the most high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.’ I no way doubt but that when they sought and returned, and inquired earnestly after God, they did it with full purpose of heart, as to the relinquishment of their sins. This is expressed in the word *returned*. To *turn*, or *return*, unto the Lord is by a relinquishment of sin. And this they did *early*, with earnestness and diligence; but yet their sin was unmortified for all this (ver. 36, 37): and this is the state of many humiliations in the days of affliction, and a great deceit in the hearts of believers themselves lies oftentimes herein.”*

* *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers.* Chap. V.

When a professor of religion has fallen into some odious vice, and wishes to shelter himself from the censures of his connexions, you will often hear him allege, "I have *repented*;" whereas it amounts to little more than the shame and alarm above described, as his after-conduct very frequently proves. Indeed it is not of the nature of true repentance to *talk* of having repented, and especially for the purpose of evading a faithful censure.

Fifthly, *Though we should refrain from the open practice of the sin, and that for a continuance, yet if it be merely from prudential or selfish considerations*, we may be certain that we have not yet repented it.—Though we had no religion, and pretended to none, we might find various inducements to refrain from gross immoralities. They affect our interest, our health, and our reputation. It is on such principles that mere worldly men will guard against them; and, if we act from the same motives, wherein are we better than they? Or if the dread of future punishment may be supposed to have some influence upon us, this is a very different thing from the fear of the Lord, which is to *hate* evil. And where the motives for abstaining from any evil are merely prudential or selfish, we shall abstain from very little more than that which falls under the eye of creatures. Our watchfulness will respect little, if any thing, more than outward actions. The daily care of our lives will be, not how we shall please God, but how we shall conceal the prevailing dispositions of our hearts from those about us—a task this as difficult as it is mean; for whatever occupies our thoughts and affections will on various occasions, notwithstanding our utmost care, escape us. Looks, gestures, manner of speaking and acting, as well as words and deeds themselves, betray what is predominant within. Hence it is that we generally deceive ourselves in these matters. We often fancy our character to be unknown when it is well known; and if it were otherwise, all is naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Of this we may be certain, that while our chief concern is to hide our sins from those about us, should we be summoned to give an account of our stewardship, it will appear that we *have sinned, and not repented of our deeds*; and wherein this differs from going down to the grave *with our guilt upon our heads* it is difficult to say.

Sixthly, *If we take pleasure in talking of the evil, or in dwelling upon it in our thoughts*, it is a certain sign of the same thing. True repentance works in a way of silent shame and self-abasement: "That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God." When men can talk and even write of their former wicked courses with lightness, it is a certain proof that, whatever repentance they have had, they do not *at present* repent of it; and though nothing be said or written, yet if such things occupy our thoughts, imaginations, and affections, it is much the same. A mind full of this must needs be *lacking* of those spiritual exercises which render us that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and those that are such are fitly enough described as having "forgotten that they were purged from their old sins." If old sins are thought of with new delight, they are reacted and persisted in; and where this continues to be the case, the guilt of them must remain upon us, and may be found upon our heads when we go down to the grave.

Lastly, *If we trifle with temptation, or be not afraid of putting ourselves in the way of it, or even of being led into it*, we may be certain that at present we have not repented of our sin.—It is a saying almost grown into a proverb, He that is not afraid of temptation is not afraid of sin; and he that is not afraid of sin must needs be in danger of being destroyed by it. If, after

having been repeatedly drawn into sin by associating in certain companies, or certain pursuits, we can, nevertheless, run into them again without fear, we cannot possibly have repented of our deeds. Nay more, though we should fear to plunge ourselves into temptation, yet if, when Providence brings us into such situations and companies, our hearts secretly rejoice in it, this is no less an evidence of our impenitent state than the other. True repentance will not only teach us to shun the way of evil, but to be averse to every avenue that leads to it. If, therefore, we either run into temptation, or are glad when we are led into it, we are, beyond all doubt, under the power of it.

INJURIOUS AND DANGEROUS EFFECTS OF SIN LYING UPON THE CONSCIENCE
UNLAMENTED.

It is a dangerous thing to fall into sin, whether secretly or openly; and the effects of it, sooner or later, will certainly be felt; but to continue in it is much more so. A very heavy threatening is denounced against God's open enemies for *persisting* in sin: "God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such a one as *goeth on still* in his trespasses." But the same thing, in persons who have known the way of righteousness, must be abundantly more offensive. "He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct?" There is a remedy at hand of God's providing; a "propitiation for our sins;" and it is declared, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." But if, instead of confessing our sins on the head of this propitiation, and imploring mercy in his name, we sink into hardness of heart, neglect prayer, shun the company of the faithful, and efface the remembrance of one sin only by the commission of another, what have we to expect?

I am aware that it is one of the devices of Satan, after having drawn a soul from God, and entangled him in the net of his own corruptions, to persuade him that the prayer of faith, in his circumstances, would be presumption, and that it is much more modest and becoming for him to stand aloof both from God and his people. And if by faith were meant what some would seem to understand by it, a working up ourselves into a persuasion that, owing to the immutability of God, all is safe and right, whatever be our spirit or conduct, it would be presumptuous enough; but genuine faith in Christ is never out of season. The greater our sin has been, the greater reason there is for us to confess it upon the head of the gospel sacrifice, and to plead for mercy in his name. We may not be able to go as Christians, but this affords no reason why we should not go as sinners.

The injury and danger of such a state of mind will appear from a consideration of the *effects* which it produces, and must continue to produce, if not healed by a return to God by Jesus Christ.

First, *It will necessarily deprive us of all true enjoyment in religion, and, by consequence, of all that preservation to the heart and mind which such enjoyment affords.*—The principal sources of enjoyment, to a Christian that walketh spiritually, are communion with God and his people: but, to him that is out of the way, these streams are dried up; or, which is the same thing in effect to him, they are so impeded as not to reach him. Guilt, shame, darkness, and defilement have taken possession of the soul; love is quenched, hope clouded, joy fled, prayer restrained, and every other grace enervated. It becomes the holiness of God to frown upon us in such a state of mind, by withholding the light of his countenance; and, if it were otherwise, we have no manner of desire after it. Such was the state of David after he had sinned and before he had repented: the joys of God's salvation were far from him. The thirty-second and thirty-eighth Psalms

appear to have been written, as has already been observed, after his recovery; but he there describes what was the state of his mind previously to it. There is much meaning in what he sets out with in the former of these Psalms: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile!" He knew the contrary of this by bitter experience. Guilt and defilement had eaten up all his enjoyment. "When I kept silence," saith he, "my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long; for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drouth of summer." It does not appear that he fully desisted from prayer; but there was none of that freedom in it which he was wont to enjoy. It was *roaring* rather than praying; and God is represented as disregarding it. In the thirty-eighth Psalm he speaks of the *rebukes* of God's wrath, and the *chastening of his hot displeasure*; of his *arrows sticking fast in him*, and his *hand pressing him sore*; of there being *no soundness in his flesh, because of his anger*; nor *rest in his bones, because of his sin*. There is one expression exceedingly appropriate: "My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness." A wound may be dangerous at the time of its being received; but much more so if it be neglected till the humours of the body are drawn towards it. In this case it is hard to be healed; and the patient has not only to reflect on his heedlessness in first exposing himself to danger, but on his *foolishness* in so long neglecting the prescribed remedy. Such was the state of his mind, till, as he informs us, he "acknowledged his transgressions," and was "sorry for his sin."

And as there can be no communion with God, so neither can there be any *with his people*. If our sin be known, it must naturally occasion a reservedness, if not an exclusion from their society. Or, if it be unknown, we shall be equally unable to enjoy communion with them. Guilt in our consciences will beget shame, and incline us rather to stand aloof than to come near them; or, if we go into their company, it will prove a bar to freedom. There is something at first sight rather singular in the language of the apostle John; but upon closer inspection it will be found to be perfectly just: "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another."

But if we are deprived of fellowship with God and his people, from what can we derive consolation? If we have only had a name to live, and been dead, the joy arising from vain hope may possibly be supplied by carnal pleasures. We may drown reflection by busying ourselves in worldly pursuits, mingling with worldly company, and, in short, returning "like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire;" but if we have any true religion in us, we cannot do this; and then what is there under the sun that can yield us relief?

Nor shall we be deprived merely of the enjoyments of religion, but of all that *preservation* to the soul which they afford. The *peace of God* is represented as that which *keeps*, or fortifies, *our hearts and minds*. Without this, the *heart* will be in perpetual danger of being seduced by the wiles, or sunk by the pressures of this world; and the *mind* of being drawn aside from the simplicity of the gospel.

Secondly, *It will render us useless in our generation.*—The great end of existence with a good man is to live to him who died for us, and rose again. If God bless us, it is that, like Abraham, we may be blessings to others. Christians are said to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world; but while we are in the state above described, we are as "salt that has lost its savour," which is "good for nothing;" or as a light that is hid under a vessel. Of what use, with respect to religion, are we in our families, while this is

the case? Neither servants nor children can think well of religion, from any thing they see in us; and when we go into the world, and mingle among mankind in our dealings, in whose conscience does our conversation or behaviour plant conviction? Where is the man who, on leaving our company, has been compelled by it to acknowledge the reality of religion? Or, if we occupy a station in the church of God, (and this character may belong to a minister no less than to another man,) we shall do little or no good in it; but be as "vessels in which the Lord taketh no pleasure." There is a threatening directed against vain pastors which ought to make a minister tremble. "Woe to the idol shepherd, that leaveth the flock! The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened." Perhaps one of the greatest temptations to backsliding in ministers may lie in this way: being selected from their brethren, and chosen to the office of public instructors, they are in danger of indulging in self-valuation. A man may labour night and day in his study, and all to get accomplished that he may shine before the people. Where this is the case, the preacher is his own *idol*, and it may be that of the people. He feels also little or no regard to the charge which he has undertaken, but is ready to desert it whenever a difficulty arises, or any opportunity offers of improving his circumstances. The consequence is, the sword of the Lord is upon *his arm*—he does no manner of execution in his work; and upon his *right eye*—whatever proficiency he may make in science, or polite accomplishments, he has but little if any spiritual understanding in the things of God. This character may respect ungodly preachers, such to whom the Jewish nation were given up for their rejection of Christ; but there is no sin committed by the most ungodly man of which the most godly is not in danger.

Thirdly, *We shall not only be useless, but injurious to the cause of Christ.*—Indeed, it is impossible to stand neuter in this cause. If we do no good, we shall do harm; not only as cumberers of the ground, occupying that place in society which might be better filled by others, but as giving a false representation of religion, and diffusing a savour of death among mankind. If our domestics infer nothing favourable to religion from our conduct in the family, they will infer something unfavourable; and if there be but little good to be seen in our example, it is well if there be not much evil; and this will surely be imitated. Who can calculate what influence the treachery, unchastity, and murder, committed by David, had upon his family? We know that each was acted over again by Amnon and Absalom. And thus many a parent has seen his own sins repeated in his posterity; and perhaps, if he had lived longer, might have seen them multiplied still more, to his shame and confusion.

The servants of God are called to bear testimony for him: "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord of hosts." This is done not merely by words, but by deeds. There is a way of bearing witness to the reality and importance of religion, by a zealous perseverance in it; to its dignity, by our firmness; to its happy influence, by contentedness and cheerfulness; and to its purity, by being holy in all manner of conversation: and this is a kind of testimony which is more regarded than any other. Men in common form their opinion of religion more by what they see in the professors of it than by the profession itself. Hence it was that David by his *deed* is said to have given "great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." They were not contented with reproaching him, but must speak against God and religion on his account. In this view he considered his sin when he was brought to repentance for it. "Against *thee*, *thee* only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."—"Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion:

build thou the walls of Jerusalem." If his sin had not greatly dishonoured God's name, and, as it were, broken down the walls of Zion, such language would not have appeared among his lamentations. Things operate much the same to this day. Whatever evil is done by a professor, it is ascribed to his religion. In this view we may justly consider our unchristian conduct as bearing false witness of God; for it is giving false representations of his gospel and government to the world. A grasping, selfish spirit is saying to those around us, that, after all which we have professed of living by faith in a portion beyond death, the present world is the best, and therefore we are for making sure of that, and running all hazards as to the other. In like manner, a cruel and revengeful disposition towards those who have offended us is saying that Christianity, after all its professions of meekness and forgiveness of injuries, renders its adherents no better than others. And when a Christian professor is detected of having privately indulged in the lusts of the flesh, the conclusion that is drawn from it is, that there is nothing in religion but outside appearance, and that in secret religious people are the same as others. It is impossible to say how much such conduct operates to the hardening of men in sin, to the quenching of their convictions, to the weakening the hands of God's servants, and to the stumbling of persons who are inquiring the way to Zion.

These things, if we be mere professors, may have but little effect upon us. We may not care for God's being dishonoured, provided we do but get pardoned at last: but if there be any true religion about us, it will be otherwise. An ingenuous mind will feel more for the dishonour which he has done to Christ, and injury to his fellow creatures, than for the reproach which he has brought upon himself.

Fourthly, *We are in the utmost danger of falling into future temptations, and so of sinking deeper, and falling further from God.*—So long as sin remains upon the conscience unlamented, it is like poison in the constitution; it will be certain to operate, and that in a way that shall go on more and more to kill all holy resolution, to harden the heart, and to defile the imaginations and desires. "Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart." It was from sad experience of the defiling nature of past sin that David, when he came to himself, prayed, "Create in me a *clean heart*, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

A mind thus enfeebled, stupified, and defiled, must needs be in a very unfit condition to resist new temptations. The inhabitants of a besieged city, who are weakened by famine and disease, and discouraged by a number of disaffected persons within their walls, have no heart to resist, but stand ready to listen to the first proposals of the besiegers.

And in proportion as we are disabled for resistance, it may be expected that the tempter will renew his attempts upon us. If Satan has any influence upon the human mind, it may be supposed that he acts with design, and knows how to avail himself of the most favourable seasons to effect his purpose. And this we find to be true by experience. In proportion as we have yielded to temptation, it will rise in its demands; solicitations, greater in number and in force, will ply our minds. As a resistance of the devil will be followed by his *fleeing from us*, so, on the contrary, a non-resistance of him will be followed by renewed and stronger attempts upon us. One sin makes way for another, and renders us less able to resist, or to return to God by repentance. When once the thief has gained admission into our habitation, he will bid us defiance. "Innumerable evils will compass us about, and our iniquities take hold upon us, so that we shall not be able to look up: they will be more than the hairs of our heads: therefore our hearts will fail us." Samson first yielded to his sensual desires; after this, to the

entreaties of his Delilah; who, in proportion as she saw him pliant to her wishes, increased in her assiduousness, till at length he lost his hair, his liberty, his eyes, and his life.

If we be mere professors, these considerations may affect us but little; we shall continue the willing slaves of our own corruptions, hoping it may be, nevertheless, that we shall sometime be brought back again, till, at some unexpected hour, we are taken out of the world. But if there be any good thing in us toward the Lord God of Israel, this part of the subject must alarm us; for, of all the methods which God takes to punish sin, there is none more awful and more dreaded by a good man than that of being *given up to sin*.

Fifthly, *So long as sin remains upon the conscience unlamented, we are in danger of eternal damnation.*—It may be thought by some that such language is inconsistent with the final perseverance of believers; but it is manifest that our Lord did not so teach the doctrine of perseverance as to render cautions of this nature unnecessary. He did not scruple to declare, even to his own disciples, that whosoever should say to his brother, Thou fool, should be in danger of hell-fire—that if they forgave not men their trespasses, neither would God forgive theirs—and if a right hand, or a right eye, caused them to offend, it must be cut off, or plucked out, and that lest the whole body should be cast into hell.

The object at which sin aims, whether in believers or unbelievers, is *death, eternal death*; and to this it has a natural and direct tendency. The apostle James, in a very affecting manner, describes its process. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." If it does not in all cases come to this issue, it is not because of its being different as to its nature or tendency in some persons to what it is in others, but because a timely stop is put to its operations. Only let it go on without repentance till it has *finished* its work, and eternal death will be the issue.

Whatever we are, so long as sin lies unlamented upon the conscience, we have no scriptural foundation to conclude that we are Christians. No real Christian, it is true, will prove an apostate; yet while we are under the influence of sin, we are moving in the direction which leads to apostacy. If we are contented with a relapsed state of mind, what ground can we have to conclude that it is not our element, or that we have ever been the subjects of true religion? If the waters continue to be naught, it is a sign that the spring has not been healed. There is no reason to think that Judas himself laid his accounts with such an issue of his treachery as actually came to pass. During the ministry of our Lord, while he kept the bag, and sometimes made free with its contents, it is probable he nevertheless reckoned himself a good man. He saw many failings in his fellow disciples, and in all other good men; and he might think this to be his. When he had covenanted with the chief priests, it does not appear that he expected his Master would be eventually taken and crucified. When they were about to lay hands on him, he had often passed through the midst of them, and gone his way; and he might suppose that it would be so again. "When therefore he saw that he was condemned," he was thrown into a state of terrible amazement, and in the issue "went and hanged himself." Such was the process of an apostate, and such his end. Surely it behoves us to take heed how we trifle with those things, the end of which is death!

MEANS OF RECOVERY.

WERE it not for the hope of being instrumental in saving some from the error of their way, and of inducing others to a greater degree of watchfulness, I should not have written the preceding pages. It can afford no satisfaction to expose the evil conduct of a fellow sinner, or to trace its dangerous effects, unless it be with a view to his salvation or preservation.

It is natural for those who have fallen into sin, unless they be given up to a rejection of all religion, to wish, on some considerations, to be restored. A backsliding state is far from being agreeable. Hence it is that many have prematurely grasped at the promise of forgiveness, and said to their souls, "Peace, peace, when there was no peace." It is desirable that we be recovered from our backslidings; but it is not desirable that we should think ourselves recovered when we are not so.

As there are many ways by which a convinced sinner seeks peace to his soul, without being able to find it, so it is with a backslider. Self-righteous attempts to mortify sin, and gain peace with God, are not confined to the first period of religious concern. Having, through the power of alarm, desisted from the open practice of sin, many have laboured to derive comfort from this consideration, without confessing their sin on the head, as it were, of the gospel sacrifice. Their sins may be said rather to have been *worn* away from their remembrance, by length of time, than *washed* away by the blood of the cross. But this is not recovery: the hurt, if healed, is healed slightly; and may be expected to break out again. The same way in which, if we be true Christians, we first found rest to our souls, must be pursued in order to recover it; namely, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the way to which the Scriptures uniformly direct us. "My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This was the way in which David was recovered. He confessed his sin with deep contrition, pleading to be purged "with hyssop that he might be clean, and washed that he might be whiter than snow." By this language he could not mean that his sin should be purged away by any thing pertaining to the ceremonial law, for that law made no provision for the pardon of his crimes: he must, therefore, intend that which the sprinkling of the unclean with a bunch of hyssop, dipped in the water of purification, was designed to prefigure; which, as we are taught in the New Testament, was the purging of the conscience, by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus.

This is the only way in which it is possible to find rest to our souls. As "there is no other name given under heaven, or among men, by which we can be saved," so neither is there any other by which we can be restored. Whatever be the nature of our backsliding from God, this must be the remedy. If it be a *relinquishment of evangelical principles*, we must return to the way, even the highway whither we went. Paul "travailed in birth" for the recovery of the Galatians; and in what did he expect it to consist? In "Christ being formed in them." He also strove to bring back the Hebrews; and all his labours were directed to the same point. His Epistle to them is full of *Christ*, and of warnings and cautions against neglecting and rejecting him. If any man had been perplexed concerning the Deity or atonement of Christ, let him humbly and carefully read that Epistle; and, if his heart be right with God, it will do him good. If our departure from God have issued in *some gross immorality*, or in *the love of the world*, or in *conformity to it*, the remedy must be the same. It is by this medium, if at

all, that the world will be crucified unto us, and we unto the world. If we have no heart to repent, and to return to God by Jesus Christ, we are yet in our sins, and may expect to reap the fruits of them. The Scriptures give no counsel to any thing short of this. They are not wanting, however, in directions that may lead to it, and considerations that may induce it. What these are, I shall now proceed to inquire.

In general I may observe, The Scriptures assure us of *the exceeding great and tender mercy of God, and of his willingness to forgive all those who return to him in the name of his Son.*—It is necessary that we be well persuaded of this truth, lest, instead of applying as supplicants, we sink into despair. If an awakened sinner, under his first religious concern, be in danger of this species of despondency, a backslider is still more so. His transgressions are much more heinous in their circumstances than those of the other, having been committed under greater light, and against greater goodness; and when to this is added the treatment which his conduct must necessarily draw upon him from his religious connexions, he may be tempted to relinquish all hopes of recovery, and to consider himself as an outcast of both God and man. Unhappy man! thy breach may be *great like the sea*, and the language of an awakened conscience may suggest, “Who can heal me?” Yet do not despair. “Hear what God the Lord will speak.—He will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly.” Hear what he speaks to the backsliding Israelites, reduced by their sins to the most deplorable state of guilt and wretchedness. “The Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men’s hands; but if *from thence* thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul: when thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice, (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God,) he will not forsake thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers, which he sware unto them.” The pardoning mercy of God towards those who return to him by Jesus Christ, is not limited by such measures as are framed by creatures in their treatment of one another, or by such expectations as, on this account, they are apt to form. There are circumstances which may render it almost impossible for forgiveness to be exercised amongst men; and therefore men are ready to think it must be so with respect to God. But “with the Lord there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption.” He will not only pardon, but pardon *abundantly*; “for his thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts.—The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from *all sin*. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from *all unrighteousness*.” The threatenings against the *unpardonable sin* itself do not affect the truth of these merciful declarations; for that sin is all along described as excluding *repentance* as well as forgiveness, Heb. vi. 6. The party is supposed to be given up to hardness of heart. If, therefore, we *confess* our sin with contrition, we may be certain it is not unpardonable, and that we shall obtain mercy through the blood of the cross.

But the great question is, *How shall we repent of our sins, and return to God by Jesus Christ?*—Undoubtedly it is much easier to get out of the way than to get in again; to lose the peace of our minds than to recover it. Sin is of a hardening nature; and the further we have proceeded in it, the more inextricable are its chains. But however this be, we either do desire to return, or we do not. If *not*, it will be in vain to address any directions to

us. It is right, indeed, for the servants of Christ to point them out, whether we will hear or whether we will forbear, and there leave them; but as to any hope of our recovery, while such is the state of our minds, there can be none. If we can think of our sin without grief, and of the cross of Christ without any meltings of spirit, there is great reason to fear that our "hearts are not right in the sight of God," but that we are yet in the "gall of bitterness, and the bonds of iniquity." If, on the other hand, we *do* desire to return; if, like Israel in the days of Samuel, we "lament after the Lord," we shall readily hearken to every direction given us in his word.

If my reader, supposing him to have backslidden from God, be in such a state of mind, it is with a mixture of hope and tenderness that I attempt to point out to him the means of recovery. Or, should it even be otherwise, I will, nevertheless, endeavour to show him the good and the right way, that at least I may deliver my own soul.

First, *Embrace every possible season of retirement for reading the Holy Scriptures, especially those parts which are suited to thy case; and accompany it with prayer.*—God's word hid in the heart is not only a preservative against sin, but a restorative from it. It both wounds and heals: if it rebukes, it is with the faithfulness of a friend; or if it consoles, its consolations carry in them an implication which, if properly understood, will melt us into repentance.

Read especially *those parts of Scripture which are addressed to persons in your situation*, as the second chapter of Jeremiah; or which express the desires of a returning sinner, as the twenty-fifth, thirty-second, thirty-eighth, fifty-first, and hundred-and-thirtieth Psalms. You may not be able to adopt all this language as your own; but it may be useful nevertheless. To read the genuine expressions of a contrite heart may produce at least a conviction of the disparity between the frame of mind possessed by the writer and yourself; and such a conviction may be accompanied with a sensation of shame and grief.

It is also of importance that you read the Scriptures *by yourself*. To read a portion of them in your families is right, and ought not to be neglected; but there is a wide difference, as to personal advantage, between this and reading them alone. Your mind may then be more at liberty for reflection; you can read and pause, and think, and apply the subject to your case.

It is of still greater importance to *unite prayer with it*. Reading the word of God and prayer are duties which mutually assist each other: the one furnishes us with confessions, pleas, and arguments; while the other promotes solemnity and spirituality of mind, which goes further towards understanding the Scriptures than a library of expositions.

It was in one of these seasons of retirement that David put up this petition. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments." He seems to have had in his thoughts the condition of a poor, wandering sheep, that had left the flock, and the rich pastures whither it was wont to be led; ranging rather like a native of the woods, than one which had been used to be led, and fed, and protected by an owner. Bewildered by its own wanderings, entangled in the thorns and briars of the wilderness, and exposed to beasts of prey, it feels its forlorn condition, and bleats after the shepherd of the flock! Is there nothing in this that may suit thy case? Yes, thou art the man! Thou hast gone astray like a lost sheep, got entangled in thine own corruptions, and knowest not how to find the way back; yet it may be thou hast not *forgotten his commandments*, nor utterly lost the savour of those happy days when walking in them. Let thy prayer then be directed, like that of the psalmist, to the good Shepherd of the sheep, "Seek thy servant!"

Prayer is a kind of religious exercise which is necessary to accompany all others. "In every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Solemn approaches to God are adapted to impress the mind with a sense of sin, and to inspire us with self-abhorrence on account of it. It was by a view of the holiness of God that Isaiah felt himself to be "a man of unclean lips;" and by conversing with him that Job was brought to "abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes." The very exercise of prayer carries in it an implication that *our help must come from above*; a truth which, in all cases, it is highly necessary for us to know, and with which, in this case especially, we cannot be too deeply impressed. We easily get out of the way; but if ever we return to it, it must be by His influence who "restoreth our souls, and leadeth us in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake."

To tell a person who is out of the way that he has no help in himself, and that if ever he get in again it must be by the restoring grace of God, may seem, to some people, paradoxical and disheartening; but it is a truth, and a truth which, if properly understood and felt, would go further towards our recovery than we at first may apprehend. Paul found that "when he was weak then he was strong;" and many others have found the same. The more we are emptied of self-sufficiency, the more sensibly shall we feel our dependence, and the more importunately implore that the Lord would save us as it were from ourselves, and restore us "*for his name's sake.*"

This was the way in which we at first found rest for our souls, and this must be the way in which we recover it. An awakened sinner frequently labours hard after peace, without being able to obtain it. Wherefore? Because he seeks it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law, stumbling at that stumbling-stone. In all his labours there is a large portion of self-righteous hope, or an idea that God will pity him on account of his painful endeavours to please him. But this is like bad flesh in a wound, which must be eaten out before it can be healed. If ever he obtain peace, it must be by utterly despairing of all help from himself, and falling, as a sinner entirely lost, into the arms of sovereign mercy. This is *walking* "in the good old way," which brings *rest to the soul*; and the same sense of our insufficiency which is necessary to find rest in the first instance is equally necessary to find it in all that follow.

We may pray from year to year, and all without effect. It is only "the prayer of faith" that succeeds; the distinguishing characteristic of which is, under a sense of there being no help in us, to lay hold of the mercy and faithfulness of God, as revealed in the gospel. David for a time "groaned," and even "roared, by reason of the disquietness of his heart;" but he obtained no relief from this. On the contrary, he sunk deeper and deeper into despondency. At length, he betook him to another *manner* of praying. "Out of the depths cried I unto thee . . . and thou heardest my voice!" We find him here pleading the exceeding *greatness of God's mercy*, and the *plentitude of his redemption*. Here he found rest for his soul!—Jonah also, for a time, was in much the same state. With a conscience so far awakened as to deprive him of all enjoyment, he retired to the bottom of the ship; and, wearied with the load of his guilt, slept away his time. Even the horror of a tempest did not awaken him. At length, being roused and reproved by heathens, and marked out by lot as the guilty person, he confesses who he is, and what he had done, and advises them to cast him into the sea. Humanity, for a time, struggles with the elements, but in vain—he must be cast away. Think what a state of mind he must at this time have possessed! He is thrown into the deep, is swallowed by a fish, and retains his reason even in that situation; but no light shines upon his soul. Conceiving him-

self to be on the point of expiring, his heart sighed within him, "I am cast out of thy sight!" But ere the thought had well passed his mind, another struck him . . . "Yet will I look again towards thy holy temple!" He looked, and was lightened: "Out of the belly of hell cried I unto thee, and thou hearest my voice!"

Secondly, *Reflect on the aggravating circumstances of thine offences, or on those things which render it AN EVIL AND BITTER THING to have departed from the living God, and to have sinned against him in the manner thou hast done.*—Every return to God begins with reflection. "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies."—"Commune with thine own heart upon thy bed, and be still." If the God against whom I have sinned had been like the idols of this world, I might have been justified in departing from him; but I have acted the part of the backsliding Israelites, who were the only people who had a God worth cleaving to, and yet were the only people distinguished by their fickleness. The world cleave close enough to their gods, which yet are no gods; but I have committed these two evils, at which the heavens are astonished, I have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewed to myself cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water! If the service of the Lord had been a heavy yoke, and if the way of his commandments had been an unfruitful and miserable path, I might have some plea for deserting it; but what have I gained, except guilt, and shame, and wretchedness, by leaving him? Was he a barren wilderness to me, or a land of darkness? How can I answer his tender, yet cutting expostulations—"O my people, what have I done unto thee? wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me!"

If I had been born and educated a benighted pagan, a deluded Mahomedan, or a superstitious papist—if the oracles of God had been withheld from me—or if I had lived all my days in a state of ignorance and insensibility, like multitudes in my native country—the sins that I have committed had been little in comparison of what they now are. I have verged near to the unpardonable sin. It is against *light* and *love* that I have offended. He has been as a husband unto me; but I have forsaken him, and have gone after other lovers. Yet he still invites me to return . . . And what hindereth? I am not straitened in him, but in my own bowels. Lord, save me from myself! Surely "I will return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now."

Thirdly, *Reflect on the goodness of God in having hitherto borne with thee, and prevented thy sins from fully operating according to their native tendency.*—It is a common observation, that one sin leads on to another. Of this, history and experience furnish many tragical examples. The sauntering indolence of David occasioned his adultery. Adultery, when committed, must be concealed, and this leads to treachery and intrigue. When these fail, recourse is had to murder. And when the murder is effected, to carry on the concealment, the event must be attributed to Providence—"The sword devoureth one as well as another!" The connexion between uncleanness and blood is strongly marked in the history of human crimes. A large proportion of those who have been publicly executed for the one were induced to perpetrate the horrid deed as a covert to the other. And hast thou been tampering with these vices; playing at the hole of the cockatrice den? How is it that death and hell have not ere now swallowed thee up? Behold that wretch who went but yesterday to suffer the just vengeance of his country, for having murdered the object whom he had first seduced; and see what thou mightest have been? Is it not owing to singular mercy that thy sins have been restrained from their wonted and deadly issues?

It may be, some who have been companions, or at least contemporaries,

with thee in the first stages of sin, have meanwhile been suffered to make more rapid progress. Their follies have ended in infamy, while thine have been restrained, and comparatively hid. And it is possible, while the public voice has been raised against them, thou hast joined it. "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" If the recollection of such things leadeth thee not to repentance, it is a dark sign of a *hard and impenitent heart*, "treasuring up to itself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

Fourthly, *Reflect on the state and exercises of thy mind in former times.*—This was the counsel of the apostle to the Hebrews, who, disheartened by persecution, were half inclined to go back again to Judaism: "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after that ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions." This was the counsel of our Lord himself to the churches of Ephesus and Sardis: "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent."—"Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent." Ask thine own soul, Are there no seasons of tenderness in my life which it would be for my profit to recall to mind? I have professed repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; and was it only a profession? Was there not a time when my sins were more bitter to me than death, and more dreaded than hell? How is it that I have turned again to folly? Has sin changed its nature, or become less odious? Rather is not the change in me? Was there not a time when the word of the Lord was precious to my soul—when my sabbaths were my happiest days, and godly people my chosen companions? Whence this lamentable change? Is Christ or the gospel less precious than heretofore? I once thought, that if I might but be found in him, and live for ever with him, and those that love him, I should not care what I lost or suffered in the present world. And was I all this time deceiving myself? Were my repentance, and faith, and hope, and love, and joy, all counterfeit? I endured reproaches and losses, as I supposed, for his name sake; and is it all *in vain*? Must I at last be separated for ever from him, and have my portion with unbelievers? "O Lord, have mercy upon me, a most wretched caitiff, and miserable sinner! I have offended both against heaven and earth, more than my tongue can express! Whither then may I go, or whither shall I flee? To heaven I may be ashamed to lift up mine eyes, and on earth I find no place of refuge or succour. To THEE, therefore, O Lord, do I run; to THEE do I humble myself. O Lord, my God, my sins are great; but yet have mercy upon me, for thy great mercy. The great mystery, that God became man, was not wrought for small or few offences. Thou didst not give thy Son unto death for little sins only; but for all the greatest sins of the world; so that the sinner returns to thee with his whole heart, as I do here at this present. Wherefore have mercy on me, O God, whose property is always to have mercy. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for thy great mercy. O Lord, I crave nothing for my own merits, but for thy name sake, that it might be hallowed thereby, and for thy dear Son Jesus Christ's sake."*

This part of our Lord's counsel would apply not only to those who have fallen into gross immoralities, but to such as have deserted *the principles of*

* That which is included in reversed commas is a part of the prayer of Archbishop Cranmer; who, through fear of man, had denied his faith, but was, notwithstanding, burned to death. When brought to execution, (which was at Oxford, on March 21, 1556,) he uttered the above prayer; and, on the flames approaching him, first thrust into the fire the hand with which he had signed his recantation.

the gospel. It was asked the Galatians through what medium it was that they first "received the Spirit; by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith." This question proceeds upon the principle of that being the true doctrine which is productive of the best effects; and by the manner in which it is introduced, "*This only would I learn of you,*" it is intimated that the solution is of *itself* sufficient to determine what the true doctrine is. And what are the effects produced by a relinquishment of the doctrines usually denominated evangelical? nay, I might say, by only a hesitation concerning them? I appeal to those who have made the trial. Have you the same joy and peace in believing your present principles as you had in your former ones? Can you, or do you, go to a throne of grace with the same holy freedom as heretofore? Do you feel an equal concern for the salvation of your poor ungodly neighbours? Rather is not the far greater part of your zeal consumed in labouring to make proselytes of serious Christians to your new way of thinking? Does the society of those who are like-minded with yourself afford that inward satisfaction which you once enjoyed in the fellowship of those whom you are now taught to pity as enthusiasts? If, while professing these things, you were strangers to them, you may answer these questions in the affirmative; but if otherwise, you will not. "Remember from whence you are fallen, and repent!" "Remember how you have received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."

Fifthly, *Set apart special times to humble yourself before God by fasting and prayer.*—Extraordinary cases require the use of extraordinary means. When a great army was coming against Jehoshaphat, it is said, "he feared, and *set himself* to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah." But the loss of the soul is of more account to you than the temporal overthrow of a country was to him. When Judah, for its backslidings, was under the frowns of God in Babylon, and had been so for about seventy years, Daniel says, "*I set my face* unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes." The apostle Paul plainly intimates that there are times wherein we are required to "give ourselves to fasting and prayer." And surely there can be no times in which these means are more necessary than when we have got out of the way, and desire to recover it. There is much meaning in the words, "*He set himself* to seek the Lord;" and, "*I set my face* unto the Lord God." They denote something more than the ordinary exercises of prayer; even a special fixedness of the thoughts, purposes, and desires to a particular object: and God has usually honoured those extraordinary approaches to him, when influenced by a pure motive, with success. It is true, we may attend to duty in a superstitious or self-righteous spirit; resting in it as an end, instead of using it as a means; but this is not *setting our face unto the Lord God, or seeking him.* A day devoted to God in humiliation, fasting, and prayer, occasionally occupied with reading suitable parts of the Holy Scriptures, may, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, contribute more to the subduing of sin, and the recovery of a right mind, than years spent in a sort of half-hearted exercises.

Sixthly, *To prayer it is necessary to add watchfulness.*—Our Lord unites these together as an antidote against temptation. It has sometimes been one of the devices of Satan, after a backslider has been drawing near to God, and strongly soliciting for mercy, yea, after a time has been set apart for this particular purpose, to ply him afresh with some powerful temptation; and while his mind has been unsuspecting, and, it may be, thinking itself to be somewhat secure, on account of having so lately been engaged in earnest devotion, he has been surprised and overcome! The consequence, as might be expected, has been a future neglect of prayer, under the idea that it must have been mere hypocrisy before, and would now be adding sin to sin. Instead

of depending upon spiritual frames for preservation, and especially when they are over, perhaps we ought to expect that our comforts should be succeeded by conflicts. We know it was so in several cases recorded in the Scriptures. Immediately after drinking at the smitten rock at Rephidim, Israel was called to fight with Amalek. Paul's thorn in the flesh succeeded to extraordinary revelations. Our Lord himself went up from Jordan into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

Seventhly, *In your approaches to the Saviour, let it be under the character in which you first applied to him for mercy, that of a sinner.*—If you attempt to approach the throne of grace as a good man who has backslidden from God, you may find it impossible to support that character. The reality of your conversion may be doubtful, not only in your apprehension, but in itself. Your approach, therefore, must not be as one that “is washed, and needeth not save to wash his feet;” but as one who is defiled throughout, *whose hands and head*, and every part, need to be cleansed. Do not employ yourself in raking over the rubbish of your past life in search of evidence that you are a Christian. You will not be able, in your present state of mind, to decide that question; nor would it be of any service to you if you could decide it. One thing is certain, you are a *sinner*, a poor, miserable, and perishing sinner: the door of mercy is open; and you are welcome to enter in. Let your past character then have been what it may, and let your conversion be ever so doubtful, if you can *from this time* relinquish all for Christ, eternal life is before you.

The Laodiceans, who, though composing a Christian church, were doubtful characters, are counselled to deal with Christ in the same manner as *sinners* deal with him, for *riches*, for *righteousness*, and for *heavenly wisdom*.

Lastly, *In all your supplications, be contented with nothing short of a complete recovery.* It is possible you may attain so much ascendancy over your evil propensities that they may seem to be slain before you; or, at least, that you are in no particular danger of yielding to them any more; and yet you may not have recovered that holy rest in God, that sweet peace which arises from confessing our sins upon the head of the gospel sacrifice. But while this is the case, there is no security against their revival. The first temptation by which you are assaulted may afford lamentable proof that they are yet alive. Nothing will serve as a preservative against the risings of evil propensities, short of *walking with God*. There is much important truth in that declaration of the apostle, “This I say, then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” Sin is not to be opposed so much directly as indirectly; not by mere resistance, but by opposing other principles to it, which shall overcome it. It is not by contending with the fire, especially with combustible materials about us, that we shall be able to quench it; but by dealing plentifully with the opposite element. The pleasures of sense will not be effectually subdued by foregoing all enjoyment; but by imbibing other pleasures, the relish of which shall deaden the heart to what is opposite. It was thus that the apostle became “dead to the world by the cross of Christ.” Do not, therefore, reckon thyself restored till thou hast recovered communion with God. David, though the subject of deep contrition, yet was not contented without gaining this important point. Till then the poison would still, at times, be rankling in his imagination. Hence arose the following petitions: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit.” Make these petitions thy own; and if God grant the thing that thine heart desireth, go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee!

PROGRESSIVENESS OF SIN AND OF HOLINESS.

[To the Editor of the Biblical Magazine.]

THE PROGRESS OF SIN.

WHEN our Saviour spoke of his making men free, the Jews were offended. It hurt their pride to be represented as slaves; yet slaves they were—and such is every sinner, however insensible of it, till Christ has made him free. And the longer he continues in this state, the more he is entangled, and the less capable he becomes of making his escape. Sin is a master that will not suffer its slaves to rest, but is always hurrying them on from one thing to another, till, having finished its operations, it bringeth forth death. The way of sin is a way in which there is no standing still—a kind of down-hill road, in which every step gives an accelerated force, till you reach the bottom. Such is the import of those emphatic words of the apostle, “Ye were servants to iniquity, unto iniquity.”

To be a servant to iniquity is descriptive of the state of every unconverted sinner. All may not be subject to the same kind of evils: one may be enslaved to drunkenness, another to uncleanness, another to covetousness, another to fashion, and another to self-righteous pride; but these are only different forms of government, suited to different tempers and constitutions: all are servants to iniquity; and all who continue such are impelled in a manner to go on in their work, “servants to iniquity, unto iniquity.” The proofs of this tendency to progression will appear in the following remarks.

First, He that yields himself a servant to sin, in any one of its forms, admits a principle which opens the door to sin in every other form. This principle is, that the authority of God is not to be regarded when it stands in the way of our inclinations; if you admit of this principle, there is nothing to hinder you from going into any evil which your soul lusteth after. You may not, indeed, commit every bad practice; but while such is the state of your mind, it is not the fear of God, but a regard to man, or a concern for your own interest, safety, or reputation, that restrains you. If you indulge in theft, for instance, you would, with the same unconcern, commit adultery, robbery, or murder, provided you were tempted to such things, and could commit them with the hope of escaping punishment. It is thus that he who transgresses the law in one point is guilty of all: for He that forbids one sin forbids all; and a deliberate offence against Him in one particular is as really a rejection of his authority as in many.

Moreover, if the mind be unrestrained by the fear of God, a regard to man will have but a feeble hold of it. Sin, in various shapes, will be frequently indulged, and, being so indulged, it will soon break out into open vices; for it is not in the power of a man, with all his contrivances, long to conceal the ruling dispositions of his soul. When king Saul had once disregarded the Divine authority in his treatment of the Amalekites, there were no bounds to the evil workings of his mind: full of jealousy, envy, and malignity, he murders a whole city of innocent men, repairs to a witch for counsel, and at last puts an end to his miserable life.

Secondly, Every sin we commit goes to destroy the principle of resistance, and it produces a kind of desperate carelessness. Purity of mind, like cleanliness of apparel, is accompanied with a desire of avoiding every thing that might defile; and even where this has no place, conscience, aided by education and example, is a great preservative against immoral and destructive courses; but if we once plunge into the vices of the world, emulation is

extinguished. The child that is accustomed to rags and filth loses all shame, and feels no ambition to appear neat and decent.

The first time a person yields to a particular temptation it is not without some struggles of conscience; and when it is past, his soul is usually smitten with remorse; and, it may be, he thinks he shall never do the like again: but temptation returning, and the motive to resist being weakened, he becomes an easy prey to the tempter. And now the clamours of conscience subside, his heart grows hard, and his mind desperate. "There is no hope," saith he, "I have loved strangers, and after them I will go." Under the first workings of temptation he set bounds to himself; "Hitherto," said he, "I will go, and no further:" but now all such promises are of no account. The insect entangled in the spider's web can do nothing; every effort it makes only winds another thread round its wings; and, after a few ineffectual struggles, it falls a prey to the destroyer.

Thirdly, Every sin we commit not only goes to destroy the principle of resistance, but produces an inordinate desire after the repetition of it; and thus, like half an army going over to the enemy, operates both ways against us, weakening our scruples, and strengthening our propensities.—This is manifestly the effect in such sins as drunkenness, gaming, and fornication. It is one of the deceits of sin to promise that, if we will but grant its wishes in this or that particular, it will ask no more, or to persuade its deluded votaries that indulgence will assuage the torrent of desire; but though this may be the case for a short time, sin will return with redoubled violence. It rises in its demands, from every concession you make to it. He that has entered the paths of the destroyer can tell, from experience, that it is a thousand times more difficult to recede than to refrain from engaging. The thirst of the leech at the vein, and of the drunkard at his bottle, are but faint emblems of the burnings of desire in the mind in these stages of depravity.

Fourthly, If we yield to one sin, we shall find ourselves under a kind of necessity of going into other sins, in order to hide or excuse it.—This is a truth so evident that it needs only to be stated in order to be admitted. Examples abound, both in Scripture and common life. When sin is committed, the first thing that suggests itself to the sinner is, if possible, to conceal it; or, if that cannot be, to excuse it. Adam first strove to hide himself in the trees of the garden, and when this refuge failed him, it was *the woman*, and the woman *that God gave to be with him* too, who tempted him to do as he did. Nearly the same course was pursued by David. Having outraged decorum, he first betakes himself to intrigue, in hope to cover his crime; and when this failed him, he has recourse to murder; and, this being accomplished, the horrible event is, with an air of affected resignation, ascribed to Providence: "The sword devoureth one as well as another!" Nor is this the only instance wherein that which has begun in a wanton look has ended in blood. What numbers of innocent babes are murdered, and one or both of their unhappy parents executed, for that which is resorted to merely as a cover for illicit practices!

Fifthly, Every act of sin tends to form a sinful habit; or, if already formed, to strengthen it.—Single acts of sin are as drops of water, which possess but little force; but when they become a habit, they are a mighty stream which bears down all before it. The *drunkard* had no natural thirst for strong liquors. Some worldly trouble, or the love of loose company, first brought him to make free with them; but having once contracted the habit, though he knows he is every day wasting his substance, shortening his life, and ruining his soul, yet he cannot desist. Even under the power of stupefaction, he calls for more drink: his very dreams betray his lusts. "They have smitten me," says he, "and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and

I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.”—The *gamester*, at the first, thought but little of doing what he now does. He fell in company, it may be, with a card-party, or had heard of a lucky adventure in the lottery, or known a person who had made his fortune by a successful speculation in the stocks. So he resolves to try a little of it himself. He succeeds. He tries again; ventures deeper and deeper, with various success. His circumstances become embarrassed; yet, having begun, he must go on. One more great adventure is to recover all, and free him from his difficulties. He loses; his family is ruined; his creditors are wronged; and himself, it is not impossible, driven to the use of such means of support as shall bring him to an untimely end!—The *debauchee* was once, it may be, a sober man. His illicit connexions might originate in what were thought at the time very innocent familiarities. But having once invaded the laws of chastity, he sets no bounds to his desires. “His eyes are full of adultery, and he cannot cease from sin.”

Sixthly, When the sinner becomes thus besotted in the ways of sin, there are commonly a number of circumstances and considerations, besides his own attachment to it, which entangle his soul, and, if infinite mercy interpose not, prevent his escape. He has formed connexions among men like himself His interest will suffer His companions will reproach him The world will laugh at him. Many in such circumstances have been the subjects of strong convictions, have shed many tears, and professed great desire to return from their evil course; yet when it has come to the test, they could not recede: having begun and gone on so far, they cannot relinquish it now, whatever be the consequence.

Reader, is this, or something like it, your case? Permit a well-wisher to your soul to be free with you. Be assured you must return or perish for ever, and that in a little time. Infidels may tell you there is no danger; but when they come to die they have commonly discovered that they did not believe their own words or writings. “Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth;” and before Him you must shortly give an account. Will you plunge yourself into the pit from whence there is no redemption? That tremendous punishment is represented as not prepared originally for you, but for the devil and his angels. If you go thither, you in a manner take the kingdom of darkness by force.

Let me add, It is not enough for you to return, unless in so doing you return to *God*.—“Ye have returned, but not unto me, saith the Lord.” If I felt only for your credit and comfort in this world, I might have contented myself with warning you to break off your outward vices, and cautioning you against the inlets of future evils. Animals, though void of reason, yet, through mere instinct, fly from present danger. “In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird.” The fishes of the sea avoid the whirlpool. And shall man go with his eyes open into the net? Will he sail unconcerned into the vortex of destruction? But it is not from present danger only, or chiefly, that I would warn you to flee. My heart’s desire and prayer to God for you is, that you may be saved from the wrath to come. Know, then, though you should escape the grosser immoralities of the world, yet you may be still in your sins, and exposed to eternal ruin. Your danger does not lie merely nor mainly in open vices. Satan may be cast out with respect to these, and yet retire into the strong holds of proud self-satisfaction. It is not the outward spot that will kill you, but the inward disease whence it proceeds. “From within, even from the heart, proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Every outbreaking of sin in your life is a proof of the inward corruption of your nature. If this fountain be not healed, in vain will you go about to purify

the streams. I mean not to dissuade you from breaking off your sins; but to persuade you to break them off "by righteousness." But the only way in which this is to be done is that to which our Saviour directed in his preaching "Repent, and believe the gospel." All reformation short of this is only an exchange of vices. But if you can, guilty and unworthy as you are, renouncing all other hopes and dependencies, believe in Christ, you shall be saved. His blood was shed for sinners, even the chief of sinners. His obedience unto death was so well-pleasing to God, that any sinner, whatever has been his conduct or character, that comes to him in *his* name, pleading his righteousness and his only, will be accepted for his sake. He has not only obeyed and died for such as you, but is now at the right hand of God, carrying into effect the great ends of his incarnation, life, and death. "Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

If, reader, thou canst embrace this doctrine, it will heal thy malady. If from thine heart thou canst receive salvation as of mere grace, through the redemption of Jesus Christ, it is thine own. If thou canst confess thy sins upon the head of this sacrifice, "God is faithful and just to forgive thy sins, and to cleanse thee from all unrighteousness." God makes nothing of thy reformations, prayers, or tears, as a reason why he should accept and save thee; but every thing of what his Son has done and suffered. If thou canst be of his mind, making nothing of them in thy pleas and hopes for mercy, but every thing of Him in whom he is well-pleased, eternal life is before thee. And at what time this doctrine shall give peace to thy troubled soul, it shall purify thy heart in such a manner that all thy former ways shall become hateful unto thee, and sobriety, righteousness, and godliness shall be thy delight.

But if thy heart be still hardened in sin; if Jesus, and salvation by grace through his name, contain nothing attractive, but rather offensive to thy mind know this, "There is no other name given under heaven, among men, by which thou canst be saved;" and the remembrance of thy having once in thy life at least been told the truth may not a little embitter thy dying moments.

Happy are all they who returning, in the name of Jesus Christ, to his Father and their Father, his God and their God, are made free from sin, and have their fruit unto holiness! They too are *progressive*, but it is in a course the opposite of that which has been set before the reader. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." The service of God shall become more easy to him; truth shall appear more evident; the marks of his conversion shall multiply; his character shall strike its roots deeper; the hope of his perseverance shall continually renew its strength; and sorrow and joy, retirement and society, the dispensations of Providence and the ordinances of grace, shall all contribute to make him more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

THE PROGRESS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

HAVING offered a few thoughts on the progress of sin, in your last number, the following may be considered as a counterpart. Righteousness is no less progressive than unrighteousness. As, in the one case, sinners are "servants to iniquity *unto iniquity*;" so, in the other, believers are "servants to righteousness *unto holiness*."

Some, I am aware, have denied that sanctification is progressive; but this, if they understand what they say, is only a proof, I fear, that they are

strangers to it. The following remarks may serve to show the tendency of true holiness to aspire after perfection, however far we may be from attaining to it.

First, The right discharge of any one duty supposes a principle which will lead us to be holy in all manner of conversation.—Strictly speaking, there is no duty performed, nor any thing done by a sinner, that is well-pleasing to God, till, repenting of sin, he believes in Jesus for salvation. This is the turning point which gives a new direction to his future course; all before it is worse than nothing. When, therefore, the Jews inquired of Christ, “What shall we do to work the works of God?” the answer was, “This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom he hath sent.” It is on this principle that the apostle declares of him that “doeth righteousness” that he “is righteous.” A single act of righteousness proves that the subject of it is created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. But where this is the case, there is that in the mind which tends to universal holiness. A few insulated services may satisfy a formalist; but he that believeth in Jesus has his heart enlarged, and runs with delight in the way of his commandments. It is not the inquiry of such a person how low a degree of spirituality will consist with true religion, but how high a degree of it is attainable in this state of imperfection. The religion of a mere professor resembles the legs of the lame, which are not equal. In the house of God he weeps and seems to be all devotion; but if a poor man, or even a poor Christian, call at his door, his heart is shut against him. Or, it may be, he prides himself in his generosity; but then he is dead to every thing spiritual and heavenly-minded. Not so the true Christian; his religion is uniform. In him, the fear of God produces good-will to men; and his charity to men operates in harmony with zeal for truth, for righteousness, and for God. When a mere professor has once established his religious character, he will commonly sit down to rest, and leave the young people to be zealous in their turn, as he thinks he has been sufficiently in his; but love will go on to “bring forth fruit *in old age*.” When the Lord had given David rest round about from all his enemies, he is said to have “sat in his house;” not, however, in a state of indolence, as though he had done enough, but meditating what more he could do for God, now that new opportunities were afforded him. “See now,” said he to Nathan, “I dwell in a house of cedar; but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.” And more than twenty years afterwards, when he was old and grey-headed, and nature worn out with troubles in his family and his kingdom, he still resolves to “go in the strength of the Lord God, and to praise him more and more.”

Secondly, Every duty rightly performed prepares the heart for the discharge of other duties.—It was a remark of the great and good Mr. Whitefield, and there is no man’s lips whom it would have better fitted, “that the more a man does for God the more he may.” Gracious dispositions strengthen and increase by exercise. The chariot in full motion surmounts hills of difficulty with much less effort than at its first outset. The truth of these remarks is most sensibly felt in exercises of self-denial, and in the influence of private on public duties. Every act of self-denial for Christ’s sake is a victory over temptation, and every such victory doubles our strength for a future onset. Thus, also, the spiritual and retired exercises of the closet prepare the mind for those of the family, and both have a tendency to fit us for those of the house of God. A little religion, it has been said, and with much propriety, will make a man miserable; but much will make him happy. It is by following the Lord fully, like Caleb and Joshua, that we enter into the gospel rest.

Thirdly, Every degree of holiness tends to an increase of spiritual know-

ledge, which in return produces more holiness.—It has been a question much disputed, whether holiness leads to the knowledge of the truth, or the knowledge of the truth to holiness; but both are true: “He that doeth God’s will shall know of his doctrine;” and, “beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory—by the Spirit of the Lord.” The influence of each upon the other is as that of capital and interest in trade. Capital is a stimulus to interest, and interest increases capital. The influence which humility has, for instance, upon a discovery of the mind of God in his word, and upon the increase of true religion in the soul, is beyond all calculation. God will “guide the meek in judgment; the meek will he teach his way.” He giveth “more grace” to the humble.

Fourthly, Holy acts tend to form and strengthen holy habits, which constitute the highest degree of holiness.—In one sense every person who is the subject of true religion possesses a holy habit: religion with him is not occasional, but an habitual pursuit. But the term is more properly applied to those fixed dispositions of the soul which are the effect of repeated exercises. God has so formed the mind, that a number of acts of the same kind, whether good or evil, shall give a tone or direction to it: by this righteousness is encouraged and sin is punished. Every exercise of repentance goes to form an habitual tenderness of conscience, and abhorrence of that which is evil; and every exercise of faith tends to a *life of faith* on Him who loved us, and gave himself for us. The more we read the Holy Scriptures, the more we shall imbibe their spirit, and be formed by them as by a model. It is thus that the word of Christ dwells richly in us in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. It is worthy of notice, that the general strain of apostolic exhortation is directed to *habitual* religion. “Simplicity in giving, diligence in ruling, cheerfulness in showing mercy, love without dissimulation, abhorrence of evil, cleaving to that which is good, being kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of the saints, given to hospitality;” are all expressive, not of one or two particular acts, but of a *life* of devotedness to God, and kindness to men. And whatever acts the apostles exhorted to, they were considered only as so many steps in a race, each of which contributed to its success, or to the winning of the prize.

Fifthly, Holy habits are friendly to a life of communion with God, by which the soul becomes more and more meetened for the inheritance of the saints in light.—“He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in God, and God in him.” The ecstasies of some, whose walk is manifestly carnal, worldly, fleshly, and even devilish, arise from a fire of their own kindling. But he whose consolations are accompanied with a close walk with God, and render him more and more watchful, diligent, and circumspect, he it is that walks in the light of God’s countenance. The enjoyment he finds in the commandments of God enlarges his heart; and, his heart being enlarged, he runs with greater pleasure in the way of his commandments.

From the whole we see, 1. The vast importance of a *right beginning* in religion. If we be wrong in the outset, the further we go the further we are off; but, entering in at the door of the sheepfold, we shall go in and out, and find pasture. The reason why so many are not progressive in religion is the want of this. Having no connexion with Christ, they bring forth no fruit, and, as dead branches, are taken away: having no oil in their vessels, the lamp soon expires. 2. The importance of every act of holiness, or duty performed with an eye to the glory of God.—It tells, as I may

say, in the divine life. It tends to accumulate a store of heavenly wealth, and to meeten us for employments and enjoyments in another and better world.

A FEW PERSUASIVES TO "A GENERAL UNION IN PRAYER" FOR THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION.*

[Addressed to all who love and long for the coming of Christ's blessed kingdom, and whose hearts may be inclined to unite in seeking its welfare.]

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN!

THE business for the promotion of which these few hints are with all due respect recommended to your candid attention is such that we are persuaded you will cheerfully unite in it. Indeed it would be unfriendly in us to suspect your readiness to so good a work. Nevertheless, considering the backwardness and inattention common to us all in this world, you will not think it superfluous in this case to urge a few motives, for the purpose of stimulating us to wrestle hard with God. We wish you then, and ourselves with you, seriously to attend to the following considerations:—

1. Consider *Christ's readiness to hear and answer prayer, especially on these subjects*. We are greatly mistaken if we imagine our Lord Jesus takes no pleasure in his own work, but is loth to prosper it, and only is persuaded by us, or does it to oblige us. He takes infinitely more pleasure in it than we do; and when he does it in answer to our prayers, it is that we may be encouraged, and that his favours may be thankfully received. Christ takes care to let us know how ready he is to hear prayer, especially in behalf of his own cause, in that he directs us to pray for these blessings; yea, he even commands us to pray for the coming of his kingdom before we ask for our daily bread; and to "*seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,*" promising that "*all other things shall be added unto us,*" Matt. vi. 33.

Indeed it may well be supposed that Christ's heart is in this work; for he laid down his life as a ground whereon to rear the structure. The foundation of this glorious kingdom was laid in blood,—not, like too many earthly kingdoms, in the blood of the conquered, but in that of the conqueror. Yes, he died that he might live and see a numerous seed of converts; and might prolong his days, or lengthen out his holy and happy kingdom. When he ascended into heaven, and took the government of all worlds into his hands, it was with a view to the carrying on of this blessed cause. He became Head over all things, but it was to the church, that he might cause every thing to subserve her welfare.

And now having thus died to lay the foundation of his kingdom, and thus long presided over all the kingdoms of the world to ripen things for it, it would be very strange indeed if he were indifferent about it! So far from that, nothing seems to lie so near his heart. He is pleased to look upon the conversion of sinners as reward enough for all his sorrows—as sufficient to make him forget all his trials! As a woman, as soon as she is delivered from travail, remembers no more the anguish for joy that a man-child is born into the world, so it is said, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied!" Yes, Christians, so far is he from being reluctant to

* This was the author's first publication. See the Memoir, Vol. I.—B.

grant us these requests, that he is pleased in these matters not only to command us to ask, but to represent himself as waiting to be gracious; yea, as being at our command, as ready to bestow these mercies whenever we shall earnestly pray for them. "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me!" See how intent he is upon what concerns his sons, and the work of his hands. O let us not be backward on our part.

2. Consider *what the Lord has done in times past, and that in answer to prayer*. When Israel, who was God's church at that time, was in Egypt, and things looked very dark indeed, they cried, and the Lord heard their cry, and came down to deliver them. Their deliverance was the extending of Christ's kingdom; and God overthrew Pharaoh and his host for setting themselves against it. The church in after-ages, when in her low estate at Babylon, is represented as making use of this as a plea with God. Thus they cry to him, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep: that hath made the depth of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" And was their prayer answered? Yes; the Lord presently replied, "I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared; *the Lord of hosts* is his name!"—Yea, as a kind of echo to their request, "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury.—Thus saith thy Lord *Jehovah*, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thy hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again."—See Isa. li. 9, 17, 22.

While Judah groaned beneath Babel's yoke, Daniel set his face three times a day towards Jerusalem; at length his prayers and supplications are heard, and an angel is sent to comfort him, yea, and to inform him that at the beginning of his supplications the commandment in favour of Judah came forth. And now God's conduct towards Pharaoh and all his host shall be acted over again towards Belshazzar and his. Yes, he not only gave Egypt and Ethiopia, but Babylon for their ransom.

The church of God was reduced exceedingly low just before the coming of Christ, but what was the conduct of those few that were on God's side? Some of them are distinguished by the character of those who "*looked for redemption in Jerusalem*," and others are said to have "continued in prayer night and day." At length, through the tender mercy of God, their prayers were answered, and "the day-spring from on high visited them!"

Just before that great outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the church was in a low and disconsolate condition, having lost Christ's personal presence; however, they united with one accord in ardent prayer, in an upper room, to the number of about a hundred and twenty. Presently their light broke forth as the morning—a little one becomes a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. Thousands are converted by a single sermon, and Satan falls before the gospel of Christ like lightning from heaven.—May we not make the same use of these glorious works of God, with some others in that day, as Judah did in Babylon of what God had done for them in Egypt?—O let us pray to the Lord Jesus that the work may be carried on; that antichrist may be consumed with the Spirit of his mouth, and destroyed by the brightness of his coming; that the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and that he may reign for ever and ever.

3. *Let the present religious state of the world be considered to this end.*

Christianity has not yet made its way, even in name, over one-fifth part of the world. Out of about one thousand millions, who are supposed to inhabit our globe, not above one hundred and seventy millions profess the Christian name; all the rest are heathens, Jews, or Mahomedans; and, of those who do profess it, the far greater part are either of the apostate Church of Rome, or of the Greek Church, which is nearly as corrupt. Add to this, what great numbers of real heathens abound in Christian lands, and unbelievers even in the congregations of the faithful. Surely it is high time for us to awake out of sleep, and to send our united cries to heaven in behalf of our fellow creatures!

4. Consider *what God has promised to do for his church in times to come*. For an absolute impossibility we can have no hope, and for what God hath declared shall never come to pass we can have no warrant to pray; but when we pray for the spread of Christ's kingdom, our object is clogged with neither of these difficulties. On the contrary, it is accompanied with the strongest assurances of success. Let us not imagine that God has yet done all he intends to do for his church; or that Christ has yet seen of the travail of his soul so as to be satisfied. Besides the various promises referred to in the foregoing pages, the first setting up of Christ's kingdom is compared to a little stone, cut out of a mountain without hands, but which should in time break in pieces all the rest, and become "a great mountain, and *fill the whole earth*," Dan. ii. 35. The King himself compared this his blessed kingdom in its infancy to a "grain of mustard seed," the least of all seeds, but when grown, the "greatest of all herbs;" implying, no doubt, that his kingdom in its beginning was apparently the most weak and despicable of any kingdom; but before it should be finished it should be the greatest, most glorious, and extensive, of all the kingdoms that were ever set up—greater than that of Alexander himself, and more durable than that of Rome, Matt. xiii. 31–33. In the same place, he compares it to a little leaven which a woman put into three measures of meal till the whole was leavened. Glorious thought! Christ has been leavening the world for many hundred years, by the preaching of the gospel; and yet, awful to think, what a great part of it continues unleavened to this day! But, O blessed be God, it shall not be given up till *the whole is leavened*! Forlorn as the state of the heathen world is, our Lord Jesus has asked them for his inheritance, and he will have them, even *the uttermost parts of the earth* for his possession, Psal. ii. 8. O blessed period! When Jew and Gentile, the fair European and the sun-burnt African, with men of every other description, shall all unite to serve the Lord.

Must it not be very reviving to see those branches that have been so long broken off the olive tree, because of unbelief, grafted in again?—to see them return, and, with the bitter tears of reflection, "seek the Lord their God, *and David their King*, and fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days?" Hos. iii. 5. Yes, verily, the receiving of them back again shall be to the Gentiles like "life from the dead!" Rom. xi. 15. Then shall they be restored to their own land, and no more be exposed to the hostile attacks of quarrelsome neighbours as heretofore, but "Israel shall be with Egypt and with Assyria a blessing in the midst of the land; whom Jehovah of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance," Isa. xix. 23, 25. Then those glorious things spoken of the city of God, in the eighty-seventh Psalm, shall be accomplished.—We shall see "Rahab and Babylon, Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia," given to the church. "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands to God," Psal. lxxviii. 31. Oh what encouragement is here to pray! How long these things will be we know not; but this we know, we are nearer by above

two thousand four hundred years than the church was in Isaiah's time, and even then they that made mention of Jehovah were charged, saying, "Keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth," Isa. lxii. 6, 7. Let us never forget that Jehovah connects the fulfilment of his own promises with the fervent supplications of his people. "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them," Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

5. *If we have any regard to the welfare of our countrymen, connexions, and friends, let that stimulate us in this work.* Let us remember we have not only heathens, and Jews, and others abroad, to pray for; but few of us are wholly unconnected with heathen neighbours, heathen relations, or stubborn and unbelieving children. Let these be borne in the arms of prayer before the Lord. Though they can claim no pity from God, yet they have a right to ours, because we were in the same condition. Let our pity then be extended to those who have none for themselves, and our prayers ascend for such who as yet call not upon God's name. Though there be no reason why God should save our children, relations, or friends, before others, yet there is a reason why we should seek their salvation before others, because they are particularly put under our care, or stand in connexion with us.

To neglect to carry our children to Christ for a blessing from want of love, if such a thing could be in a good man, would be more cruel than the ostrich in the wilderness! So were it possible for a Christian to be amongst wicked neighbours and wicked relations, and, seeing he is safe himself, care nothing about them, surely he must be beside himself! How unlike would this be to the spirit of his Lord and Saviour—he wept over those who wept not for themselves! O Christians, for your country's sake, your neighbours' sake, your friends' sake, yea, your enemies' sake, as well as for the honour of Christ, seek the welfare of Zion, and pray for the extending of his kingdom in the world!

6. Consider that *what is requested is so very small.* The Lord does not ask us in this case for our silver or our gold, which, if he did, it were but a trifle to give.—He does not require us to sacrifice our lives, families, or friends, in support of his cause, which, if he did, it is no more than multitudes of the best men that ever the world saw have complied with;—but he only says, "Give me thine heart!" Seek the prosperity of His interest who died for yours—of that interest with which your own is so inseparably united—yea, of that interest which is your own; for Christ and you have no separate interests.

As to the times for public prayer, nothing can be less burdensome than once in a month—but what did I say, burdensome?—God forbid that any employment of this sort should ever prove a burden! It is hoped it will be attended to as a privilege rather than merely as a duty. It is hoped that Christians will feel a pleasure, and find a benefit, in these meetings, that will induce them of their own accord to meet together more frequently than this proposes, either on Lord's-day mornings, or on any convenient opportunities, for the same most desirable purposes.

7. And lastly, *It will not be in vain, whatever be the immediate and apparent issue of it.* Could we but heartily unite and make an earnest effort, there is great reason to hope great good might follow. Whenever those glorious outpourings of God's Spirit shall come, all over the world, no doubt it will be in answer to the prayers of his people.—But suppose we should never live to see those days, still our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. God would be glorified; and is this of no moment? It would convey this piece of intelligence to the world, that God has yet some hearty friends in it, who will continue to pray to him in the darkest times.—But this is not all:

our petitions may prove like seed in the earth, that shall not perish, though it may not spring up in our days. Thus the "prophets laboured, and the apostles entered into their labours" (John iv. 38); and what if we should be the sowers, and our posterity the reapers, shall we grudge at this? As great an honour at the last day, perhaps, may attend Isaiah, who hardly knew who had believed his report, as Peter, by whose sermon thousands were converted in an hour.—But neither is this all.—There are different degrees of prosperity bestowed upon different parts of Zion, and these favours are often granted to those particular communities where most ardent prayer, love, and holiness prevail.—Add to all this, the prosperity of our souls, as Christians, is generally connected with an earnest pursuit of God's glory and Christ's kingdom. Consolation, like reputation, will not do to be sought directly and for its own sake. In that case it will flee from us. But let us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to us. One great reason perhaps of so many Christians going so destitute of Divine comfort, is because they care about scarcely any thing else; God therefore justly withholds it from them. If they were more to seek his glory and the extending of his kingdom in the world, they would find consolation come of its own accord. He that cannot lie, speaking of his church, hath said, "*They shall prosper that love her.*"

THOUGHTS ON CIVIL POLITY.

ATTACHMENT TO GOVERNMENT.

[Written in March, 1808.]

THE question proposed for discussion is,—*Whether the obedience to civil government required in the Scriptures includes ATTACHMENT.*

It certainly does not include attachment to any thing but what is declared to be "an ordinance of God;" nor to any person or persons, but as officers executing that ordinance. It does not necessarily include an attachment to the constitution of a country, which, when compared with others, may be very oppressive and unjust; nor to particular measures, which may be equally so. But even in such cases there is an "honour" due to government, which in its worst forms is preferable to anarchy; and which, notwithstanding the most unjust procedures, is still in itself the ordinance of God. It is thus in parental authority. The duty of a child to obey a parent who may be harsh and unkind is not obliterated; nor is it enough for him to yield the obedience of fear, out of regard to his own interest. He ought to do it from a conscientious regard to the will of God, who has made him his parent. A violent father once fell foul upon his son, a young man about twenty years of age. The son made no other resistance than to ward off the blows, and said, "I could do what I please with you; but you are my father!" Such is the spirit which ought to be cherished towards the worst civil government. The young man not only conformed to those orders which his father might give him, but felt an attachment to him as a father; and was not to be driven from his duty because the other had forgotten his.

All this proceeds upon the supposition of our living under the worst of governments, which is so far from being the truth that almost any one would think it the best in Europe, if not in the world. A large proportion of those who have left their country, under a contrary impression, have seen cause to repent of their folly and ingratitude. The civil liberty contained in the

British government is the very cause of its being worse thought of and spoken against, by one part of its subjects, than that of any other country. Were one of these in France, and even a member of the legislature, he must not open his mouth in the manner he does in England. It is a part of our civil constitution to admit of free debate; and an opposition to the administration of the day, though generally conducted on mere party principles, is considered upon the whole as a salutary check on men in power. It is a mode of balancing evils, by suffering one set of them to weigh against another. Hence it is that a Tory administration in England, being watched by Whigs, would not be materially unfriendly to liberty; and Whigs, if not watched by Tories, would soon become as bad as the other. But while these parties are invariably assailing their rivals, in hope of supplanting them, it is not for the wise and the good to enlist themselves under their respective standards, or to believe half what they say. If, within my remembrance, only a tenth part of what has been foretold by the opposition interest had been true, we should ere now have ceased to be a nation.

Oh but, says one, we are going fast to ruin! Provisions rise, farms let for double and treble what they did, and taxes are enormous. And what does the rise of provisions and of land prove, except that the country is full of money? All buying and selling is only an exchange of commodities; and according to the quantity and demand for any article such is the price. To say that provisions are dear is only saying that money is cheap. Oh, but it is not money, it is paper. So long however as the nation is solvent, and can pay its debts, paper is the same as money. With respect to the amount of taxes, it is not of much account so long as we have the means of paying them. A London tradesman might say, My rent and taxes are so high in the city, I'll go and take a farm or a house in the woodlands! Such in effect has been the reasoning of some of our emigrants. Yet, it may be asked, do we not live better, wear better clothes, and occupy more comfortable dwellings than our forefathers did? and whether, where one fortune was gained a century ago, there be not six or seven now? These things may seem nothing to those who are complainers by profession; for if God should have determined for our ingratitude and other sins to bring us under a foreign yoke, as he has brought the continent of Europe, we shall then know our present advantages by the loss of them.

To form our opinion of the measures of government, by daily reading one class of the opposition papers, is much the same as judging of them from the philippics of the French *Moniteur*; or making up an opinion of the mission to the East, by purchasing and reading all the pieces of Major Scott Waring! If we choose to be deceived, deceived we shall be and ought to be. If I am attached to government *as government*, irrespective of the men who administer it, I shall be willing to find their measures right, and unwilling to find them otherwise, unless compelled so to think by evidence. I shall never take pleasure in traducing it, nor in hearing it traduced. If in any case I think it in the wrong, I shall speak of it, if at all, with regret. But if I choose to enlist under the banners of a systematic opposition, and to learn all that occurs from their report, I shall presently enter into their prejudices, and become their dupe. They are fighting for a substance indeed, but I for a phantom. So when these patriots get into power, I wonder and admire, and am then attached to government, not because the New Testament enjoins it, but because my favourites bear rule; and thus, both when they are out of office and when they are in, I am out of the way of Christian obedience.

How can I be said to honour magistrates, while I view all their actions through the representations of men whose interest it is to supplant them;

discrediting every thing good, and believing every thing evil? "Buonaparte," said one of the opposition prints, "is conciliating people of all religions; but our government is going to convert the Hindoos to Christianity!" Is not such a suggestion sufficient to show what these men are? It is well enough known that our government are not going to convert the Hindoos, and that if they let those men alone who would endeavour to convert them, it is all that can be said or hoped of them. How utterly unprincipled and base therefore must such a writer be! Yet from these men some people form their ideas of the government that protects them. If I must judge of public measures, let me judge righteously, and not by appearance, or from personal regards, John vii. 24.

Government may have done wrong in pursuing certain measures, but it is not from their being accused of it by interested men that we ought to believe it. Those who are now in power were lately in opposition, and then they were patriots, and every thing was going to ruin. There never was a period in British history when, in the opinion of what is called the opposition, let that opposition be on which side it might, the nation was not going to ruin; and when its humble adherents did not think so. The New Testament tells us, "they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." Now a small acquaintance with things will enable us to perceive that they who attend continually to one thing may in a hundred instances have reasons for their conduct of which those who only attend to it as an occasional amusement are very incompetent to judge. Let a disaffected member of a Christian church judge of the measures of its officers, and he will find them all wrong. Should he also be desirous of gaining an ascendancy, and can persuade a few others to judge of those measures through the medium of his representations, it is easy to imagine what sort of treatment the pastor and his colleagues would be likely to receive at their hands. The minister might feel indignant, and say to his friends, This man wants to be in power, and the rest are his dupes. We attend continually upon this very thing, and do to the best of our ability. But these men neither know our reasons, nor wish to know them; but, having set us down as bad, conclude that nothing we do can be right.

What is that "honour" and "obedience" due to government, and that prayer to God "for all who are in authority," which the Scriptures enjoin, (Rom. xiii. 1-7; 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2; Tit. iii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 13-17,) but an attachment to them as magistrates, irrespective of their party? We cannot pray for them as we ought, unless we feel a sincere attachment. There needs not a greater proof of this than the base perversions of God's word which have been made on this subject by some disaffected men. I pray for kings and rulers as men, says one, the same as I pray for other men. Yes, but you are required to pray for them *as men in authority*. Well, says another, I can pray that God would restrain their iniquity, and prevent their doing mischief, that good people may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty. Would you then presume thus to pervert the oracles of God? Can you say that the exhortation in 1 Tim. ii. 2, proceeds on the supposition that civil governors are the parties which you are to pray God to restrain? Does it not rather suppose, what is manifestly true, that the great body of wicked men around you would persecute and destroy you as Christians, were they not prevented by the civil power? The exhortation is to intercede *for* kings, and *for* all that are in authority; but this would be interceding *against* them.

Without attachment there is no such thing as *obedience*, whether to parents, husbands, masters, ministers, magistrates, or to God. A disaffected person may abstain from conspiracies and seditious conversation from mere pru-

dential motives; but in all this there is not a grain of honour or obedience. He who thinks otherwise, and imagines that an outward compliance with the laws is all that ought to be required of him, only proves himself to be given up in a great degree to a mind void of judgment. Let such a one ask himself as a father, a husband, a master, or a minister, whether a mere outward compliance with his directions would satisfy him. By the same means he may find an answer to all his other objections. What! says an undutiful child, you think, I suppose, every thing is right that my father does.—No, you reply, your father is a man like other men, and has his faults; but it is not for you to expose them. He is your father, and you are commanded of God to honour and obey him in all his lawful commands.—What! and am I bound to esteem him, and to feel attached to him, when he has all along been my enemy, doing every thing for my hurt? The answer is, such a supposition is as unnatural as it is undutiful. Have you not contracted this prejudice by associating with persons who have an end to answer by supplanting him in your esteem?—For me to esteem or be attached to him would be the same thing as to be attached to what is wrong.—Surely this objection can arise from nothing but perverseness. You know there is no necessity for this, and no one wishes it. You seem to forget that he is your father, and to think of him only as a bad man; but these thoughts arise from your listening to evil counsel, intended for sinister ends to lower him in your estimation.—Well, I cannot help it.—Such also might be the answer of the worst of beings.

A disaffected heart will lead men to talk of Providence, so far as it favours their wishes, but renders them blind to it in every other view: some have pleaded that Providence has favoured the arms of France, and they have subdued their enemies before them; it is folly, therefore, to resist them. But if it be true that Providence has favoured the military power of France, it is no less true that the naval power of England has been equally favoured and destined of Providence to check the inordinate ambition of our rival and our enemy; and, but for this, liberty would find no asylum upon earth. Yet, were I a subject of the French government, I should think it my duty, while I experienced its protection, to cherish a sincere attachment, and to pray for its prosperity in all its lawful undertakings, whatever I might think of the private character of those by whom the government is administered. I should think it wrong to magnify the faults of such a government, even though I could do it with safety to myself, or to read only those accounts of it which came from a quarter where a systematic opposition was carrying on against it. How much more then ought I to be attached to a legitimate government, under whose protection the church of God, for more than a century, has had an opportunity to live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty!

Surely you cannot account for my imbibing these sentiments, but by supposing that I have learned them from the Scriptures. You know me too well to impute to me a spirit that would cringe to any man. You know also that I have no temporal interest to serve, and no prejudices to gratify. If I have any political predilections, they are on the side of Whiggism. It is true, I have lately perceived some infidels amongst them, giving in to a persecuting spirit against evangelical religion, and have denounced them in my Letter to the Chairman of the East India Company. And I should not be surprised to find the greater part of them holding these principles when it comes to the trial; but if it be so, it would be a mortification to me as belonging to the Whig interest. On this account, as well as others, I have said nothing against them as a political party, but have contented myself with attacking the principle.

It is a fact, of which few will doubt, that great numbers are attached to government because they are hired, both in church and state. It is no less a fact that great numbers are disaffected because they are not hired. I accuse neither the one nor the other by the lump; but who can doubt that the cause of disaffection in thousands is that they are not treated in all respects as their fellow subjects; and that, in the present reign especially, the political party which has been used to favour Dissenters and the cause of religious liberty has been kept out of power? this party has ever maintained a war, as all parties do, against their opponents. They have their newspapers, by which they give their own representations of every thing done by the other. They are not scrupulous to state things as they are, but as they appear to their own prejudiced and violent minds. If any person forms his ideas according to these statements, he will soon become an inconsiderate partisan, laying aside not only the Christian, but the man of sober sense, who views both these parties as aiming to supplant the other; and therefore, though he may hear what both advance, and may think it necessary on the whole that the one should watch the other, yet, in forming his own judgment of men and things, will take neither of them for his guide.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EPISTLE OF JUDE.

[Extract of a letter written during the alarm of an invasion in 1803.]

I HAVE been much struck of late in reading the Epistle of Jude; and I think I see there the very character of some of our modern democrats. 1. They were wicked men; yet they crept in unawares amongst religious people, ver. 4. 2. They were apostates from the truth, after the example of the devil himself, ver. 5, 6. 3. They were lascivious characters, given over to fornication and all uncleanness, ver. 7. 4. They were despisers and depreciators of civil government, using language concerning their superiors which an angel dare not use of Satan himself, ver. 8, 9. 5. Their real object, whatever were their pretences, was the hope of plunder and of power, ver. 11. 6. The admission which some Christians gave them into their churches was to their reproach, ver. 12. 7. They are characters whose society we should avoid as we tender our own salvation; for the course which they steer leads to perdition, ver. 12, 13.

[A correspondent having intimated that as the descriptions referred to apostates from the truth, and the cases of Cain, Balaam, and Korah, were cited by the apostle as a warning to his contemporaries, the allusion could not be to political, but religious disobedience, Mr. Fuller replied as follows.]

It is certainly true that "the error of Balaam," Jude 11, was not *jacobinism*, and that the sin of Cain and of Korah was not committed against civil government. But on a reperusal of the Epistles of Peter and Jude, it does not appear to me that civil government can justly be *excluded* from the things against which these men set themselves. There is nothing surprising that they should despise and set themselves against *all* that which set itself against their lusts, which every species of legitimate authority did, whether civil or ecclesiastical. It is thus interpreted by all the expositors and lexicons to which I have access. They admit indeed that the passage referred to in 1 Pet. ii. 10 proves a part of their opposition and contempt to have been directed against Christ, and the authorities in his church; but consider other parts of it as directed against civil government. The term rendered "government or dominion," in 2 Pet. ii. 10, and Jude 8, is never applied, I believe, to ecclesiastical authority, but either to that which subsists among the different orders of angels, or to civil government amongst men, Eph. i. 21; Col. i. 16

Christ, it is true, exercises all authority and dominion; but the *dignities* which they blasphemed do not seem to relate to his spiritual authority. Moreover, the argument used by the apostle Jude in ver. 9 seems to imply that the authority, or dominion, against which these men set themselves, had in it a *mixture of evil*, which afforded them a handle for running it down. Jude's answer is, Be it so, that it has a great many evils attending it, as administered by wicked men; yet an archangel, when speaking to the worst of beings, did not dare to use such language as theirs. The answer supposes that to exist which did not exist in Christ's spiritual government, nor yet in the ecclesiastical government of the church at that time; but which might well be supposed to exist in the imperial government of Rome, under which the early Christians suffered so much persecution.

INFLUENCE OF THE CONDUCT OF RELIGIOUS PEOPLE ON THE WELL-BEING OF A COUNTRY.

THE 21st of September, 1803, was fixed upon, by several dissenting ministers in London, as a day of fasting and prayer on account of the state of the nation; and they expressed a wish that their brethren in the country would unite with them. Being at one of those meetings in the country, I was forcibly struck with an idea suggested in a passage of Scripture which was read on that occasion. It was Isa. v. 5, "And now, go to: I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down."

I had often heard it observed, from the intercession of Abraham in behalf of Sodom, and other scriptures, that God might spare a country for the sake of the righteous few; but never recollect hearing it noticed before that the sins of professing Christians might also be the principal cause of a nation's overthrow. Certainly the *church* is here represented as God's vine, the grand object of his care. He *fences* it by his providence, cultivates it by the means of his grace, and looks that it should bring forth grapes, or fruit to his glory. But if instead of this it bring forth wild grapes, what inducement can he have to continue the fence?

I am more afraid, said the minister on the above occasion, on account of the sins of my country, than from the threatenings of the enemy; and I am much more afraid for the sins of professing Christians in my country than I am for those who are openly profane. It is true they are wicked, and will not go unpunished; but God does not *look* to them for fruit in such a manner as he does to us. If the *hedge* be taken away, and the wild boar of the wood suffered to enter in and destroy, I fear it will be principally, though not wholly, on our account. Our ingratitude, lukewarmness, worldly-mindedness, animosities, divisions, scandals, and other evils, may be more offensive to God than all the wickedness of the land besides.

If these remarks be just, what a weight lies upon the religious part of a nation; who either prove, like Paul, the salvation of them that sail with them; or, like Jonah, the principal cause of the storm!

POLITICAL SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.

I HAVE been much edified by some things which appeared in print, respecting the present state of our country, especially by those which have been directed against what may with propriety be called political self-righteousness. I am persuaded this is a sin which cleaves closer to men, and even religious men, at the present time, than most of us are aware of; and

that we are more in danger from it than from almost all our national sins put together.

I have heard it said in conversation, when the sins of the nation have been mentioned as a ground of fear, True; but we are not so bad as our enemies. Mr. Robert Hall, in his fast sermon lately published,* has shown, with great force of evidence, the folly of this way of speaking. "The thing itself," considering our religious advantages, he observes, "is very doubtful, and, if it were otherwise, it has been common with the great Disposer of events to punish a nation that has had a portion of true religion in it by one that has been utterly irreligious, though afterwards he has poured out his wrath upon the latter."

I have heard it still more frequently said, "The Lord has many praying people in this country; surely therefore he will not deliver us up." A praying people may indeed avert the Divine judgments; but if we trust to the efficacy of our prayers, we shall be more likely to bring them upon us. This notion has been well combated by another correspondent; and my soul unites with his in trembling for the consequences of our religious self-complacency. Alas, our navy and our army, it is to be feared, will too generally trust in themselves; but let not them that fear God do so too. Our brethren in distant countries may hope the best of us; the good minister at Berlin may be allowed to mention "the numbers whose prayers continually rise to God in this country;" but we must not depend upon them ourselves, for this will render them of none effect.

There is a passage in that admirable book, the "Holy War," which I could scarcely ever read without tears. When Mansoul, in the day of her distress, had drawn up a petition to Emmanuel, a question arose, by whom it should be sent. "Now," says the writer, "there was an old man in the town, and his name was Mr. Good-deed, a man that bore only the name, but had nothing of the nature of the thing. Now some were for sending him; but the recorder, Conscience, was by no means for that; for, said he, we now stand in need of, and are pleading for mercy; wherefore, to send our petition by a man of his name, will seem to cross the petition itself. Should we make Mr. Good-deed our messenger, when our petition cries for mercy? Besides, quoth the old gentleman, should the prince now, as he receives the petition, ask him and say, What is thy name? and nobody knows but he will, and he should say, Old Good-deed, what think you that Emmanuel should say but this: Aye, is old Good-deed yet alive in Mansoul? Then let old Good-deed save you from your distresses.—And if he says so, I am sure we are lost; nor can a thousand old Good-deeds save Mansoul."

We subscribe to all this in matters which respect our eternal salvation, but it is no less applicable to things of time. Instead of religious people flattering themselves with the idea of being the bulwark of their country, it becomes them to take heed lest they prove the contrary. Though the religious people in a nation may, by their interest with Heaven, be its greatest blessings; yet there are cases in which they may prove the reverse. To Paul was given, not only his own life, but the lives of all them that sailed with him; but Jonah had well nigh been the destruction of those that sailed with him. God does not look for those things, as I may say, from the ignorant and ungodly, as he does from them that know him. It is their province to stand between God and their country; but if they be loose, light-minded, vain, or worldly, what is to be expected? We may declaim against the wickedness of the slave trade, and many other things; but are there not with us, sins against the Lord our God?

* "Sentiments proper to the present Crisis." Oct. 19th, 1803.

Thus spake the Lord by his prophet: "The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy; yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them: I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath," Ezek. xxii. 29-31.

God's ancient people were compared to a vine, and their country to a vineyard: this vine was cultivated with great care and expense, and a hedge of defence was set about it. But when he looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes. What was the consequence? "Go to, saith the Lord, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up: and I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down," Isa. v. 5. If God's vine bear no fruit, the wall that protects it may be expected to be broken down on its account; and thus our unfruitfulness may not only dishonour God, and injure ourselves, but render us a curse to our country.

I write not thus to promote dismay. I have never for a moment been the subject of such a feeling, but to cut up, as far as may be, self-righteous hope, and to excite that humble and holy trembling which becomes sinful creatures, whether in respect to this world, or that which is to come.

THE PROPER AND IMPROPER USE OF TERMS.

NOTWITHSTANDING the number of words found in every language, they are far from being equal to the number of ideas in the human mind. Hence it is that one and the same term has a variety of meanings; hence also arises the distinction between the proper and improper, the literal and figurative, use of terms. The word אֲבִיב, *abib*, the first in the Hebrew lexicon, signifies, (1.) *verdure*, or greenness, Job viii. 12: (2.) an ear of corn on its first appearance, being then of a *green* colour, Lev. ii. 14: (3.) a month in the Jewish year, falling some where about March or April, when corn in that country had begun to *ear*.

Here we see the progress of language, and the causes of different ideas being affixed to the same term. When a name is wanted to express an idea, men do not think of making a new one; but call it by something already known, to which it bears a *resemblance*; and as this resemblance is frequently confined to one leading property, and sometimes to one that is not so, it hence comes to pass that the more objects a term is applied to, the further it commonly advances from the original idea. In mentioning the month Abib, for example, a Jew would think nothing of *greenness* or *verdure*, which is its true and primary meaning; but merely of the time of his forefathers coming out of Egypt, and of the institution of the passover. Yet, in arguments from the meaning of Scripture terms, it becomes us to ascertain the true, primitive, or proper sense, and to measure all secondary and figurative applications by it as a standard. It appears to me that many important errors have been introduced and defended for want of attending to this rule, which is dictated by common sense. Instead of defining a term according to its proper and primary meaning, and resting nothing upon its secondary or figurative applications, any further than they accord with it, the reverse has been the practice. The proper meaning has been made to give way to the figurative, rather than the figurative to the proper.

EXAMPLES.

1. *The Universalist*, finding the terms used to express the duration of future punishment frequently applied to things which *have an end*, endeavours from thence to set aside the evidence of its eternity. That is, he grounds his argument on the secondary and figurative application of terms, to the setting aside of that which is primary or proper. Thus *αἰών*, though its proper meaning is *always being*, is made to mean no more than *age* or *ages*; and *αἰώνιος*, though it literally signifies *everlasting* or *endless*, yet is said to mean no more than *age-lasting*. Thus, instead of measuring the secondary sense of words by the primary, the primary is measured and excluded by the secondary, which goes to exclude all just reasoning and to introduce everlasting wrangling. It were just as reasonable to contend that the English word "turnpike" signifies a road made by act of parliament, though it is so called merely in a way of contraction, and because such roads have toll-gates, and such gates a turnpike for the accommodation of foot passengers.

2. *The adversaries of the doctrine of atonement* have taken the same method. "By a *sacrifice*," says Dr. Taylor, "is meant a symbolical address to God, intended to express before him the devout affections, by significant emblematical actions; and consequently, whatever is expressive of a pious and virtuous disposition may rightly be included in the idea of a sacrifice: as prayers, thanksgivings, expenses, labours, &c." It is easy to see that the *primary* notion of a sacrifice is here explained away, or lost in the crowd of secondary meanings; by which any thing may be proved or disproved, as the writer pleases.

3. Let it be dispassionately and impartially considered whether the principal objections brought against the ordinance of *baptism* being administered exclusively by *immersion* do not originate in the same cause. The word βαπτίζω, it is said, will not *always* agree with the idea of immersion. It is applied to the *effusion* of the Holy Spirit, and to some other things wherein immersion is inadmissible. Be it so; still it amounts to no more than this, That the term βαπτίζω, like almost every other term, has its secondary and figurative sense. Its *proper* and *primary* meaning is allowed, by the most learned Pædobaptists in all ages, to be that which the Antipædobaptists contend for; and this is the only meaning which ought to be called in to settle the dispute. By the contrary method, it were easy to prove that the English word immersion does not mean dipping or plunging; for if a person be very wet by rain, it is common to say he is immersed, merely because he is as wet as if he had been immersed.

To generalize the meaning of a term, in order to include its secondary or figurative senses, is the way to lose its true and proper sense; and, if applied universally, might go to undermine all the great doctrines of Christianity.

The rule of fair and just reasoning, with respect to the use of terms, as I have always understood it, is, *That every word be taken in its literal and primary sense, unless there be any thing in the connexion which requires it to be taken otherwise.* Now apply this rule to the foregoing examples, and the result will be this—

The Universalist must either deny that the proper or primary meaning of *αἰών* and *αἰώνιος* is *always being* and *eternal*; or else prove that, when these terms are applied to the duration of future punishment, *there is something in the subject which requires them to be taken, not in a proper, but improper sense.*

The adversaries of the atonement also must either set aside the proof that the proper and primary notion of a sacrifice includes in it the idea of *expia-*

tion, or show cause why this meaning should not attach to it when applied to the sacrifice of Christ.

Thus also those who object to *immersion*, as being the only proper mode of baptism, should either disprove what has been acknowledged by more than *eighty* of their most learned writers,* that the native and proper signification of the word is to dip or plunge; or show cause why it should not be taken in this sense when applied to the ordinance in question.

[The insertion of the foregoing piece in the *Theological and Biblical Magazine* called forth the animadversions of the Rev. Samuel Greathed. The remaining parts consist of replies to his objections.]

THE animadversions of your correspondent require a reply, not so much on account of what relates to baptism as to the general principle which he attempts to overturn. Mr. Greathed will give me credit that I had no unkind design against my Pædobaptist brethren; but he must excuse me in saying, if pædobaptism will keep bad company, it must take the consequences.

By "measuring the secondary and figurative application of a term by that which is proper or primary," I did not mean to suggest that the primary sense is to be invariably retained; but merely that it ought to be so, *unless there be any thing in the connexion which requires the contrary*. The primary, literal, or proper sense of a word is its true sense, and the *standard* of all others which it may bear by way of figure or allusion. My mind is sufficiently expressed by Dr. Williams. "The improper or figurative use of terms," says he, "does not alter the literal sense: otherwise the very foundation of figures and allusions would be destroyed." The rule also which I have laid down is the same as his: "It is not fair nor agreeable to the just rules of criticism," he says, "to interpret the words of an author allusively, improperly, and metaphorically, *except when plain necessity urges*."[†]

I do not deny that the figurative sense of a term may, in many cases, be equal, and even of superior importance, to the literal one. If, for instance, we were to understand the first promise, "he shall bruise thy head," of a descendant of Eve occasionally killing a serpent, the meaning would be puerile, in comparison of what it is generally, and no doubt justly, applied to. But here *the connexion requires a departure from the literal meaning*. Let the same be proved of any other term, and I acquiesce.

Your correspondent does not wish to set aside the primary meaning of a term, in favour of one that is figurative, "when it can be clearly ascertained;" but in various cases he thinks it is "very difficult to decide, of two senses, which is its primary and which its figurative meaning." I suppose he intends to say that words in a long course of time change their meaning; and that the original sense, or that which was attached to a term in the earliest usage, may be lost. There may, for aught I know, be some truth in this remark; but it does not appear to me to affect the argument. Allowing it to be so, and that what was at first only an allusive or figurative sense may have become the earliest sense with which we are acquainted, yet as all words are mere arbitrary signs of ideas, that which is the secondary sense of a term might have been its primary sense, provided it had been so applied; and if the primary sense be lost, the secondary of course may become primary. In other words, it may become by general consent the *obvious* sense of the term, there being no anterior idea excited in the mind when it is expressed. If then we can ascertain what was the *obvious* meaning of the word *at the time when the author wrote*, we thereby ascertain, to every purpose of just reasoning, what is its primary or proper meaning, and ought to abide by it

* See "*Booth's Pædobaptism Examined*," vol. i. ch. 2.

† "*Antipædobaptism Examined*," vol. ii. p. 146.

unless the connexion requires a different one. If this cannot be ascertained, there is no certain conclusion to be drawn from the word, any more than from "selah" in the Psalms, and we ought to rest no argument upon it.

With respect to the notion of the Universalists, which is chiefly founded upon the supposed ambiguity of the terms *αἰών* and *αἰώνιος*, your correspondent half concedes to them that these terms might originally express only a limited duration. He cannot decide, as it would seem, whether they were "primarily used of visible or invisible objects." At least, he does not choose to rest his opposition to that system upon such a ground. Yet every lexicographer that I have seen makes no scruple of asserting that the *proper* meaning of *αἰών* is *always being*, or *eternity*; and of *αἰώνιος*, *everlasting*, or *endless*. It is an opinion, I am aware, which has been advanced by great authorities, that terms which now signify spiritual and invisible objects were originally applied to those which are sensible and visible. But however true this may be in many cases, it will not hold good in all.

Mr. Locke, in what he says on this subject,* argues as if he thought language to have been a human invention, and that men learned it by slow degrees; whereas it was manifestly concreated with man from the beginning. We might as well argue from the gradual progress of strength and knowledge in an infant that Adam must have been created a child, and have grown in wisdom and stature as we do, as that all the names by which he expressed spiritual and invisible objects were first applied to those which are sensible and visible. On this principle we must either suppose him to have had no ideas of his Creator, of his own immortality, or of endless life; or, if he had, that he had no terms by which to express them. But neither of these suppositions will consist with the important station which he occupied, or the account which is given of his communion with JEHOVAH ELOHIM. To what visible or sensible object, I ask, could the names of the everlasting God be applied, before they were applied to him?

Mr. Greatheed thinks the meaning of a word "may be made perfectly clear and certain by the connexion in which it stands. For example: when the word *everlasting* is applied to God, it always signifies *without end*; when applied to a hill, it can only mean of long duration." To the same purpose says the Universalist, "Where a word is used in relation to different things, the subject itself must determine the meaning of the word." Whether the absurdity of this position has not been proved beyond all reasonable contradiction in my sixth letter to Mr. Vidler, and in the seventh and eleventh letters of Mr. Jerram's Review,† the reader of those pamphlets will easily determine.

If *αἰών* and *αἰώνιος*, with their corresponding words in Hebrew, be allowed to have been originally applied to limited duration, and this to be their *proper* meaning, I acknowledge myself unable to prove, *from the use of these terms*, the doctrine of eternal punishment or of eternal happiness, or even of the eternal existence of God. I might conclude, indeed, with Mr. Greatheed, that *everlasting*, as applied to God, plainly signifies *without end*. This, however, would not be proving the eternity of God from the word *everlasting* being applied to him; but merely that *everlasting* in this case means *endless* because of its being applied to God, whom we know, *from other sources of evidence*, to be eternal. Thus the terms by which *endless* duration is commonly expressed in the Scriptures are reduced to silence, proving nothing but what can be proved by the subject without them.

Your correspondent thinks that "when the term *everlasting* is applied both to the states of the righteous and the wicked, after the day of judgment,

* *Essay on Understanding*, book iii. chap. i.

† *Letters to a Universalist*.

nothing but the most inveterate prejudice can interpret it in different senses." Allowing this to be a solid argument, it only proves that the doctrine may be defended from other sources of evidence as well as from the proper meaning of the term; but it is giving up the argument from that source. It is allowing that the term everlasting stands for nothing, unless *you* can prove from the connexion that it must mean endless; whereas, by the other mode of reasoning, the word itself, wherever it occurs, establishes the doctrine, unless *they* can prove from the connexion that the proper sense is inadmissible. But further, the above is only *argumentum ad hominem*, which is adapted to silence an opposer rather than convince him. I do not say it is unfair reasoning with persons who hold the eternity of future rewards; but Universalists, rather than admit of eternal punishment, will call this in question. This is actually done by Mr. Vidler;* and if we concede with your correspondent that the word *αἰώτος* itself proves nothing, I acknowledge that I do not perceive how the doctrine of endless punishment, or of endless rewards, is to be maintained from Matt. xxv. 46. We must, as far as I see, relinquish that important post, and fly to some other source of evidence. We may assert that "the term being applied to the states of the righteous and the wicked *after the day of judgment* requires it to be taken in the sense of endless; but we should be told this is begging the question; the very point at issue being whether every thing that takes place after the day of judgment be endless.

Respecting *baptism*, your correspondent "willingly admits that I might introduce that topic for no other reason than that it appeared to me an apt illustration of the rule I was endeavouring to establish for the interpretation of Scripture, and hopes that I shall as readily give him credit for a proper motive in entering a protest against such an application of my principle." As to *motives*, I had no other than a desire to ascertain what is truth; and I give him credit that such is his. But why must not the principle in question be applied to pædobaptism as well as other things? He does not mean to suggest, I presume, that this subject is exempted from examination by the courtesy of the country. If the principle be false, or misapplied, I hope we shall be able to discover the fallacy, or wherein the misapplication consists.

Mr. Greatheed calls in question two things: (1.) Whether the word βαπτίζω primarily signifies to immerse. (2.) If it do, whether this be the *only* meaning that ought to be called in to settle the dispute. With respect to the former, my assertion may, as he observes, be "too comprehensive to be supported by due evidence in your publication." I was aware of this at the time, and therefore referred to Mr. Booth's "Pædobaptism Examined," vol. i. chap. 2, where no fewer than *eighty-two* of the most learned Pædobaptists acknowledge the *native, primary, or proper* meaning of the word to be *IMMERSION*. Your correspondent, in answer, refers to Dr. Williams's "Anti-pædobaptism Examined;" and I in reply may refer to Mr. Booth's "Defence." The reader who wishes to examine this subject to the bottom will find, I presume, in these three performances all that is necessary for the purpose.

Your correspondent asks, in the second place, "if the primary meaning of the word βαπτίζω were to immerse, yet why should that be the *only* meaning called in to settle the dispute." I answer—(1.) Because, as Dr. Williams says, "It is not fair, nor agreeable to the just rules of criticism, to interpret the words of an author allusively, improperly, and metaphorically, *except when plain necessity urges.*" Let it but be proved that plain necessity urges the proper meaning of βαπτίζω, when applied to the ordinance of

* *Letters to Mr. Fuller*, p. 95.

baptism, to be given up in favour of one that is improper, and I consent to call it in. (2.) Because, as Mr. Greatheed himself allows, "the primitive sense of a term, *when it can clearly be ascertained*, ought not to be accommodated to any of its figurative applications;" and that it can easily be ascertained in this case is granted in the supposition. All secondary and figurative meanings, therefore, by his own concession, ought to be excluded in the settling of this controversy.

But your correspondent supposes that though the word βαπτίζω should be allowed primarily to mean immersion, yet a secondary or improper sense of the term might be that on which the primitive Christians acted. "Wherefore is it impossible, he asks, that the first Christians should have used the term with as little idea of immersion, even had that been its primary sense, as the Jews had of *greenness*, when they spoke of the month Abib?"—Nothing that I have advanced supposes this to be "impossible." But it lies upon my friendly opponent to prove that *it must have been so*; otherwise, according to Dr. Williams's and his own acknowledgment, it is "unfair, and contrary to the just rules of criticism," to suppose this to have been the case. I can prove that when the term *abib* is applied to a month *it must needs be taken in a figurative sense*, as it would involve an absurdity to translate it as in Job viii. 12, by the abstract term *greenness*. Let him prove the same *necessity* for affixing a figurative meaning to βαπτίζω, and his point is gained.

Mr. Greatheed goes further: he affirms that "when the term βαπτίζω is specifically used for the initiatory ordinance of the gospel dispensation its application *must be admitted to be figurative*." Indeed! But wherefore? If instead of this assertion, which appears to me to be utterly unfounded, he had given evidence of it, it had been to purpose. Let him but *prove* that the word, when applied to baptism, *requires* to be understood in a secondary or improper sense, or that to understand it properly would involve an absurdity; and, I say again, his point is gained. If he succeed in proving this, however, he will disprove what he says he has "long since been led to apprehend—that its primary meaning is not immersion." I suppose he means *ablution*; for if the primary meaning of βαπτίζω be *ablution*, and baptism were originally administered by immersion, the term, with respect to that ordinance, must have been applied in its literal, and not in a figurative sense.

Your correspondent intimates that some things in my last tended to "provoke asperity." Nothing was further from my design; but if, by what I considered a stroke or two of pleasantry, I have excited any such feelings, I sincerely beg his pardon, and will endeavour to avoid every thing of the kind in future. It never was my intention to rank Pædobaptists with Universalists or Socinians, in the manner which his note represents; but merely to point out their agreement *in one principle of reasoning*; and I should think, notwithstanding his assertion, he would be sorry to be put to the proof of it.

With respect to the principle of interpretation, he thinks, "nothing more is necessary than to bring into *one point of view* the variations in my manner of stating it." By this it would seem that I have shifted my ground, and in effect conceded the matter in dispute. At first, my statement was thus expressed: "In arguments from the meaning of Scripture terms, it becomes of importance to ascertain the true, primitive, or proper sense, and to measure all secondary and figurative applications by it as a standard." Afterwards, it seems, I *modified* this principle, requiring only that every word be "taken in its literal, primary, or proper sense, unless there be any thing in the connexion or in the subject which *requires* it to be taken otherwise." And

lastly, I am contented with saying, "If we can ascertain what was the obvious meaning of the word *at the time when the author wrote*, we thereby ascertain, to every purpose of just reasoning, what is its primary or proper meaning." Whether any "change has occurred in my judgment on this subject, or whether we have only misunderstood each other," he does not determine; but seems to think that, as to the general principle, we are now nearly agreed.

In answer, I must say, there is no alteration in my judgment: the whole, therefore, must be attributed to misunderstanding. With respect to the *first* statement, it never entered my mind that all words are to be understood literally, or properly; but merely that the literal is the *standard* sense, or that all allusive meanings are to be measured by that to which they allude. But the answers of Mr. Greatheed proceed upon the supposition that I was pleading for the primitive sense of the term "being *invariably* adhered to." It is only on this supposition that what was afterwards said could be considered as "a modification of my principle." The truth is, I held no principle that required modifying. I never for a moment thought of maintaining any other idea than that every word should be taken in its literal, primary, or proper sense, unless there be any thing in the subject that requires it to be taken otherwise. In proof of this, I could refer to two pamphlets, of which you know that I approve; and in which this subject is more fully handled than can be expected in these papers.*

With respect to my *last* "variation," as it is called, it was merely in answer to an *exception which he had made to a general rule*, owing to the difficulty in many cases of ascertaining which is the primitive and which the figurative sense of a word. To this I answered, that where the primitive sense of a word was *lost*, or became uncertain, it was sufficient for all the purposes of just reasoning to consider the *obvious* idea conveyed by it at the time when the author wrote as its primary meaning. But this can have nothing to do with words whose primitive meaning is *not* lost, and therefore nothing to do with the present dispute. The amount of all that I have stated is this:—the primary, literal, or proper meaning of words is their standard meaning, and that which always ought to be adhered to, *unless* there be any thing in the connexion which requires a departure from it; and should a case occur in which it cannot be clearly decided what was its primitive meaning, it is sufficient to ascertain what was its obvious meaning at the time when the author wrote.†—In all this I can perceive no "variation" of judgment.

To allow of an expedient, in a particular case, is very different from adopting it as a general rule, where that case does not exist. I have contended, and do still contend, that the primitive meaning of the terms *αιωνιος* and *βαπτισμα* is not lost; that it can be "clearly ascertained;" and, consequently, that a recourse to the sense in which they are used in the New Testament, *in order to determine it*, is unnecessary, and contrary to fair reasoning. I have no doubt of what would be the issue of an impartial inquiry, even upon that ground; but there is no justice in setting the meaning of a word afloat, when the ordinary methods of decision in all cases have fixed it.

Surely my respected opponent will not deny that the proper meaning of *αιωνιος* is "clearly ascertained" to be *always being*, and that of *αιωνιος* to be *everlasting*. Is it not to be lamented, then, that he should undermine the argument against the Universalists from this ground, and endeavour to rest

* *Letters to Mr. Vidler*, Letter vi. *Scrutator's Review*, Letters vii. xi.

† Chambers, in his *Cyclopedia*, says, under the word *proper*, "In respect of words it denotes their immediate and peculiar signification, or that which is directly or peculiarly attached to them; in which sense the word stands opposed to figurative and metaphorical." And Barclay, under the word *figure*, says, "In rhetoric, any mode of speaking by which words are used in a sense different from their primary and literal meaning." MS. Note by Mr. Fuller.

the doctrine of endless punishment on the term *αιωνιος* being so "obviously used in the New Testament to denote what is strictly everlasting, that he is not aware of any instance in which the connexion requires a different sense to be admitted." Were I a Universalist, I would not wish for a fuller concession by which to overturn his principle. To give it up, as he does in effect, the original use of the term antecedently to its being adopted by the apostles, and to rest his faith upon its being *always* applied by them to unlimited duration, is in my opinion, whatever be his design, to betray the truth. A Universalist might reply as follows—You are mistaken, sir. It is obvious that *αιων*, though sometimes used in the endless sense, which we never deny, yet in other places is applied to the temporary existence of the present world, and to the *ages* and *times* of limited duration, Matt. xiii. 39; xxviii. 20; John ix. 32; Acts iii. 21; 1 Cor. ii. 7; Eph. iii. 9; Col. i. 26; Heb. i. 2. It is also obvious that *αιωνιος*, though it sometimes means eternal, yet in other places is applied, like *αιων*, to limited duration; namely, to the *ages*, or *times*, since the beginning of the world, Rom. xvi. 25; 2 Tim. i. 9; Tit. i. 2, compared with Eph. i. 4; 1 Pet. i. 20. See Parkhurst. What proof therefore is there of the endless duration of future punishment from the use of these terms, which are generic, including all degrees of duration, unlimited and limited?

To this reasoning I should reply by granting that the obvious design of these terms, in certain connexions, is to express the idea of an *age* or *ages*; but that it is not their primary, literal, or proper meaning, and therefore ought not to be applied to the duration of future punishment, *unless* there were something in that subject, as there is in the others, which rendered the literal meaning inadmissible. But how my opponent could answer the objection, upon *his principles*, it remains for him to show. To me it appears that by his method of reasoning, we should always be at sea, and without a compass; able to prove scarcely any Divine truth from the words by which it is expressed, inasmuch as almost all words are used in more senses than one. I wish he would carefully and candidly read "Scrutator's" seventh and eleventh Letters on this subject.*

Mr. Greatheed, as if to depreciate the primary sense of the term *αιωνιος*, speaks of its being "invented by the heathens," and that I cannot believe it to have been "created or revealed." I question whether any language, dead or living, can be proved to have had its origin in human invention. The account of the origin of all languages appears to be given in the eleventh chapter of Genesis; and all that men have done seems to have been to modify, compound, and change them into different forms. But whatever was the origin of this and other terms, they were adopted by the Holy Spirit as the medium of conveying Divine truth; and if the sacred writers meant to be understood, they must, one would think, have used them in the ordinary acception in which they were used by those who spoke and wrote in the Greek language. That they applied them to new objects is true; but it does not follow that they changed their meaning. In the writings of Aristotle, *αιων* properly means *always being*, no less than in the Epistles of Paul.†

"Upon the same ground," says Mr. Greatheed, "I have formed my judgment of the terms *βαπτίζω* and *βαπτισμος*. In whatever sense the heathens, who invented these terms, may have used them, it appears to me that the writers of the New Testament apply them so constantly to the signification of a *sacred cleansing*, that I am not aware of an instance in which the connexion requires a different sense to be admitted. I therefore consider this the obvious meaning of those words at the time, and in the circumstances in

* *Letters to a Universalist*, by Rev. Charles Jerram.

† *Fuller's Letters to Vidler*.

which the authors wrote." On this passage I would offer the following remarks:—

1. My worthy opponent is sufficiently aware that βαπτίζω was used originally by the Greek writers to express immersion. But they were "heathens!"* And will he affirm that the word was so applied by heathens only? Did not the Septuagint translators of the Old Testament, and Josephus, so apply it? If proofs of this be called for, they will be produced.

2. The word βαπτω, from whence βαπτίζω is derived, it will not be denied, is used in the New Testament for immersion. Thus in John xiii. 26, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have *dipped* it." Luke xvi. 24, "Send Lazarus, that he may *dip* the tip of his finger in water." Rev. xix. 13, "He was clothed with a vesture *dipped* in blood." In these sentences there is no idea of "cleansing" of any kind; and, in the last, the reverse of it.

3. Dr. Williams, to whose work Mr. Greatheed refers us, allows, and says, "*It is universally agreed among the learned that both βαπτω and βαπτίζω etymologically, and according to their radical, primary, and proper meaning, are justly rendered by the words tingo and mergo, to tinge or plunge.*"† But every one knows that to *tinge* is the opposite of to cleanse. One would think that this acknowledgment were sufficient to settle the meaning of the word. And, as Dr. Williams elsewhere says, it is "neither fair, nor agreeable to the just rules of criticism, to interpret the words of an author allusively, improperly, or metaphorically, except when plain necessity urges," it must lie on him and his brethren, before they plead for any thing short of immersion being Christian baptism, to prove that the primitive sense of the term in this instance involves an absurdity, and therefore that a secondary one requires to be admitted.

4. The term *baptism*, as applied to the sufferings of Christ, conveys a full idea of immersion, but none of "cleansing."

5. That water baptism, which is the Christian ordinance, generally includes the idea of "cleansing," may be allowed; but it is only in a secondary or consequential sense, as he that is immersed in water is thereby cleansed. *Cleansing*, in water baptism, is that which its opposite, *staining*, is in a vesture being dipped in blood; it is not the thing itself, but its necessary effect. Such is the idea conveyed in Acts xxii. 16, "Be *baptized*, and *wash* away thy sins." To render the first of these terms *cleansed*, would make the sacred writer utter a mere tautology.

"If the apostles used the term βαπτισμος merely for immersion, then, it is said, every person who has been immersed, whether for health, diversion, or punishment, is a baptized person." True, he is so, though not with *Christian* baptism.

"But if something more than simple immersion is meant, when the apostles speak of the baptism of their converts, and yet the primary and proper meaning is nothing but immersion, then the apostles used that term in a secondary or figurative sense when they applied it to the initiatory ordinance of the Christian dispensation." If there be "no flaw" in this argument, Mr. Greatheed thinks his point is gained. I think there is a flaw in it, and that it lies in confounding the *act* with the *end* or the design to be answered by it. An act, say that of *eating*, may be one and the same, *whatever be the end of it*; whether refreshment, or the showing forth of the Lord's death.

* Mr. G., in alleging "that according to my statement the Scriptures are not sufficient to determine the meaning of words, without going among the heathen," might as well have said, That the grace of God is sufficient to make a Christian, without being indebted to nature in first making him a man.

† *Antipedobaptism Examined*, vol. ii. p. 30.

Nor is the term designed to express any thing more than the act: the *design* is to be learned from other terms connected with it, and not from that. To represent different ends as giving a secondary or figurative meaning to the term which expresses the action, is what I apprehend no writer ever thought of on any other subject. At this rate, if I be said to *walk*, simply, or without an end, the term is literal; if for health, or to see a friend, it becomes figurative; and if to meditate and pray, like Isaac, it becomes still more figurative! The truth is, if I be not greatly mistaken, to baptize, to eat, or to walk, is each expressive of the action, *whatever be the end*; and the term is no less literally used in the one case than in the other.

The last argument of Mr. Greatheed's proceeds upon a principle which should not have been taken for granted; namely, that *βαπτισμος* signifies *any sacred cleansing*. The divers baptisms among the Jews (to which the word *βαπτισμος*, by the way, is applied, rather than to the Christian ordinance) may relate not to divers *modes* of baptizing, but to the divers *cases* in which persons and things were required to be immersed in water, and which cases were numerous and diverse. Thus, or to this effect, it is expressed by Grotius. Were I to speak of *divers* journeys, which my worthy friend has undertaken, to promote the interest of evangelical religion, it would indeed imply some kind of difference between them; but it were putting an unnatural force upon the words to understand them as intimating that in every journey he adopted a different *mode* of travelling.

THE IMMACULATE LIFE OF CHRIST.

THE character and work of Christ form a very considerable part of the gospel embassy. The attention of Christians in all ages has been deservedly drawn towards this important subject. His Godhead, his manhood, his miraculous conception, his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession at the right hand of God, are topics each of them full of the richest consolation to believers. There is nothing pertaining to Christ which is uninteresting. It has lately struck my mind that the immaculate life of Christ is a subject that has not been insisted on, in our sermons and bodies of divinity, in proportion to its importance in the evangelical scheme. The thoughts which I have to offer upon this subject will be contained in *two parts*. In the first, I shall take a view of the evidences with which it is supported; and, in the second, consider its connexion with the truth of Christianity, and some of its leading principles.

THE EVIDENCES by which the immaculate life of our Lord Jesus Christ is supported are as follows:—

First, *His friends, who knew the most of him, and who wrote his life, describe him as without fault*. The characters of men are often best esteemed by those who know the least of them. Like works of art, they will not bear a close inspection; but those who were most conversant with Jesus beheld his glory, and loved him best. Peter tells us, "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." He describes him as "a lamb without spot." Paul speaks of him as being "made sin for us, who knew no sin." John teaches that "he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him was no sin:" and the whole company of the disciples, in their address to God, speak of him as his "holy child Jesus," Acts iv. 27. It is true, some of the evangelists do not make express mention of his perfect innocence; but they all write his life as faultless. There is not a shade of imperfection that attaches

to his character, from the beginning to the end of their accounts of him. This evidence derives peculiar weight from the evident impartiality of those writers in other cases; they do not hide each other's faults, nor even their own. The imperfections of the apostles, during Christ's life upon earth, were numerous, and, in some cases, affecting; yet they narrate them with the greatest sincerity. Even those faults which are most degrading to dignity of character, and the most mortifying to reflect upon, they never affect to conceal. They tell of their little foolish contests for superiority, of their carnality in desiring an earthly kingdom, and of their cowardice in forsaking their Lord and Master in the hour of extremity; but never do they suggest any thing to *his* disadvantage.

Secondly, *His worst enemies have never been able to substantiate a single charge against him.* Though our friends have the greatest advantages of knowing us, yet it may be alleged that they are partial, and that the scrutiny of an adversary is most likely to discover our imperfections. Be it so; it is to the glory of Christ's character that it will bear the test of both. A public challenge was given to the Jews, his most inveterate enemies, to accuse him of sin (John viii. 46); and not one of them dared to accept it. That which adds peculiar weight to this evidence is the circumstance that Christ had just before inveighed against them with the keenest severity: "Ye are of your father the devil," said he, "and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a liar from the beginning;" and, "because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not." Under such charges from him, if there had been any shadow of a ground for accusation, they would most certainly have seized it. The apostles gave nearly a similar challenge on behalf of their Lord, as he had given for himself. They taxed their countrymen with having "denied the Holy One and the Just, and preferred a murderer before him." How are we to account for the silence of these adversaries? It was not for want of will; it must, therefore, be for want of power.

But there were some who, in the lifetime of Jesus, did accuse him. They said, "He is a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." They insinuated that he was *ambitious*. Jesus having declared, saying, "I am the light of the world," they answered, "Thou bearest record of thyself, thy record is not true;" and the same objection is repeated by a modern Jewish writer.* They also charged him with blasphemy, in that he, being a man, made himself God; and for this supposed blasphemy they put him to death. To the former part of these charges it may be answered, that they who preferred them do not appear to have believed them; if they had, they would have made use of them, especially when challenged to *accuse* our Lord of sin. As to the latter part of them, I acknowledge, were I to embrace any system of Christianity which leaves out the proper Deity of Christ, I should be unable to vindicate him. Either his words did mean what the Jews understood him to mean, or they did not. If they did, upon every hypothesis which excludes his proper Deity, he was a blasphemer; if they did not, he ought explicitly, and with abhorrence, to have rejected the idea of making himself God;—but if I admit that he really was *God manifest in the flesh*, all these objections fall to the ground.

It is worthy of notice that modern unbelievers are not very eager to attack the moral character of Christ. Through all their writings, full of railing accusations on every other subject, one cannot but remark a cautious reserve upon this. Mr. Paine, who in a talent of the highest importance to the cause of infidelity—I mean impudence—has had but few equals, even Mr. Paine declines this part of the business. Amidst all his rancour against

* Mr. Levi.

revelation, he seems disposed to follow the advice of Pilate's wife, to "have nothing to do with that just man." "Nothing," he observes in his 'Age of Reason,' "which is here said, can apply even with the most distant disrespect to the *real* character of Jesus Christ. He was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practised was of the most benevolent kind." Whether Mr. Paine can consistently with these concessions, reject the evangelical history, we shall by and by inquire; suffice it at present to observe, that though he disowns Jesus to be the Son of God, yet he ranks among the witnesses in favour of his moral character. But can it be true, we may be tempted to ask, that Mr. Paine, that determined adversary to Christianity, should have made such a concession in favour of Christ? "*Is Saul also among the prophets?*" It is even so; nor let it appear a matter of surprise; the father of lies himself was constrained to unite in this truth: "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God."

Thirdly, *Christ himself, who best knew his own heart, and who was never known to boast, bore witness of himself that he was free from sin.* Not only did he challenge his most inveterate enemies, saying, "Which of you accuseth me of sin?" but declared, what no other man did or could, that he always did those things which pleased God, that there was "no unrighteousness in him;" that when the prince of this world should come he should "find nothing in him;" and that he was "meek and lowly in heart," a perfect model for his followers to imitate, and into whose *image* they were predestinated to be conformed. If it be objected, in the words of the ancient Jews, "He beareth record of himself, his record is not true," it might be answered in the words of Jesus, "Though he bare record of himself, yet his record is true; for he knew whence and what he was;" and as he was never known to deal in empty boasting, his testimony has great weight.

Fourthly, *The temptations that our Lord underwent, instead of drawing him aside, displayed his character to greater advantage.* Seasons of temptation in the lives of men, even of good men, are commonly dark seasons, and leave behind them sad evidences of their imperfection. It was not without reason that our Lord cautioned us to pray, saying, "Lead us not into temptation." There are but few, if any instances, in which we enter the field of contest and come off without a wound; but, to our Redeemer, temptation was the pathway to glory. There was nothing in him on which it could fasten; its arrows, therefore, rebounded upon the head of the tempter. "In all points he was tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He underwent the trials of poverty and want. He was often hungry and thirsty, and "had not where to lay his head;" yet he bore it without repining; he wrought miracles to satisfy the wants and alleviate the miseries of others; but for himself, strictly speaking, he wrought no miracle. It was upon this ground that Satan first accosted him: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread:" q. d.—Would I, having all creation at command, know the want of a piece of bread?—But this temptation was repelled in a manner that discovered his heart to be wholly devoted to the will of God. Our Lord had also temptations of another kind; he had worldly honours offered him. Not only did Satan present to him "all the kingdoms of the world," but the Jewish populace would have *made him a king, even by force*, if he had not withdrawn himself. If Jesus had possessed the least degree of worldly ambition, there were arguments enough to have induced him to comply with the popular desire. They had no king but Cæsar, and he was a tyrannic invader, who had just as much right in Judea as the empress of Russia and the king of Prussia in Poland. If the virtue of Jesus had resembled that of the great sages of Grecian and Roman antiquity, he would have embraced this opportunity, and his name

might have been enrolled in the annals of fame. Their pride was to be patriots; but that which they called patriotism was abhorrent to the spirit of Christ. He possessed too much philanthropy to enter into national prejudices and antipathies: though the deliverance of his country from the Roman yoke might have been doing a great national justice, and, in this view, very lawful for some persons to have undertaken, yet he declined it; for it made no part of that all-important design for which he came into the world. He was *doing a great work, and therefore could not come down.*

As his last sufferings drew on, his devotedness to God, and his disinterested love to men, appeared more and more conspicuous. He incurred the displeasure of the Samaritans by *steadfastly setting his face to go up to Jerusalem*, even though he knew what would follow upon it. Under the prospect of his sufferings he prayed, saying, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Never, surely, was such a flood of tenderness poured forth as that which follows in his last discourse to his disciples, and in his concluding prayer for them. Follow him to the Jewish and Roman tribunals, and witness his meekness and patience. "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously.—He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." There are two kinds of characters which are common among men,—oppressive tyrants, and cringing sycophants. The first are lords, the last are slaves; but the character given of Christ shows that he was neither the one nor the other. "He did no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." Though the Lord and Master of his disciples, he was among them as their servant; and when brought before Herod and Pilate, he betrayed no signs of fear; but amidst their blustering, imperious, and scornful treatment, maintained a dignified silence.

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." Throughout his sufferings he manifested the tenderest concern for sinners, and even for his murderers. "The same night in which he was betrayed" he was employed in providing for us, by instituting the sacred supper; and as he hung upon the cross, and beheld his enemies, he prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!"

Let not fastidious infidelity object to his want of *fortitude* in the garden; or rather, let it object, and make the most it can of the objection. It is true "his soul was troubled;" it is true he prayed, saying, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" That is, he discovered what, among men of the most refined sense, are always accounted "the amiable weaknesses of human nature." Is it an honour under affliction to carry it off, or affect to carry it off, with a high hand? Rather, is it not an honour to feel the hand of God in it, and to acknowledge that we feel it? And if, amidst these feelings, we be in "subjection to the Father of spirits"—if, while we mourn, we do not murmur—this is the highest degree of perfection of which human nature is capable. Such was the spirit of our Redeemer, and such the conclusion of his prayer in the garden: "Not my will, but thine be done."

That our blessed Lord was not deficient in *real* fortitude is manifest from his conduct during his trial and crucifixion. He feared God, and put up strong cries, and was heard in that he feared; but he feared not men. There his spirit shrunk under the weight; but here he is firm as a rock. The principal engines with which he was attacked from men were *pain* and *disgrace*. By the former they deprived him of life, and by the latter they hoped to wound his reputation, and cover his name with eternal infamy; but neither the one nor the other could divert him from his course: "He endured the

cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

By the misgivings of Christ's human nature in the garden, together with his firmness before men, we are furnished with very important instructions. From thence we learn that the most dreadful parts of his sufferings were not those which proceeded from men, but those which came immediately from the hand of God. This agrees with what is implied in that pathetic exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He could have borne the rest, but this was worse than death! How can this agree with any other idea of the death of Christ than that of his being a substitute for sinners? Upon no other principle can his agony in the garden, or his exclamation upon the cross, be fairly accounted for. From hence also we learn the absolute necessity of Christ's death for our salvation. If it had been possible for the great designs of mercy to have been accomplished without his being made a propitiation for our sins, there is every reason to suppose that his request for an exemption would have been granted.

IN a former paper I considered the *evidences* of the immaculate life of Christ; in this I shall inquire into its *importance*, as it stands connected with the truth of Christianity itself, and of some of its most interesting branches.

First, *If the life of our Lord Jesus Christ was immaculate, it must go a great way towards proving the truth of the gospel which he taught, and of that religion which he inculcated.* If Jesus Christ was "a virtuous and an amiable man," as Mr. Paine himself acknowledges, he must have been what he professed to be—the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. To allege, as this writer does, that "Christ wrote no account of himself—that the history of him is altogether the work of other people," is mere trifling. If the history that is written of him is undeserving of credit, how came Mr. Paine to know any thing about either the amiableness of his character, or the excellence of that morality which he preached and practised? He knows nothing of either the one or the other but through the medium of the evangelical history; and if he admit this history in one case, with what consistency can he reject it in another?

Mr. Paine affects to rank Christianity with other religions—with heathenism and Mahomedism, calling the New Testament writers "The Christian mythologists;" but what founder or teacher of any religion will he resort to whose character will bear any comparison with that of Christ? Among the sages of antiquity, or the teachers of what is called the *religion of nature*, there is not one to be found whose life will bear a thorough scrutiny. Natural religion itself must be ashamed of its advocates; and as to Mahomet, there is scarcely any thing in his character but a combination of ambition, brutality, and lust, at the sight of which nature itself revolts. "Go," says an eloquent writer, "to your natural religion; lay before her Mahomet and his disciples, arrayed in armour of blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands and ten thousands, who fell by his victorious sword. Show her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravished and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirements. Show her the prophet's chambers, his concubines, and his wives, let her see his adultery, and hear him allege revelation and his Divine commission to justify his lust and his oppression. When she is tired of this prospect, then show her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and the perverse. Let her see him in

his most retired privacies. Let her follow him to the mount, and hear his devotions and supplications to God: Carry her to his table, to view his poor fare, and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her see him injured, not provoked. Let her attend him to the tribunal, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoff and the reproach of his enemies. Lead her to the cross, and let her view him in the agonies of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!'

"When natural religion has viewed both, ask which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already had, when she saw part of this scene through the eyes of the centurion who attended at his cross; by him she spoke, and said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'"*

To admit the amiableness of Christ's moral character, and yet reject the evangelical history of him, is choosing a very untenable ground. The history which the evangelists have given of Christ evinces its own authenticity. A character so drawn is a proof of its having really existed, and of those who drew it possessing a mind congenial with it. If Christ had not been that immaculate character which they represent, they could not have so described him. It is not in the power of man to invent any thing like it; the imagination of impostors, especially, would have been utterly unequal to the task; such a picture could not have been drawn without an original corresponding with it. Writers of fiction have often produced wonderful characters; they have emblazoned their heroes with extraordinary charms, but they are charms of a different kind from what Jesus possessed. The beauties of holiness are not to be collected, in the manner in which the sacred writers have collected them, by the power of imagination; and as the existence of the picture implies the reality of the original, so also it proves the congeniality of mind possessed by those who drew it. Let the moral character of Christ have been ever so fair, a set of impostors could not possibly have drawn it in the manner in which it is drawn; for this, it was necessary that it should be not only observed, but felt, and loved, and imitated. If Judas had written a history of Christ, it would have been a very different one from those which are transmitted to us, even though it had been of a piece with his confession, "I have betrayed innocent blood."

I am not inclined to call Mr. Paine, what he calls the sacred writers, either *fool* or *liar*; but methinks it were no great labour to prove him to be both. It certainly was no mark of *wisdom* in him to acknowledge Christ to be "an amiable character, and that he taught and practised morality of the most benevolent kind," in an attempt to overturn Christianity; and the flagrant manner in which he has *belied* the sacred writers must be manifest to every one that is in the least acquainted with them, and will take the trouble to compare them with what he has asserted concerning them.

Secondly, From the purity of Christ's character arises an important part of his fitness for his undertaking; without this he could not have been a *Priest*, a *sacrifice*, or a *Mediator*. It was necessary that the priests of Aaron's order should be "without blemish," and their sacrifices "without spot," Lev. xxi. 21; Numb. xxvii. 3, 9, 11. This purity, it is true, was of a ceremonial kind, but it was typical of that which was moral; for in reference to this it is said of Christ, that "such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless undefiled, and separate from sinners.—We are redeemed, not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.—He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." The priests under the law were but ceremonially clean; they needed "daily to

* *Bishop Sherlock's Sermons*, vol. I. pp. 270, 271.

offer up sacrifices, first for their own sins, and then for the people's:" but Christ "offered himself once without spot to God," and thereby "perfected for ever them that are sanctified." A polluted being might endure the demerit of sin, as the ungodly actually will; but he cannot make atonement for it, so as to "make an end" of it. The world might have borne its own iniquity, but it is the "Lamb of God" only that can "bear it away." And as it was an important part of the priestly office to mediate, and make intercession for the people, so Christ is our Mediator and Intercessor before the throne: "With his blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." This mediation is founded upon his sacrifice: and the acceptableness of the former depends upon his spotless purity equally with the latter. A mediator could in no case be admitted to plead in behalf of a criminal, unless he himself were innocent. Had Moses been guilty of idolatry at Horeb, he could not have mediated on behalf of Israel. Our "Advocate with the Father is Jesus Christ the righteous." Though he mingled with sinners, yet he must be holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from them; and though he pleaded for sinners, yet he must not extenuate their sin, but condemn it without reserve, and justify the righteous government of God, by which it was threatened with destruction. It was on this account that the mediation of Christ was so highly acceptable to God, and so gloriously successful, that he gave him the desire of his heart. "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

Thirdly, From the spotless purity of Christ's character arises his fitness to be the great *Exemplar* after which we should be formed, and which it should be our daily practice to imitate. God hath "predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son." Jesus saith to the weary and heavy laden, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." One great object of the Holy Spirit is to "glorify Christ;" and this he doth, not only by "receiving of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us;" but by working, as I may say, by his spotless life as a model, and forming our souls into a resemblance of it. And as the Holy Spirit "glorifieth Christ" in his operations upon us, so also must we glorify him by voluntarily copying after his example.

The nature of man is such that he requires an example before his eyes. We all feel a strong propensity to imitation. Hence the danger of evil, and the benefit of good company; and hence the superior effect of example, in ministers and heads of families, to mere precept. But where shall a suitable example be found? God is too much above us: our weak souls cannot look steadfastly at his glory. With angels we have but little or no acquaintance; and men, even the best of them, are stained with imperfections, which it would be dangerous to imitate. If we had been predestinated to be conformed to the image of the best merely human character, we should never "appear faultless before the presence of the Divine glory." Whatever imperfections attend us in the present state, we require a perfect model, otherwise we shall never attain perfection in any state. The example of Christ is the only one that is adapted to our circumstances. In his face the glory of God is seen, without the eye of the mind being dazzled with its overwhelming lustre. In his character there is every thing to love, and in conforming to it nothing to fear. Happy are the men who are found "followers of the Lamb whithersoever he goeth!"

THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

THE DEITY OF CHRIST ESSENTIAL TO ATONEMENT.

THE doctrine of atonement by the death of Christ is one of the great and distinguishing principles of the gospel, and its importance is acknowledged by most denominations of professing Christians: yet there are some who suppose that this doctrine is not necessarily connected with the Divinity of Christ; and, indeed, that it is inconsistent with it. It has been objected, that according to the Scriptures it was the *person* of Christ that suffered; but that this is inconsistent with his Divinity, because Divinity could not suffer. To which it may be answered, that though the *person* of Christ suffered, yet that he suffered in *all that pertains to his person* is quite another thing. A great and virtuous character among men might suffer death by the axe or the guillotine, and this would be suffering death in his person; and yet he might not suffer in his honour or in his character, and so not in all that pertained to him. A Christian might suffer martyrdom in his body, and yet his soul be very happy. To object, therefore, that Christ did not suffer in his person, because all that pertained to him was not the immediate seat of suffering, is reasoning very inconclusively. It is sufficient if Christ suffered in that part of his person which was susceptible of suffering.

It has been objected, that, as humanity only is capable of suffering, therefore humanity only is necessary to make atonement. But this objection proceeds upon the supposition that the value of atonement arises simply from suffering, and not from the character or dignity of him who suffers; whereas the Scripture places it in the latter, and not the former. "The blood of Jesus Christ, *his Son*, cleanseth us from all sin."—He, "*by himself*, hath purged our sins."—Some, who have allowed sin to be an infinite evil, and deserving of endless punishment, have objected to the necessity of an infinite atonement, by alleging that the question is not what sin *deserves*, but what God *requires* in order to exalt the dignity of his government, while he displays the riches of his grace in the forgiveness of sin. But this objection implies that it would be consistent with the Divine perfections to admit, not only what is equivalent to the actual punishment of the sinner, but of what is *not* equivalent; and, if so, what good reason can be given why God might not have entirely dispensed with a satisfaction, and pardoned sinners without any atonement? On this principle the atonement of Christ would be resolved into mere sovereign appointment, and the *necessity* of it would be wholly given up. But, if so, there was nothing *required* in the nature of things to exalt the dignity of the Divine government, whilst he displayed the riches of his grace; and it could not with propriety be said that "*it became* Him, for whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

If God required less than the real demerit of sin for an atonement, then there could be no *satisfaction* made to Divine justice by such an atonement. And though it would be improper to represent the great work of redemption as a kind of commercial transaction betwixt a creditor and his debtor, yet the satisfaction of justice in all cases of offence requires *that there be an expression of the displeasure of the offended, against the conduct of the offender, equal to what the nature of the offence is in reality*. The end of punishment is not the misery of the offender, but the general good. Its design is to express displeasure against disobedience; and where punishment is inflicted according to the desert of the offence, there justice is satisfied. In other

words, such an expression of displeasure is uttered by the Lawgiver, that, in it, every subject of his empire may read what are his views of the evil which he forbids, and what are his determinations in regard to its punishment. If sinners had received in their own persons the reward of their iniquity, justice would in that way have been satisfied; and if the infinitely blessed God, "whose ways are higher than our ways, and whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts," has devised an expedient for our salvation, though he may not confine himself to a *literal* conformity to those rules of justice which he has marked out for us, yet he will be certain not to depart from the *spirit* of them. Justice must be satisfied even in that way. An atonement made by a substitute, in any case, requires that the *same end* be answered as if the guilty party had actually suffered. It is necessary that the displeasure of the offended should be expressed in as strong terms, or in a way adapted to make as strong an impression upon all concerned, as if the law had taken its course; otherwise *atonement* is not made, and mercy triumphs at the expense of righteousness.

Let it be inquired then whether *this great end* of moral government could have been answered by the sufferings of a mere creature. Some who deny the Divinity of Christ appear to be apprehensive that it could not, and have therefore supposed that God, in order, it should seem, to bring it within the compass of a creature's grasp, required less of his Son than our sins deserved. It is true, indeed, if Christ be only a creature, it must be less, infinitely less, that was accepted, than what was strictly deserved. In the atonement of Christ, God is said to have "*set him forth* to be a propitiation—to *declare his righteousness* for the remission of sins." Now this, as well as the nature of things, implies that one who makes an atonement must be of so much account in the scale of being as to *attract the general attention*. But the sufferings of a mere man, whose obedience could be no more than duty, or whose humiliation contained in it no condescension below the place that became him, would be no more adapted to excite the general attention of the intelligent creation than the sufferings of an insect would be to attract the attention of a nation. It were as rational to talk of the king of Great Britain setting forth a worm tortured on the point of a needle, to *declare* his regard to righteousness, while he pardoned the deluded votaries of the Pretender, as to talk of a mere creature being set forth as a propitiation for the *DECLARATION* of the righteousness of God in the remission of human guilt.

To suppose, because humanity only is capable of suffering, that therefore humanity only is necessary to make atonement, is to render *dignity of character* of no account. When Zaleucus, one of the Grecian kings, had made a law against adultery, that whosoever was guilty of this crime should lose both his eyes, his own son is said to have been the first transgressor. To preserve the honour of the law, and at the same time to save his own son from total blindness, the father had recourse to an expedient of losing one of his own eyes, and his son one of his. This expedient, though it did not conform to the letter of the law, yet was well adapted to preserve the spirit of it, as it served to evince to the nation the determination of the king to punish adultery, as much, perhaps more than if the sentence had literally been put into execution against the offender. But if instead of this he had appointed that one eye of an animal should be put out, in order to save that of his son, or if a common subject had offered to lose an eye, would either have answered the purpose? The animal, and the subject, were each possessed of an eye, as well as the sovereign. It might be added, too, that it was mere bodily pain; and, seeing it was in the body only that this penalty could be endured, any being that possessed a body would be equally capable

of enduring it. True, they might endure it, but would their suffering have answered the same end? Would it have satisfied justice? Would it have had the same effect upon the nation, or tended equally to restore the tone of injured authority?

Some have placed all the virtue of the atonement in the *appointment* of God. But, if so, why was it "*not possible* that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin?" It does not accord with the Divine proceedings to be prodigal of blood, especially in a superior character, where one far inferior might answer the same end. When, in order to try Abraham, Isaac was bound, and ready to be sacrificed, a lamb was found for a burnt-offering; and if any gift from the Divine Father, short of that of his only begotten Son, would have answered the great purposes of moral government, there is no reason to think that he would have made him a sacrifice, but would have *spared him*, and not *freely* have "delivered him up for us all."

It has been objected, against the necessity of Christ's being a Divine person in order to his making atonement, that, if he who makes atonement be infinite, it must needs be followed by the salvation of the whole human race. But this objection supposes that the number of the saved is to be proportioned to the ability of the Saviour; and then it would seem that Christ being a mere man, he saved all that his finite merit would extend to. With just as much propriety might it be alleged that the power by which we were created could not be infinite; for if it had, there must then have been an infinite number of worlds in existence. And the wisdom and goodness by which we are saved cannot be infinite; for, if so, all the world, and the fallen angels too, would be interested in that salvation.

In short, the Deity and atonement of Christ have always, among thinking people, stood or fallen together; and with them almost every other important doctrine of the gospel. The person of Christ is the foundation-stone on which the church is built. An error, therefore, on this subject affects the whole of our preaching, and the whole of our religion. In the esteem of the apostle Paul, that which nullified *the death of Christ* was accounted to be *another gospel*; and he expressed his wish that those who propagated it, and so troubled the churches, were *cut off*. The principle maintained by the Galatians, it is true, did not consist in a denial of the Deity of Christ; but the consequence is the same. They taught that justification was by the works of the law, from whence the apostle justly inferred that "Christ is dead in vain." And he who teaches that Christ is a mere creature holds a doctrine which renders his sufferings of none effect. If the Deity of Christ be a Divine truth, it cannot reasonably be denied that it is of equal importance with the doctrine of justification by his righteousness. If therefore a rejection of the latter was deemed *a perversion of the gospel*, nothing less can be ascribed to the rejection of the former.

DEITY OF CHRIST ESSENTIAL TO OUR CALLING ON HIS NAME AND TRUSTING IN HIM FOR SALVATION.

THERE are some doctrines of greater importance than others, and which may properly be termed fundamental truths. Whatever difficulty may attend the specification of those doctrines, it will not be found more difficult than a distinct enumeration of those Christian graces which are essential to true religion. The precise degree of holiness necessary to salvation is not more easily to be defined than the degree of truth to be believed; yet no one can doubt that a certain degree of truth and holiness is essential to Christianity.

The importance of a principle must be determined by the relation it bears to other principles and duties of religion. Truth is a system, though it is

not taught in the Scriptures in a systematic form. The gospel is not a mass of discordant sentiments, but possesses a lovely proportion, a beautiful analogy, Rom. xii. 6. The oracles of God contain their "first principles," (Heb.) v. 12,) which suppose a scheme or system of principles. To show the importance of the doctrine of the resurrection, the apostle proceeds to prove that it involves in it the resurrection of Christ, and that this involves in it the truth of Christianity, 1 Cor. xv. 13-15. There is no part of the works of God but what bears a relation to the great system. The infinitely wise God does nothing in a loose, unconnected, or inharmonious form; connexion and consistency run through all his works. And it would be strange if redemption, the greatest of all his works, were accomplished without a plan, or without a system. But if the work itself form a complete system, just conceptions of it will be the same; otherwise our conceptions must be at variance with truth.

It is from this consideration that a denial of one Divine truth generally leads on to the denial of many others. It is by the gospel as it is by the moral law, "to offend in one point is to be guilty of all." You cannot break any command, without violating the authority of the Lawgiver; and this being once violated, there are no bounds where to stop. "He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. And if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art a transgressor of the law." The same principle which leads thee to despise the Divine authority in one instance would lead thee to do the same in all, as occasion might offer. It is much the same in reference to evangelical truth; we cannot reject one part of it, especially if that part be amongst its fundamental principles, without either rejecting or becoming less attached to the rest.

At present there are two things which offer themselves to our consideration, in reference to the Deity of Christ; each of which, while it tends to confirm the truth of the doctrine, exhibits its importance. The one is, Calling on the name of the Lord Jesus; the other is, Trusting in him for salvation. These are of importance, or there is nothing in Christianity which is so; but a denial of the Deity of Christ would render them both improper, if not impracticable.

Calling on the name of the Lord Jesus is considered, in the New Testament, as of equal importance with believing in him, having the same promise of salvation annexed to it.—"Whosoever shall *call* upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." And seeing it is asked, "How shall they *call* on him in whom they have not believed?" (Rom. x. 13, 14,) it is strongly intimated that all who truly believe in Christ do call upon him. This is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the primitive Christians. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians was addressed to them, in connexion with "all who in every place *call* upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord," 1 Cor. i. 2. Now as a rejection of the Divinity of Christ renders it idolatry to worship him, or call upon his name; so it must involve a rejection of that by which primitive Christians were distinguished, and which has the promise of salvation. And where these things are rejected, there is no longer any possibility of Christian union; for how can those who consider Christ to be a mere man join in the worship of such as are employed in calling upon his name, and ascribing "blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto the Lamb for ever?" Rev. v. 13. If there were no objection on the part of Trinitarians, there ought to be on the part of Arians and Socinians, to render their conduct consistent.* If we be guilty of idolatry, they ought to come out from

* A certain Socinian is known to have declined taking any part in the family worship of a Trinitarian, and gave this reason for it: That he could not unite with those who *call upon the name of Christ*.

amongst us, and be separate, as the Scriptures command Christians to do with respect to idolaters, 2 Cor. vi. 16, 17. But if they be so indifferent about the importance of religious principle as not to scruple such matters, there is no reason that we should be the same; and we have no warrant to acknowledge those as fellow Christians who come not under the description given of such in the New Testament; that is, who call *not* upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Trusting in Christ for salvation is represented in the gospel as equivalent, and of equal importance, with believing in him.—“In his name shall the Gentiles trust.”—“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day,” Matt. xii. 21; 2 Tim. i. 12. But trusting in Christ must be intimately connected with a belief in his proper Deity. Without this, all committing of ourselves to him, and trusting in his ability to keep that which we have committed to him, would be placing confidence in an arm of flesh; and would bring down the curse upon us, instead of the blessing. God has expressly appropriated trust to himself alone, and prohibited our placing it in a mere creature. “Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.”—“Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is,” Jer. xvii. 5, 7.

Every creature is entirely dependent on the Creator, and is totally incompetent to answer the character of a saviour, especially with respect to that salvation which mankind need. That there may exist a proper foundation for trust, the character of a saviour must unite omnipresent and omnipotent power, to control every intelligent creature, and every particle of matter in the universe, and render every thing subservient to the great purposes of salvation. Omniscient understanding to know perfectly, and at all times, their hearts, their dangers, and their wants. Infinite wisdom, to select unerringly, from an infinite number of supposable schemes, for the accomplishment of the great object, that which is best, both with respect to the end, and the infinitude of antecedent means. Absolute immutability, to prosecute invariably the same designs; and infinite love, to rise above millions of provocations, and embrace perpetually the same good.

That scheme, therefore, which denies Christ to be possessed of these Divine prerogatives, and considers him as a mere dependent creature, leaves no ground for its abettors to trust unreservedly and ultimately in him for salvation; for, according to their principles, Christ cannot be an adequate object of trust.

Those who deny the Divinity of Christ may plead that they confide in the *truth* of his declarations; but they might also confide in the declarations of Peter or Paul, seeing that their testimony is equally true. But to commit our souls into their hands would be unwarrantable and presumptuous; and it would be equally so to commit them into the hands of Christ, if he were a mere creature like them. To deny his proper Divinity, therefore, is to destroy the foundation of a sinner's hope, and to make void the distinctive evidence of primitive Christianity:—Calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus, and committing our souls into his hands for salvation.

DEFENCE OF THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

[In reply to the Rev. Henry Davis.]

YOUR correspondent H. D. seems dissatisfied with the Trinitarian doctrine of Christ's proper Deity, and wishes to substitute the indwelling scheme

in its place.—In writing the piece which occasioned his remarks, I did not once think of “Athanasius,” nor of any human writer; but simply of stating what appeared to be the mind of God in his word. Neither was it my object to prove, concerning any denomination of professing Christians, that they are not in a state of salvation; but merely that those *principles* which disown Christ’s proper Deity, be they held by whom they may, *if fully embraced so as to be acted upon*, do not consist with it.

Your correspondent asks, “How am I to conceive of this?” that is, of Christ’s proper Deity. “Am I to consider the Deity of Christ as separate and distinct from the Deity of the Father and the Holy Spirit? Is there one Deity of the Son, another of the Father, and another of the Spirit?” If he intend to ask whether the proposition, *Christ is true God*, mean any thing different from the proposition, *the Father is true God*? I answer, it certainly does. But if whether the Deity of Father, Son, and Spirit be one or more Deities, he must know that the former, and not the latter, is the avowed principle of Trinitarians. I have always supposed that Godhead is common to Father, Son, and Spirit; and that, whatever distinction there is between them, it consists not in their nature, but in their personality. Surely H. D., while he objects to the doctrine of the Athanasian Creed, must have paid but little attention to it. “There is one person of the Father,” says the writer of that Creed, “another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost; *but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one.*” As therefore he has mistaken the premises, the consequence of “a division in Deity” falls of course.

But “something like this,” he thinks, “is the case when the three persons are separately addressed in prayer.” Did not the primitive Christians *call on the name of Christ*? Did not Stephen call upon the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit? And was not this praying to him as distinct, though not as “separate,” from the Father? Yet I suppose Stephen will not be accused of making “a division in Deity.”

“It is evident that amongst common Christians there are many who, for want of time and inclination to read and examine for themselves, have no other idea of the doctrine of the Trinity than that of three Gods.” To *whom* is this evident? To me it appears that those Christians who read the least of human speculations upon this subject, and content themselves with the doctrine abundantly taught in the Scriptures, that “the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, yet that there are not three Gods, but one God,” are the least likely to err.

But, “Is not tritheism an error that ought to be guarded against as well as that of Socinianism?” The Scriptures plentifully guard us against polytheism; and if the danger of tritheism was what is here supposed, it is rather surprising that they never guard us against that. Yet so it is. The sacred writers expressly call the Father God, the Son God, and the Holy Spirit God (John i. 1; Acts v. 3, 4); yet they seem never to have thought of Christians so understanding it as to make three Gods, and therefore never guard against it. Neither is there a single caution in all the word of God against making too much of Christ, though there are many against making too little of him. The union between him and the Father appears to me to be so described in Scripture as to leave no room for dishonouring the latter, while we truly honour the former.* On the other hand, a jealousy for the honour of the Father, at the expense of that of the Son, was the error and overthrow of the Jewish nation.

The Trinitarian doctrine of the eternal Son of God, the second person in

* See Calvinistic and Socinian systems compared, Letter vii.

the Godhead, assuming human nature in the fulness of time, appears to me to be "the great mystery of godliness;" and that which ought to be received "without controversy," or curious speculations how these things are. It will not be expected that I should here enumerate the many passages by which this is supported in the New Testament; I will however mention one, which has lately struck me as possessing peculiar force. It is 1 John i. 1, 2, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of: the Word of life. For the Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal Life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."

On this passage I would remark—1. That there is a manifest resemblance between John's introduction to his Epistle and that to his Gospel, and that the same personage that is there called "The Word" is here called "The Life," and "The Word of Life."—2. That as the Word who was "with God," and who "was God," was "made flesh," and the apostles "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth;" so the "Life, even that eternal Life that was with the Father, was manifested, and they saw it." And the manifestation of the Life, in human nature, is given as the reason why he came to be "seen with the eyes, and looked upon, and handled;" plainly intimating that if he had not thus been manifested, he would have been concealed from all mortal eyes.—3. It was not the Deity itself, "personally distinguished as the FATHER," (for which Dr. Watts in his latter days contended,*) that was manifested; but "that eternal Life which was *with* the Father."

As to the *indwelling scheme*, I do not at present sufficiently comprehend it. If H. D. will give a brief and clear statement of it, and of the evidence on which it rests, whether in his own words or those of the ablest authors who have written upon it, I will endeavour seriously and candidly to consider what he may advance.

REMARKS ON THE INDWELLING SCHEME.

[In reply to the Rev. Henry Davis.]

I PROPOSED in my last that you should state the indwelling scheme, with the scriptural grounds on which you supposed it to rest. I wish you had complied with this proposal; merely writing *about* a subject brings nothing to an issue. I will endeavour, however, to collect your sentiments as well as I can.

I agree with you that "attempts to investigate difficult parts of Divine truth should be conducted with humility and candour." If any thing I have written, or may write, be inconsistent with either of these virtues, I am willing to bear the blame. But I hope an attempt to prove that the denial of Christ's proper Deity is inconsistent with worshipping him, and trusting in him for salvation, is not necessarily subject to such a charge. I am far from thinking that every person is aware of the legitimate consequences of his own doctrine, or that in his approaches to God he acts up to them; and still further from "excluding from salvation all who may not have the same ideas of the subject with myself." I must add, however, that true candour does not consist in entertaining a good opinion of one another, *whatever be our religious principles*; but in speaking the truth in love. You may think well of me, and I of you; and we may go on complimenting each other,

* Palmer's Life of Watts, p. 62.

till we both fall into perdition. As to your personal religion, and that of the "very many" who you say think with you, I have never called it in question. It is of *things*, not *persons*, that I have written. If any of us find ourselves affected by what another advances, it becomes us to examine whether what he alleges be true, and not to content ourselves with exclaiming against his want of candour. If I think the worse of any man on account of his *differing from me*, that will only betray my vanity and folly; but if I do not think the worse of a man for what I account his *differing from the Scriptures*, and thereby dishonouring Christ, that is esteeming men irrespective of the truth that dwelleth in them, and rendering it of no importance; which, however pleasing to flesh and blood, may be no less repugnant to the spirit of Christianity than the most uncharitable bitterness.

You ask, "whether, by the proper Deity of Christ, I mean any thing more than his being called God in the Scriptures." Certainly I do: or I have all along been deceiving myself and the reader. I mean that *he is* what he is called. But do I suppose "that he is God in the same sense as the three persons united are one God?" No; I do not. The Father is not God in this sense any more than the Son and Spirit. We nowhere read that the Father is *a* God, the Son *a* God, or the Spirit *a* God, when spoken of in distinction from each other; nor do I recollect any such idea conveyed in the Scriptures; yet each Divine person has every perfection of Godhead ascribed to him.

You have twice suggested that the Son and Spirit, having assumed visible appearances, must have a nature different from Deity. You cannot mean that the nature or appearance *assumed* was different from Deity; for of this there is no dispute; but the nature *assuming*. But what proof is there of this? I do not know that the Holy Spirit ever assumed any other nature than his own, though he descended on Christ in the form or appearance of a dove; and though the Son assumed human nature, yet this implies no inferiority to the Father, in respect of what he was antecedently to such assumption.

I have no objection to our inquiring, not only into the evidence that the doctrine of the Trinity is contained in Scripture, but, as far as Scripture informs us, what that doctrine is. It does not become us however to take up the principle of the Divine Unity, however true and important, and, having formed an idea of it as being personal, resolve to admit of no other than what shall agree with our preconceived notion; for this were to regulate certainty by uncertainty, the certain light of revelation by the uncertain conjectures supposed to be derived from the light of nature. We ought to regulate our ideas of the Divine Unity by what is taught us in the Scriptures of the Trinity; and not those of the Trinity by what we know, or think we know, from the light of nature, of the Unity.

It appears to me, by the tenor of your pieces, especially from some passages, that you and your brethren have in this matter symbolized with the Socinians, who, having taken up the idea of God as being *one person*, reject every thing in the Scriptures that is inconsistent with it; and therefore renounce first the Deity, and then the atonement of Christ; and, in short, almost every thing pertaining to revelation, except what might have been learned without it. I do not say that you go their lengths; but would seriously and affectionately entreat you to consider whether you have not adopted their principle. Do you not make your ideas of the unity of God the standard by which to try the Scripture doctrine of the Trinity; forming, as you say, "the best ideas you can" of the latter subject, and holding nothing fast except the former? If the admission of Christ's proper Deity, though taught as plainly and much more frequently in the New Testament than the other,

cannot be understood so as, in your ideas, to be "fully consistent," it must be given up, and a "Godlike form" of a man, as one of your writers expresses it, substituted in its place. But if, as you acknowledge, "the three Divine persons spoken of in Scripture be in some sense one God," why should you not suspect, or rather renounce, your own ideas of the unity, as if it must needs be confined to *one person*? And, instead of "forming the best ideas you can" *how* this is, why should you not be content with believing that it is so, without pretending to pry into that which is above your comprehension? Nor ought it to be objected that so abstruse a subject cannot be of any great importance. Can you communicate to me, or form to yourself, any idea of self-existence, eternity, or infinity? Yet, if you do not believe them, you do not believe in God. Your own scheme also appears to be equally incomprehensible as ours; for you do not pretend to "explain *how* the Son and Spirit derive their nature from the Father." Here then you can admit of mystery, though, as to the question, "*How* the three Divine persons spoken of in Scripture are one God," you are for going about to "form the best idea that you can;" and, if none present themselves, conclude that proper Deity belongs only to one of them—a singular method this of answering the question!

If you think that you believe "the three Divine persons spoken of in Scripture to be *Divine*, and to be *one* God," do you not deceive yourself? You speak of "the Son and Spirit having a *derived* nature." If by derivation you mean what is *essential* and *eternal*, as expressed by the term begotten, there is no dispute on this head. But if you mean that they were produced by the will and power of the Father, they are mere creatures; and however exalted, cannot be "Divine." No Socinian, I apprehend, would deny that God dwelt in the man Christ Jesus, enabling him to perform all his mighty works. But he would tell you, and justly too, that this does not prove him to be any thing more than human. Dr. Watts, I am aware, spoke of the indwelling of the Father in such a way as that the Father and the human nature became "*one person*;" and thus conceived that he maintained the proper Deity of Christ. But, whether he did or not, his conceit of the Father's assuming human nature, which the New Testament invariably ascribes to the *Son* or *Word*, or that eternal *Life* that was *with* the Father, leads on to the neglect, and by degrees to the disbelief, of this important truth. I scarcely remember ever to have heard a minister of your persuasion introduce the subject in the pulpit; and much less insist upon it with that earnestness and delight which is so frequently found in the writings of the New Testament.

Have you not symbolized with the Socinians till you have nearly, if not entirely, lost this great doctrine? Do you really consider Christ as any thing more than a *man extraordinarily inspired of God*? If you do, how is it that you should feel yourself hurt when the contrary is maintained? I advanced nothing in the piece which first attracted your notice but the Divinity of Jesus Christ. I had not the remotest idea of opposing the indwelling scheme. I thought nothing about it; but merely stated a doctrine which your writers, Watts and Doddridge, professed to maintain. Yet this excites your suspicions. Can it be a matter of doubt whereabouts you are? Excuse me if I inquire further, Will your scheme allow you to *worship* Christ, I do not say "separately," but distinctly from the Father, as the martyr Stephen worshipped him, and prayed to him in his dying moments; and as all the primitive Christians worshipped him, *calling upon his name*? Finally, Can you, in the full persuasion of this scheme, *trust* in him for salvation, as one who is *able* to keep that which is committed to him? Does it not rather teach you to trust *in the Father only*, as dwelling in him.

These are serious things, and require to be answered in some other way than by exclaiming against the want of candour. Candour, sir, requires us to deal plainly and faithfully with each other. By the manner in which you, and writers on your side of the question, express yourselves, it would seem to be a matter of small account what we believe on these momentous subjects, provided we do but think well of one another. But surely that which affects the objects of worship, and the foundation of hope, cannot be of trifling importance. Principles form the character in the sight of God: a handful of cockle may seem of but little consequence at seed time, but it will appear different at harvest.

Your scheme requires you to symbolize with Socinians in denying our Lord Jesus Christ to be "equal with" the Father, and to explain away those scriptures which speak of him as such. Thus that glorious passage, in Phil. ii. 5-7, is degraded and martyred: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." This is made to mean that "his human soul, being in union with the Godhead," that is, with the Father, "was invested with a God-like form and glory in all ages. Thus he oftentimes appeared to the patriarchs as the Angel of the Lord, and as God. This seems to be 'the form of God' which the apostle speaks of; nor did he think it 'any robbery,' or presumption, so to do; that is, to appear and act as God. Yet he 'emptied himself,' or divested himself of this God-like form or appearance, this Divine Shechinah; and, coming in the flesh, he consented to be 'made in the likeness of other men;' nay, he took upon him 'the form of a servant,' instead of 'the form of God.'"*

"The form of God" means the God-like form assumed by a man! A man, or human soul, thought it no presumption to "appear and act as God!" A man consented to be made in the likeness of men. No; this was too gross: therefore the term "other" is added to help out. A man was so humble and condescending as to take upon him the form of a servant! And the existence of this man was necessary to the covenant of redemption;† that is, till God had formed a creature out of nothing, he had no counsel, plan, or design, what should be done! And is this Dr. WATTS?—the sweet singer of our Israel; the man who in his better days taught us thus to worship—

"Ere the blue heavens were stretched abroad,
From everlasting was the Word;
With God he was, the Word was God,
And must divinely be adored."

How are the mighty fallen!

By the several passages of Scripture which you have introduced, in support of the indwelling scheme, it seems to me that you interpret that as being essential which is only economical, just as in other instances you make that to be economical which is essential. Referring to John xiv. 10, you say, "Our Lord appeals to his works to prove that he was in the Father, and the Father in him—the Father in me doeth the works." All that Christ said or did in the Father's name was indeed a proof of such a mutual indwelling as that he who had seen the one had seen the other; but not of our Lord's Deity consisting in the Father's dwelling in him. It might as well be alleged from this passage that the Deity of the Father consisted in that of the Son, who is said to be "in him." This and all other such passages, which ascribe the works of Christ to the power of the Father, are expressive of the *economy* of things, and not of the insufficiency of the Saviour.

* Palmer's Life of Watts, p. 86.

† Ib. p. 68.

I submit to your consideration the following brief statement of my views on this subject. The first measure in the execution of the great work of redemption was that he who was "in the form of God," and as such "equal with God," *took upon him the form of a servant*; and, having taken that form, it was fitting, in the account of Him who hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence, that he should act under it. Now it belongs to the character of a servant that *he receive his instructions* from him whose servant he is; and thus did Christ. Though, considered as Divine, "he knew all things," John xxi. 17; yet as a servant, and as being made in the likeness of men, he grew in knowledge, taught nothing, and knew nothing, as it were, but what he had heard and learned of the Father. "I speak to the world," says he, "those things which *I have heard of him*."—"Ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth which *I have heard of God*: this did not Abraham."—"I have given unto them the words which *thou gavest me*," John viii. 26, 40; xvii. 8.

Further, It belongs to the character of a servant that *he act under the authority and be directed by the will* of him whose servant he is; and thus did Christ. Though, as a Son, his throne was acknowledged by the Father himself to be for ever and ever, Heb. i. 8, yet as a servant he learned obedience. He was sent by the Father, and did every thing in obedience to his will. "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do."—"I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father who sent me."—"I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me," John v. 19, 30; vi. 38.

Finally, It belongs to the character of a servant that *he be supported in his work* by him who employs him; and this was Christ. As a Divine person he was acknowledged to be most mighty—the mighty God (Psal. xlv. 3; Isa. ix. 6); yet as a servant, and during his humiliation, he is commonly represented as doing what he did by the power of the Father. He ordinarily ascribes his miracles to this, and not to his own power. It was "the Father who was in him that did the works." Thus he was "God's servant whom he upheld, his elect in whom his soul delighteth."

Is it not a pity, sir, that this surprising instance of condescension, for the very purpose of redeeming us from the wrath to come, should be converted into an argument against his essential dignity? If it be asked, What is it then which is ascribed to the Divinity of Christ, if his miracles and works are ordinarily ascribed to the Father, or to the Holy Spirit: and of what use was it? I answer, It gave *value* and *virtue* to all he did and suffered. Thus he is represented as "by himself" purging our sins—"The blood of Jesus Christ, *his Son*, cleanseth us from all sin."—"We have a great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens, Jesus *the Son of God*," Heb. i. 3; v. 14; 1 John i. 7.

You mention some other passages: as, "God was manifest in the flesh;" by which, I suppose, you would understand the Father, or the Deity, without distinction of persons. But who was it that was "seen of angels, believed on in the world, and received up into glory?" Was this the Father?—Frequent mention has also been made of Col. ii. 9, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" as though it was not the second person in the Godhead only that assumed human nature, but the Godhead itself. To this I answer, If the passage refer to the constitution of the person of Christ, which to me is doubtful, it may without any force be understood of every perfection of the Divine nature dwelling in him, in common with the Father. To interpret it of the Godhead, without distinction of persons, is to contradict the whole tenor of the New Testament. "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman."—"The Word that was with God, and who was God,

even that eternal Life that was with the Father, was made flesh, or manifested to us," Gal. iv. 4; John i. 1, 14; 1 John i. 2.

God being *in Christ*, reconciling the world unto himself, has no relation, I apprehend, to the constitution of Christ's person, but to the exercise of mercy through his atonement. Thus it is that God in Christ, or for Christ's sake, is said to have forgiven us, Eph. iv. 32.

ON THE SONSHIP OF CHRIST.

THE meaning of the terms, "*Son of God*," and "*only begotten Son of God*," must needs be of importance, inasmuch as the belief of the idea signified by them was made a leading article in the primitive professions of faith, John vi. 69; iii. 18; xx. 31; Acts xviii. 37; 1 John iv. 15. Whatever disputes have arisen of late among Christians, there seems to have been none on this subject in the times of the apostles. Both Jews and Christians appear to have agreed in this: the only question that divided them was, whether Christ was the Son of God or not? If there had been any ambiguity in the term, it would have been very unfit to express the first article of the Christian faith.

It has been frequently suggested that the ground of Christ's sonship is given us in Luke i. 35, and is no other than his miraculous conception. "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

It is true that our Lord was miraculously conceived of the Holy Spirit, and that such a conception was peculiar to him; but it does not follow that by this he became the "Son" or "only begotten Son of God." Nor does the passage in question prove any such thing. It has been thought that the phrase "Son of God," in this place, is used in a peculiar sense, or that it respects the origin of Christ's human nature, as not being by ordinary generation of man, but by the extraordinary influence of God; and that he is here called the Son of God in the same sense as Adam is so called, (Luke iii. 38,) as being produced by his immediate power. If this be the meaning of the term, in the passage in question, I should think it will be allowed to be peculiar, and therefore that no general conclusion can be drawn from it as to the meaning of the term in other passages. But, granting that the sonship of Christ in this place is to be understood in the same sense as it is commonly to be taken in the New Testament, still it does not follow that the miraculous conception is the origin of it. It may be a reason given why Christ is *called* the Son of God; but not why he *is* so. Christ is called the Son of God as raised from the dead, and as exalted at the right hand of God, Acts xiii. 33; Heb. i. 4, 5. Did he then become the Son of God by these events? This is impossible; for sonship is not a progressive matter. If it arose from his miraculous conception, it could not, for that reason, arise from his resurrection or exaltation; and so, on the other hand, if it arose from his resurrection or exaltation, it could not proceed from his miraculous conception. But if each be understood of his being hereby *proved, acknowledged*, or, as the Scriptures express it, "*declared* to be the Son of God with power," all is easy and consistent.

Whether the terms, "Son of God," and "only begotten Son of God," be not expressive of his Divine personality, *antecedent* to all consideration of his being conceived of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the virgin, let the following things determine:—

First, The glory of "the only begotten of the Father," and the glory of the "Word," are used as convertible terms, as being the same; but the latter is allowed to denote the Divine person of Christ, antecedent to his being made flesh; the same, therefore, must be true of the former. "The Word was made flesh, and we beheld his glory,"—that is, the glory of the Word, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is true, it was by the Word being "made flesh, and dwelling among us," that his glory became *apparent*; but the glory itself was that of the eternal Word, and this is the same as "the glory of the only begotten of the Father."

Secondly, The Son of God is said to "dwell in the bosom of the Father;" that is, he is intimately acquainted with his character and designs, and therefore fit to be employed in making them known to men. "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." If this be applied to his Divine person, or "that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to us," it is natural and proper; it assigns his omniscience as qualifying him for making known the mind of God; but if he became the only begotten of the Father by his miraculous conception, or by any other means, the beauty of the passage vanishes.

Thirdly, God is frequently said to have *sent* his son into the world; but this implies that he was his Son antecedently to his being sent. To suppose otherwise is no less absurd than supposing that when Christ sent forth his twelve disciples they were not disciples, but that they became such in consequence of his sending them, or of some preparation pertaining to their mission.

Fourthly, Christ is called the Son of God antecedently to his miraculous conception, and consequently he did not become such by it.—"In the fullness of time God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law; that he might redeem them that were under the law."—"God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." The terms, "made of a woman, made under the law," are a parenthesis. The position affirmed is, that God sent forth his Son to redeem the transgressors of the law. His being made of a woman, and made under the law, or covenant of works, which man had broken, expresses the necessary means for the accomplishment of this great end; which means, though preceding our redemption, yet follow the sonship of the Redeemer. There is equal proof that Christ was "the Son of God" before he was "made of a woman," as that he was "the Word" before he was "made flesh." The phraseology is the same in the one case as in the other. If it be alleged that Christ is here called the Son of God *on account* of his being made of a woman, I answer, if so, it is also on account of his being "made under the law," which is too absurd to admit of a question. Moreover, to say that "God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," is equal to saying that the Son of God assumed human nature: he must therefore have been the Son of God before his incarnation.

Fifthly, Christ is called the Son of God antecedent to his being "manifested to destroy the works of the devil;" but he was manifested to destroy the works of the devil by taking upon him human nature; consequently he was the Son of God antecedent to the human nature being assumed. There is equal proof from the phraseology of 1 John iii. 8 that he was the "Son of God" antecedent to his being "manifested to destroy the works of the devil," as there is from that of 1 Tim. iii. 16 that he was "God" antecedent to his being "manifested in the flesh;" or from 1 John i. 2 that "that eternal Life which was with the Father" was such antecedent to his being "manifested to us."

Sixthly, The ordinance of baptism is commanded to be administered "in

the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The terms "Father" and "Holy Spirit" will be allowed to denote Divine persons; and what good reasons can be given for another idea being affixed to the term "Son?"

Seventhly, The proper Deity of Christ precedes his office of Mediator, or High Priest of our profession, and renders it an exercise of *condescension*. But the same is true of his sonship: "He maketh his Son a High Priest."—"Though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience." His being the Son of God, therefore, amounts to the same thing as his being a Divine person.

Eighthly, It is the proper Deity of Christ which gives *dignity* to his office as Mediator; but this dignity is ascribed to his being the "Son of God." "We have a *great* High Priest, Jesus the *Son of God*." His being the Son of God, therefore, amounts to the same thing as his being a Divine person.

Lastly, It is the proper Deity of Christ which gives *efficacy* to his sufferings: "by *himself* he purges our sins." But this efficacy is ascribed to his being the "Son of God." "The blood of Jesus Christ, *his Son*, cleanseth us from all sin." His being the Son of God, therefore, amounts to the same thing as his being a Divine person.

Those who attribute Christ's sonship to his miraculous conception (those at least to whom I refer) are nevertheless constrained to allow that the term *implies* proper Divinity. Indeed, this is evident from John v. 18, where his saying that "God was his own Father" is supposed to be "making himself equal with God." But if the miraculous conception be the proper foundation of his sonship, why should it contain such an implication? A holy creature might be produced by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, which yet should be merely a creature; that is, he might, on this hypothesis, profess to be the Son of God, and yet be so far from making himself equal with God, as to pretend to be nothing more than a man.

It has been objected that Christ, when called the Son of God, is commonly spoken of as engaged in the work of mediation, and not simply as a Divine person antecedent to it.—I answer, In a history of the rebellion, in the year 1745, the name of his Royal Highness, the commander-in-chief, would often be mentioned in connexion with his equipage and exploits; but none would infer from hence that he thereby became the king's son.

It is further objected that sonship implies *inferiority*, and therefore cannot be attributed to the Divine person of Christ.—But whatever inferiority may be attached to the idea of sonship, it is not an inferiority of *nature*, which is the point in question; and if any regard be paid to the Scriptures, the very contrary is true. Christ's claiming to be the Son of God was "making himself," not inferior, but *as God*, or "equal with God."

Once more, Sonship, it is said, implies *posteriority*, or that Christ as a Son could not have existed till after the Father: to attribute no other Divinity to him, therefore, than what is denoted by sonship, is attributing none to him; as nothing can be Divine which is not eternal.—But if this reasoning be just, it will prove that the Divine purposes are not eternal, or that there was once a point in duration in which God was without thought, purpose, or design. For it is as true, and may as well be said, that God must exist before he could purpose, as that the Father must exist before he had a Son; but if God must exist before he could purpose, there must have been a point in duration in which he existed without purpose, thought, or design; that is, in which he was not God! The truth is, the whole of this apparent difficulty arises from the want of distinguishing between the order of nature and the order of time. In the order of nature, the sun must have existed before it could shine; but in the order of time, the sun and its rays are coeval; it never existed a single instant without them. In the order of nature, God

must have existed before he could purpose; but in the order of time, or duration, he never existed without his purpose; for a God without thought or purpose were no God. And thus in the order of nature the Father must have existed before the Son; but, in that of duration, he never existed without the Son. The Father and the Son, therefore, are properly eternal.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

No sober Trinitarian would take upon him to say precisely to what degree the distinctions in the Godhead extend. It is generally supposed, however, that the term *person* approaches the nearest to the Scriptural idea of any term that could be applied to this subject; yet those who use and contend for this term, in opposition to that of three *names* or three *properties*, do not mean to suggest that the distinctions in the Deity are in all respects the same as between three persons among men. The latter have no necessary connexion or union with each other, so as to denominate them one. It is highly probable that there is nothing in creation perfectly analogous to the mode of the Divine subsistence; and therefore nothing by which it can be fully conceived. And what if this should be the case? Where is the wonder that there should be something in God peculiar to himself, in the mode of his existence, which we cannot comprehend? If Socinians would but modestly consider the weakness of the human understanding, they would not decide so peremptorily on the other hand concerning the unity of God, as that it must needs be *personal*, or not at all. If it be too much for us to say with exactness to what degree the distinction reaches, is it not also too much for them to decide upon the precise kind and degree of *union* which is necessary to denominate the great Creator of the world—the *ONE* God?

The doctrine of a Trinity in unity is evidently a doctrine of pure revelation, and could never have been discovered by the mere light of nature. But, by comparing Scripture with itself, we may plainly perceive that the Divine unity is not a unity of *person*. Though there are three in the Godhead who are dignified with the same incommunicable titles of Jehovah, God, and Lord—possessing the same attributes and perfections, and entitled to the same worship and adoration—yet the Scriptures do not exhibit a plurality of Deities, but teach us that Jehovah our God is one Jehovah. The obvious conclusion is, that these three are one God, and that the Scripture doctrine of unity is of more persons than one in the Godhead. The following passages, among many others, are very full to this purpose:—

“Go, teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of *the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*.—There are *three* that bear record in heaven; *the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one*.—I am one that bear witness of *myself*.—*The Father* that sent me beareth witness of me.—It is *the Spirit* that beareth witness.—And the *Holy Spirit* descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him; and a voice came from heaven which said, Thou art my *beloved Son*, in whom I am well pleased.—When the Comforter is come, whom *I will send* unto you from *the Father*, even *the Spirit of truth*, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.—Now I beseech you, brethren, for *the Lord Jesus Christ's* sake, and for the love of *the Spirit*, that you strive together with me in your prayers to *God* for me.—*Through him* (that is, Christ) we both have access by *one Spirit* to *the Father*.—Praying in *the Holy Spirit*, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of *our Lord Jesus Christ* unto eternal

life.—*The Lord* direct your hearts into the love of *God*, and the patient waiting for *Christ*.—The grace of our *Lord Jesus Christ*, the love of *God*, and the communion of the *Holy Spirit*, be with you all.”

On reading these and similar passages, together with a great number of others which teach the proper Deity of Christ, we conclude that in a mysterious way, far above our comprehension, there are in the Divine unity three subsistencies; and as the New Testament constantly represents each of these three as bearing personal names, sustaining personal offices, and performing personal acts, we think ourselves warranted in accounting them three Divine persons.

Socinians, however, object to the doctrine of the Trinity on account of its being *incomprehensible*: and Dr. Priestley denies that the first teachers of Christianity taught any “mysterious doctrines, or doctrines in their own nature incomprehensible;”^{*} and insists upon the necessity of “considering in *what manner* three persons are one God, upon the general principle that every proposition, before it can be believed, must be understood in some sense or other.”[†]

The first preachers of Christianity taught the self-existence of God: Rev. i. 4, “Grace be unto you, and peace, from him who *is*, and who *was*, and who *is to come*.” But the self-existence of God is allowed by Dr. Priestley himself to be so much of a mystery that “he does not understand the manner of it.” He can here distinguish between things which are *above* reason and things *contrary* to it. “Though it be above our reason,” he says, “to comprehend *how* this original Being, and the cause of all other beings, should be himself uncaused, it is a conclusion by no means properly *contrary* to reason.”[‡] Now, why might not an atheist demand of Dr. Priestley an account of the mode or manner *how* God himself can exist, upon the general principle, “that every proposition, before it can be believed, must be understood in some sense or other?” Why should not this general principle apply to the manner in which God always existed, as an uncaused Being, as well as to the manner in which three persons are one God? And if it be proper to distinguish between things above reason and things contrary to it, in the one case, why not in the other?

The truth is, it is not necessary that every thing contained in a proposition should be clearly understood, in order to our being rationally convinced that such a proposition is true. We ought not to deny every thing we cannot comprehend; otherwise a man born blind would reason right when he forms this syllogism: We can only know the shape of different substances by feeling them; but it is impossible to handle them at a distance; therefore, it is impossible to know the shape of different bodies which lie beyond our reach! A blind man, by the concurring testimony of all about him, may be convinced that the figure of different bodies may be clearly ascertained by sight, though we cannot handle them. But when convinced of this on the ground of testimony, he never can be made to conceive *how* this is true. It is therefore a fundamental maxim, in all true philosophy, that many things may be incomprehensible and yet demonstrable, that though seeing clearly be a sufficient reason for affirming, yet not seeing at all can never be a reason for denying.

When it is affirmed that in the Godhead there are three, and that these three are one God, it has been objected, not only that the doctrine is incomprehensible, but that the terms themselves involve a *contradiction*; to this it might be replied, that if the Divine Being were affirmed to be three in the same sense in which he is said to be one, the objection would be valid; but

^{*} Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, Part II. p. 209.

[†] Letters to Dr. Horne.

[‡] Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, Part I. p. 46.

the contradiction here is only a seeming one, and is no other than what appears in other propositions concerning the Divine Being, which are also true. Suppose it were affirmed that it is *possible* for God to do evil, and yet that it is *impossible* he should do evil: this would involve an *apparent* contradiction; and if the two branches of the proposition were to be understood in *the same sense* of possible and impossible, the contradiction would be *real*. But to say that it is not *naturally* impossible for God to do evil, were he so inclined, is only affirming what is necessary to his being a free agent, and so of being virtuous or holy; and to say that it is *morally* impossible for God to do evil is only ascribing to him that perfection of holiness which constitutes the true glory of his character. So to affirm that the centre and surface of the globe are exceedingly remote, and yet so exceedingly near as to be equally the central point of infinite space, is an apparent contradiction, and yet demonstrably true. That the remotest periods of time are alike the centre of infinite duration is also a most evident truth, and yet a caviller might object that the terms of these propositions involve a contradiction; it is like saying that two points may be one, and that one may be two. Yet, opposite as the terms may appear, the truth of the proposition is not at all affected by them, but rests on the strongest demonstration.

JUSTIFICATION.

THE DOCTRINE OF IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS.

“This is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.”—
Jer. xxxiii. 16.

It may seem too much for the church of Christ to bear a name which is properly applicable only to Christ himself, and is expressly given to him in chap. xxiii. 6 of the same prophecy. Interpreters have attempted to account for this in different ways. Some have rendered the words, “And this is the name of Him that shall call her,” as we should say, by his grace, “The Lord our righteousness.” But the words clearly import an appellation given to the church. Others have supposed the church to be called after the name of Christ on account of her intimate union with him, as a woman is called after the name of her husband. But this is a modern practice, to which therefore there can be no allusion.

The name in the Hebrew is *Jehovah-tsidkenu*; and, if I am not mistaken, the use of several other of these compound terms in the Old Testament will determine the meaning of the passage in question. When Abraham was about to offer up his son, in the very moment of extremity his hand was stayed, and a lamb was provided. Abraham, in commemoration of this signal interposition, called the name of the place *Jehovah-jireh*, the Lord will see or provide. When God gave Israel the victory over Amalek, Moses built an altar, and called it *Jehovah-nissi*, the Lord my banner. When Gideon, having seen an angel of God, was apprehensive that he should die, and the Lord comforted him, saying, “Peace be unto thee, fear not;” he built an altar, and called it *Jehovah-shalom*, the Lord send peace. Finally, when the church in the latter day, under the form of a city, is described in prophecy, it is said that its name shall be called *Jehovah-shammah*, the Lord is there: Gen. xxii. 14; Exod. xvii. 15; Judg. vi. 24; Ezek. xlvi. 35. Now the *place* where Abraham received the Lamb was not *Jehovah*, nor either of the *altars* erected by Moses and Gideon. They were only memorials of what

Jehovah had wrought. Neither will the city described by Ezekiel be Jehovah; but the presence of Jehovah shall be so sensibly and manifestly with it, that this shall be its *name*, or *distinguishing character*. Thus it is that the church, under the gospel dispensation, shall be called *Jehovah-tsidkenu*, the Lord our righteousness; not because she is Jehovah, but because her justification, by the righteousness of Jehovah, forms a kind of prominent feature in her countenance. This leading truth is inscribed upon her in deep and legible characters, like those upon the altars of Moses and Gideon. She is even a standing memorial of it to all generations.

Such, I take it, is the meaning of this prophecy. Let us next inquire whether it accords with fact. If there be a leading principle which distinguishes the gospel church more than any other, it may be expected to occupy a conspicuous place in the New Testament. It is true, the Old Testament church was accepted of God through the same medium that we are; but, the righteousness of *Jesus* not being actually wrought, it does not form so prominent a feature in that dispensation. As soon as our Lord entered on his ministry, he declared his errand to be, "to seek and to save that which was lost." The self-righteous Pharisees, who were whole in their own eyes, were most of them left to perish in their own deceivings, while publicans and harlots entered into the kingdom of God before them. Every encouragement was given to *faith* in the Redeemer. In answer to this the diseased were cured, and the guilty forgiven, whatever had been their former character. Those who embraced the Saviour from among the sect of the Pharisees, and who were righteous in their own eyes, were brought to an open renunciation of every thing of this kind, and to sue for mercy among the chief of sinners. This was particularly the case of Saul of Tarsus, who "counted all things but loss that he might win Christ, and be found in him; not having his own righteousness, which was of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phil. iii. 8, 9.

When the apostles, commissioned by their Lord, went forth preaching the gospel to every creature, this was their errand. To the Jews they thus addressed themselves: "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses," Acts xiii. 38, 39. As to the Gentiles, their address to them was in substance as follows: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor. v. 20, 21.

In almost all the Epistles, we find this great truth written in legible characters. It is almost the sole object of that to the Romans. To quote all the evidence from it were to quote the Epistle itself. I shall only observe that there are some errors noted in that Epistle, among believers, and which were to be objects of forbearance; but justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ, to the renouncing of all dependence on the works of the law, is not represented as a question that divided believers, but as a principle of such importance as to distinguish believers from unbelievers. "The Gentiles which followed not after righteousness have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone. Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness,

they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God," Rom. ix. 30-32; x. 3.

The disorders of the Corinthians were greater than those of any other of the primitive churches. This, with some who profess to believe this important truth in the present day, would have been thought a sufficient reason for withholding it in this instance, lest it should be abused; but Paul did not withhold it. "Of him," says he, "are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 30, 31. He had found them sunk in vice and profligacy. Speaking of fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners; "and such," says he, "were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 9-11.

The Epistle to the Galatians, like that to the Romans, is principally composed of this doctrine. It is here considered of such importance as that the rejection of it "perverted the gospel of Christ." Those teachers who set themselves against it, and thereby troubled the churches, the apostle wished to have them "cut off" from among them. And those professors of Christianity who gave into another system he considered as "fallen from grace," or as having deserted the truth of the gospel; and told them plainly that Christ was "become of no effect to them," Gal. i. 7; v. 4, 12.

The Epistle to the Ephesians, the object of which seems to be to endear Christ, and the knowledge of him, enumerates the spiritual blessings with which God hath blessed us in him, and among these is his having made us "accepted in the Beloved." And again, "By grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Similar observations might be made on almost all the remaining Epistles. I shall content myself with only referring the reader to the following passages, (Phil. iii. 7-9; 1 Tim. i. 9; Tit. iii. 4-7; 2 Pet. i. 1; 1 John ii. 1; Rev. xix. 8,) and offering a few remarks on the apparent inconsistency of Paul and James on this subject. If the justification on which these sacred writers insist were the same, their doctrine would certainly wear every appearance of contradiction, inasmuch as that the one affirms we are justified "by faith without the works of the law," while the other insists that a man is justified "by works, and not by faith only." Yea, and what is more, each of them appeals to the case of Abraham, as an example of his doctrine, Rom. iv. 1-6; James ii. 21-26. But if the justification on which they severally insist be different, different things may be affirmed concerning each, without any contradiction. And this is manifestly the case. *Paul* discourses on the justification of the *ungodly*, or of sinners being accepted of God, which is by faith in the righteousness of Christ, without works; *James* on the justification of the *godly*, or of a saint being approved of God, and which is by works. Abraham is said to have been justified by faith, when he first believed the promise, prior to his circumcision; but by works, many years after it, his faith was made manifest, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar. The one therefore relates to his acceptance with God as a sinner, the other to his being approved of God as a saint. Both together completed his character. "He believed, and it was accounted to him for righteousness;" he obeyed, and was "called the friend of God."

Upon the whole, if these observations be just, we are, by this appellation given to the Christian church, furnished with a criterion by which to judge of it. It is composed of such characters as, renouncing all dependence upon their own righteousness, rely only upon the righteousness of Christ for ac-

ceptance with God; while at the same time their faith is not a dead, inoperative opinion, but a vital principle, productive of good works.

We also see the justice with which divines have insisted on the importance of this great article of faith. It was with good reason that Luther, in particular, considered it as a kind of corner-stone in the Reformation. Those reformed communities, whether national or congregational, which have relinquished this principle in their confessions of faith, or which, retaining it in their confessions, yet renounce or neglect it in their ordinary ministrations, have with it lost the spirit and power of true religion.

DEFENCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS.

[In reply to a Correspondent, in 1799.]

I AGREE with your correspondent, Christopher, that "a manly and Christian avowal of our sentiments tends to the discovery and establishment of truth;" to which also "I devoutly wish that all our differences may verge." But if I thought that "difference of opinion," or, as I should call it, the imbibing of opposite religious principles, was any otherwise "unavoidable in the present state" than as every other species of sinful imperfection is so, I should consider the attainment of truth as an object of no importance; and all our labours to rectify our own and each others' errors as so many attempts to subvert the order of nature. It were absurd to attempt to reduce to uniformity the natural differences of men's tastes and features; and if differences in religion be of the same kind, as your correspondent seems to think, it were equally absurd to attempt to lessen them, or "devoutly to wish them to verge towards truth."

But really, sir, I feel at a loss how to enter upon a defence; and this because I cannot perceive that any thing I have advanced is the object of your correspondent's attack. It is true, he begins by expressing his disapprobation of imputed righteousness; but I am not the inventor of that doctrine, or of the terms by which it is expressed. If there be any thing objectionable in either, it is the apostle Paul that must be accountable for it, who in the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans has repeatedly used the very language at which your correspondent has taken offence. If the objection had been made to any explanation of the doctrine which I had given, I should have considered myself as called upon to reply; but as what is alleged is against imputation itself, I have no concern in the business. It is on Paul that Christopher has made his attack, and he and Paul must settle the matter. It is true, he has explicitly stated the notion of imputation to which he objects, which he says is this—"To ascribe *that* to a man which he has not, whereby he is considered righteous, or a good man." But this is as foreign from any thing I have advanced as darkness is from light. To have answered *me*, he should have collected *my* ideas of the subject: if there were none to collect, there could be nothing to answer. I have no notion of "ascribing" the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinner personally, any more than he has. I should as soon "ascribe" the unrighteousness of the sinner to Christ as the righteousness of Christ to the sinner. The *imputation* of sin to Christ, and of righteousness to the sinner, appears to me to consist, not in God's thinking or judging of characters differently from what they are, or declaring them to be what they are not; but in his treating or *dealing with them*,* not according to their personal merit or demerit, but according to those of another. God neither thought his Son to be wicked, nor declared him to be so; but he treated or dealt with him *as if he had been so*. God

* In a subsequent record of his views the author defines imputation as consisting not of *treatment*, but *charging* or *reckoning*, which is the ground of treatment.—Ed.

neither thinks the character of the believing sinner such as his righteous law approves, nor declares it to be so; but he treats or deals with him *as if it were so*, out of respect to the righteousness of him in whom he believeth.

Of course, by the term *righteous*, as it is used with reference to justification, I do not mean the same thing as being "a good man." I should as soon consider Christ's being "made sin for us" as the same thing with his being made a bad man, as I should our being made "the righteousness of God in him" to be the same thing with our being made good men. This is utterly confounding justification with sanctification, which indeed appears to me to be the drift of the whole piece.

The statement which Christopher gives of men's recovery by Jesus Christ seems to represent sinners not as accepted of God out of regard to what Christ has done, but on the ground of "the Divine life and likeness within us;" and that the righteousness which he disclaims as the ground of his hope is not what he performs under the character of a Christian, but merely what he has performed prior to his sustaining that character, or while he was unrighteous.

The connexion in which he has introduced Col. i. 27, "Christ in you the hope of glory," renders it pretty evident that by "Christ," in this passage, he understands the image or likeness of Christ in us. But surely this was not Paul's meaning; of Christ, who was in or among the Colossians, he adds, "whom we preach." But it was not the image of Christ in our hearts that was the subject of Paul's ministry.

If even our evangelical obedience be the ground of acceptance with God, I should be glad to be informed—(1.) How is it that *works* are constantly excluded in the justification of sinners? Rom. iii. 24–27; iv. 2–8. (2.) How is it that God is said to *justify the ungodly*? chap. iv. 5. I do not suppose that, when a sinner is justified, he is actually an enemy to God; for in the same passage he is supposed to a believer, which character is inconsistent with such a state of mind. But, as Dr. Owen has observed, "To say that he who worketh not is justified through believing, is to say that his works, whatever they be, have no influence in his justification; nor hath God in justifying him any respect unto them."—(3.) How is it that the righteousness by which we are justified is represented as *revealed* to faith, and as being to and upon all them that believe? chap. i. 17; iii. 22. Are the dispositions of our own minds "revealed" to us?—(4.) How is it that such *objections* are made to the Christian doctrine of justification, if holy dispositions were the ground of it? If Paul had taught justification by evangelical works, and only meant to reject those which were done prior to embracing the gospel, with what plausibility could it have been objected that this doctrine gave liberty to sin? If the "righteousness through which grace reigns to eternal life" (chap. v. 21) meant, as Christopher explains it, "our own righteous dispositions," with what propriety does the apostle ask, in the following words, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!"

Your correspondent remarks that "his friend Gaius seems partial to the phrase *imputed righteousness*." Is it unbecoming a Christian, then, to be partial to the phraseology of Scripture? What if I should ask friend Christopher whether he be not prejudiced against this phrase; and not the phrase only, but the doctrine conveyed by it? He might answer, No: I shall allow it in the same sense in which sin is imputed to us, that is, really and truly, by participation of a fallen nature. Then really and truly, friend Christopher, either you or I are entirely out as to the meaning of words. Does the word *impute* really and truly mean to participate? When Ahimelech pleaded before Saul, saying, "Let not the king *impute* any thing unto his

servant," (1 Sam. xxii. 15,) did he mean, Do not cause me to participate in a conspiracy? When Shimei entreated David, saying, "Let not my lord *impute* iniquity unto me," (2 Sam. xix. 19,) did he mean, Do not make me wicked? Does he not rather mean, Do not deal with me according to my desert?

And does the imputation of the sin of our first parent to his posterity consist in participation? That it is connected with it I allow. Could an individual be found who had never made the sin of his first father his own, by participating in it, he would, I suppose, have nothing to fear from its being imputed to him. And much the same may be said concerning righteousness; for until a sinner believes in Christ, which includes an acquiescence in the gospel way of salvation, he has nothing to hope from imputation. These things have an inseparable connexion; but the plain meaning of words must be altered before we can consider them as the same.

We have the same authority for believing that our sins were imputed to Christ as that Adam's sin was imputed to his posterity. The word "impute" is used in neither case, but both are compared to the imputation of righteousness. "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."—"He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," Rom. v. 19; 2 Cor. v. 21. Now will Christopher affirm that Christ was really and truly made sin by participation?

It does not follow from hence that "the old man, any more than the new man, is a mere creature of imputation," or that the necessity of "repentance and the love of God" is superseded. It is strange that Christopher should have so little regard to the credit of his own understanding as to insinuate the contrary. He who cannot distinguish between the blessings of justification and sanctification, without setting aside the importance of either, has in my opinion yet to learn one of the first principles of the oracles of God.

REMARKS ON GOD'S JUSTIFYING THE UNGODLY.

[In reply to Dr. Joseph Jenkins of Walworth.

THE passage in my last paper, on which J. J. has animadverted is as follows—"God is said to *justify the ungodly*," Rom. iv. 5. I do not suppose that when a sinner is justified he is actually an enemy to God; for in the same text he is supposed to be a *believer*, which character is inconsistent with such a state of mind.

Now he who controverts these principles may be supposed to maintain the contrary; namely, that when a sinner is justified he is actually at enmity with God; and that though he is a believer, as the text intimates, yet his being so includes nothing inconsistent with such a state of mind. And such in fact is the statement of this correspondent.—(1.) He endeavours to maintain that when a sinner is justified he is God's enemy. It is true, he says, "I do not suppose, any more than Gaius, that a man can be justified and at the same time be an enemy to God;" but he means only to allow that he does not continue an enemy to God *after* he is justified, concerning which there is no dispute. The question is,—In what state of mind is the sinner, with regard to enmity and friendship, *antecedent* to his justification? And, by all that J. J. has written, it appears that he considers him as God's enemy "until" he is justified.—(2.) He labours to prove that his being a *believer* includes in it nothing inconsistent with such a state of mind. The faith which is "counted for righteousness," he supposes, must either mean Christ, the object of faith, or a spiritual illumination of the understanding, in which the mind is passive: at all events, it must include no holy disposition of heart, that is, nothing inconsistent with enmity to God.

Before we examine these positions, it seems necessary to have a clear understanding of what is meant by justification. J. J. distinguishes between justification in the eye of justice, or a sinner's being accepted in the Beloved; and justification as it respects the sensation or perception of the blessing in a person's own mind; adding, that "his more immediate business is with the latter." I am certainly obliged to him for this explanation, for without it I should have supposed the question to relate wholly to acceptance with God itself, and not to the sensation or perception of this blessing in the mind; and still less to the pleas which the sinner is to "bring forward," in his application for mercy. I must say, however, if J. J.'s "business" lies here, assuredly mine does not; having never, that I recollect, advanced a single idea on the subject. But if it did, it would not affect the argument; for if we be not in a justified state till we cease to be the enemies of God, it is impossible we should enjoy any previous sensation or perception of it, as no one can truly perceive that which does not exist.

To me it appears that the distinguishing of justification into acceptance with God, and the sensation or perception of this blessing which a sinner enjoys, has nothing in the Scriptures to support it. I think it will be found on inquiry that the former is that which the sacred writings term justification, and that the latter is denominated "peace with God," which follows on it as a consequence, Rom. v. 1. A sensation of peace is as distinct from justification as a sensation of wrath is distinct from condemnation. As some are justified, that is, exempt from the curse of the law, and entitled to everlasting life, according to the uniform declarations of the statute-book of heaven, while, owing to a cloud upon their minds, they are far from clearly perceiving it; so others stand condemned, that is, exposed to the curse of the law, according to the uniform declarations of the same statute-book of heaven, while, through ignorance and unbelief, they have no proper sense of it.

The question is not concerning any secret persuasions in the mind of man, or any secret purpose in the mind of God; but simply this, Do the Holy Scriptures, which form the statute-book of heaven, and fully express the mind of God, pronounce any man pardoned or justified in his sight, while his heart is in a state of enmity against him?

"It is plainly implied," says J. J., "in the Lord's justifying the *ungodly*, that they are *ungodly until* justified." But, before any conclusion can be drawn from these words, it is necessary to ascertain the meaning of them, particularly of the term "ungodly." This term, I apprehend, is not designed, in the passage under consideration, to express the actual *state of mind* which the party at the time possesses, but *the character* under which God considers him in bestowing the blessing of justification upon him. Whatever be the present state of a sinner's mind—whether he be a haughty Pharisee or a humble publican—if he possess nothing which can in any degree balance the curse which stands against him, or at all operate as a ground of acceptance with God, he must be justified, if at all, as unworthy, ungodly, and wholly out of regard to the righteousness of the Mediator. He that is justified must be justified as "ungodly," in like manner as he that is saved must be saved among the "chief of sinners," 1 Tim. i. 15. But as Paul's using the latter expression of himself does not prove that at the time he uttered it he was one of the worst of characters, so neither does his using the former concerning others prove that they are at the time of their justification the enemies of God. If it be objected that the term "ungodly" is no where else used but to express a state of enmity to God, it may be answered that God is no where else said to "justify the ungodly." The interpretation put upon this term, therefore, is no more singular than the phraseology of

the text itself. Both the one and the other ought no doubt to be interpreted by the general tenor of Scripture, and the particular scope of the writer. If the sense here given clash with either of them, let it be rejected. To me it appears in harmony with both. When the reader has considered the following observations, let him judge whether it be so or not.

1. It is the uniform language of the Scriptures that "without repentance there is no forgiveness," Psal. xxxii. 5; Prov. xxviii. 13; Mark i. 4; iv. 12; Luke iii. 5; xxiv. 47; Acts iii. 19; v. 31; viii. 22; 1 John i. 9. The very passage to which the apostle in the context refers, (Psal. xxxii.,) as affording an example of the imputation on which he was treating, clearly holds up the idea of forgiveness as preceded by repentance. It is of no account to allege the difference between pardon and justification; for, whatever difference there is between these blessings, there is none which affects the argument. They are not so distinct as that the one can in any instance exist without the other. He that is justified is pardoned. If, therefore, repentance precede the one, it must precede the other. But if justification be preceded by repentance, it cannot be said that a person is an enemy to God "until he is justified," for enmity and repentance are inconsistent.

2. It is the uniform language of the New Testament, that *those whom God justifieth are believers*, John iii. 18, 36; v. 24; Acts xiii. 39; Rom. iii. 26, 28; iv. 24; v. 1; x. 4; Gal. ii. 16; iii. 24; Phil. iii. 9. The very persons referred to in the text under consideration are supposed to "believe in him who justifieth the ungodly." But faith "worketh by love," and is therefore inconsistent with a state of enmity to God. If the uniform language of Scripture had been, we believe by or through being justified, we should certainly have concluded that justification in the order of things preceded believing, and consequently that those who are justified were at the same time enemies to God. And as it is the reverse, or that we are justified by or through believing, why should we not equally conclude that faith in the order of things precedes justification, and consequently that they who are justified were at the time not the enemies but the friends of God?

3. The apostle, in the same Epistle as that which contains the passage in question, speaks of justification as *preceded by vocation or calling*. "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate: whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified," Rom. viii. 29, 30. It cannot be pleaded that the order of things is not here preserved. It is allowed on all hands that predestination is preceded in the order of nature by foreknowledge, calling by predestination, and glorification by justification. What good reason then can be given why justification should not from hence be concluded to be preceded by vocation? But the vocation here spoken of is a holy one, the same with that mentioned in 2 Tim. i. 9, "He hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling;" which must therefore be inconsistent with enmity to God.

4. The design of the apostle in the context was to establish the doctrine of *free justification by faith in Jesus Christ*, without the works of the law—a justification that should exclude boasting, or glorying. Now this design is equally accomplished by the interpretation here defended as by the contrary. I am aware that this ground will be disputed, and let it be disputed. The principle on which I rest my defence, on this part of the subject, is the following:—WHATEVER BE THE STATE OF A PERSON'S MIND AT THE TIME, IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE AS TO THE GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION. J. J. will not deny this; he has acknowledged as much himself. "In this case," he says, "*all works*, good and bad, are out of the question;" and, if so, doubtless *all dispositions* are the same. None of them, be they what they may, can avail any thing towards justifying one who has not continued in all things written

in the book of the law to do them. But, if so, of what account is it to the doctrine of justification by grace, to maintain their nonexistence at the time? The existence or nonexistence of things that are "out of the question" can signify nothing to the argument, and afford no ground of glorying.—Moreover, if the existence of a holy disposition at the time of our being first made partakers of the blessing of justification detract from the grace of it, why should it not operate in the same way afterwards? Justification is not of so transient a nature as to be begun and ended in an instant. Though not progressive, like sanctification, yet it is a permanent privilege, or *state* of blessedness bestowed on believers. As condemnation is a state of exposedness to the curse, under which every unbeliever, remaining such, *continues*; so justification is a state of exemption from it, in which every believer in Jesus *abides*. It is true we are *introduced* to this blessed state at the moment of believing; from that instant we are no more under the law, but under grace; the curses of the former stand no longer against us, and the blessings of the latter become our portion. But though our introduction to the blessing be transient, yet the blessing itself continues as long as we continue believers in Christ, and united to him, which is to the end. Hence justification and condemnation are each described in language expressive of their continuity. "It is God that *justifieth*: who is he that *condemneth*? He that believeth on the Son hath *everlasting life*: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God *abideth* on him." Hence also believers, in every stage of life, deal with Christ for justification, desiring nothing more than that they may be found in him, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law; but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. And this accounts for Abraham's believing for righteousness, as we shall see presently, not merely when he first believed in God, but after he had loved and served him a number of years; and for David's having righteousness imputed to him without works on his recovery from a state of backsliding. Now do the holy dispositions of Christians detract from the freeness of their continued acceptance with God? If not, why should the existence of any such dispositions detract from the freeness of their first acceptance? If it be necessary that the mind be at enmity with God "until" we are first introduced to this blessing, in order to its being merely of grace, why should it not be equally necessary that it should remain so through life, in order to its continuing to be merely of grace?

5. Neither Abraham nor David, whose cases the apostle selects for the illustration of his argument, was, at the time referred to, the enemy of God. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness;" and it is concerning his justification that the following reflection is made. "Now to him that worketh is the reward reckoned, not of grace, but of debt." It is here plainly supposed of Abraham, that if he had "worked," and so obtained the reward, it had been a matter of debt, and he had had whereof to glory. And did not Abraham work prior to the period to which this refers? He certainly should not have performed a single good work, but have been an enemy to God, according to J. J.'s hypothesis. But the truth is, he had been a believer in God and a true worshipper of him for many years, at the time when he is said to have believed in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness, Gen. xv. 6; xii. 1-3; Heb. xi. 8. Here then is an account of one who had walked with God for a series of years "working not, but believing on him that justifieth the ungodly;" a clear proof that by "working not" the apostle did not mean a wicked inaction, but a renunciation of works as the ground of acceptance with God.

"David also," continues the apostle, "describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed

are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Of whom speaketh the psalmist, in this thirty-second Psalm; of himself, or of some other man? Of himself, as is manifest from the whole Psalm. It is one of those penitential songs which he penned after his fall and recovery. The third and fourth verses describe the state of his mind after he had sinned, and before he had repented. The "blessedness" of which he speaks is a blessedness arising from *free* forgiveness. Hence the apostle, in the text under consideration, very properly puts this gloss upon his words: "David describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." David did not say it was "without works;" he said nothing about works; but he described the blessedness of him who possessed a *free* forgiveness, which was the same thing. Paul supposed that David "worked not;" but had he never performed a "good work" at the period referred to? Was he at that time an enemy to God? J. J.'s hypothesis requires that it should have been so; but it was not so. Let the reader judge whether the cases of Abraham and David be not decisive, and whether they ought not to decide the controversy, as to the meaning of the passage in question.

I had supposed that when a sinner is justified he is not an enemy of God, seeing he is a *believer*. J. J. attempts, it should seem, to invalidate this argument by so explaining faith as that it shall include in it nothing inconsistent with enmity to God. I cannot but remark the unpleasant situation of the writer in this part of his work. With him it seems a very difficult thing to determine what the apostle means by that faith which is counted for righteousness. "If it were to be considered as a *work*, he supposes it would overturn the whole reasoning of the verse." If it were considered as a work performed to furnish a ground of justification it would; but not else. That faith is a work we are expressly taught by one who perfectly understood its nature, John vi. 28, 29. But that we are justified by it *as* a work, or as a part of moral obedience, J. J. knows I utterly deny. But if it be not counted for righteousness as a work, "it *must* mean either Christ the object of faith, or a spiritual illumination of the understanding, in which the mind is totally passive." That it does not mean the former, one should think, is evident, in that it is called believing. "He that believeth, his faith, or believing, is counted for righteousness." And if it mean the latter, it will go to confound what the Scriptures elsewhere distinguish. Spiritual blindness is represented as an obstacle to believing, and spiritual illumination as that which precedes it, 2 Cor. iv. 4; John vi. 40. But faith in this passage "*must*" mean this or that. Perhaps it *must*, in order to comport with J. J.'s hypothesis; and this spiritual light or discernment *must* also be supposed to have nothing spiritual in it, or it will be equally inconsistent with a state of enmity to God as believing. But let him seriously consider whether that hypothesis which requires such forced and far-fetched interpretations of Scripture to support it can be any part of "evangelical truth."

To me it appears a plain and easy matter to ascertain the meaning of faith in the passage referred to. It is believing; and this believing is counted for righteousness; not as a work, but as the prescribed means of interesting us in the righteousness of Christ. Thus it was common for Christ to say to diseased people, whom he had healed, "Thy faith hath saved thee." Did he mean by this to make a saviour of faith? No: faith did not cause, nor so much as co-operate, in these cures, which were accomplished only by his own power; but it was the prescribed means by which they became interested in the exercise of that power. I use the term interest as I do that of justification, not for what we may have in the secret purpose of God, but for that part or portion which we have in spiritual blessings according to the

revealed will or promise of God in the Scriptures. The healing efficacy proceeded from Christ, and not from faith, yet without faith they would not have been healed; and the same may be said of justification.

NATURE OF IMPUTATION.

[In reply to Ignotus.]

I CORDIALLY agree with your correspondent, on the necessary connexion between the doctrine of Christ's Divinity and justification by the imputation of his righteousness. But the former of the two grounds on which he rests it I would seriously entreat him to reconsider. He represents the imputation of righteousness as consisting in a "transfer of surplus virtue;" and as every creature, however exalted, owes its all to God, it can have none to spare for the use of others. But if this be the nature of imputation, how are we to understand it in the case of the *first* Adam? If, instead of transgressing the Divine precept, he had faithfully obeyed it, there is every reason to conclude that his posterity, instead of being exposed to sin and death, as they now are, would have been confirmed in a state of holiness and happiness; that is, his obedience would have been imputed to them, as is now his disobedience. Yet in this case there would have been no "surplus" of obedience, or any thing done by our first parent beyond what was his duty to do. From hence, I conceive, it is clear that the imputation of righteousness consists not in the transfer of overplus of virtue; and that Divinity is not necessarily, and in all cases, connected with it.

I shall not here take upon me to decide whether Christ's obedience to the Father was necessary on his own account. Whether it was or not makes nothing as to his being qualified to accomplish our salvation. The imputation of righteousness, as the Scriptures represent it, appears to me to be this:—*God for wise and holy ends blessed one, or many, in reward of the obedience of another, to whom they are related, in a manner as though it were performed by themselves.* Thus, if the first Adam had continued obedient, God would have *expressed his approbation* of his conduct, not only by confirming him, but his posterity after him, in a state of holiness and happiness. And thus *the obedience unto death* yielded by the Second Adam is represented as that with which God is so well pleased, that, *in reward of it*, he not only exalted Him far above all principality and power, but bestowed full, free, and eternal salvation on all those who believe in him, how great soever had been their transgressions.

But, it may be said, if this be the idea which the Scriptures give us of the imputation of righteousness, and it be applicable to the first as well as the Second Adam, whence arises the necessity of the Divinity of Christ, in order that his righteousness should be imputed to us? I do not suppose that it was necessary to imputation itself, but rather to its being *available* to the justification of the ungodly. Imputed righteousness may take place, whether it be that of a mere man or of one who is both God and man; but the righteousness of a mere creature would not avail for the pardon and justification of rebellious men.

There is an important difference between the supposed imputation of the righteousness of the first Adam, and that of the Second. God's promising to bless the sinless posterity of the former, by confirming them in a state of holiness and happiness, had nothing in it which could clash with any of his perfections. He might thus have blessed them without any previous obedience being performed on their behalf, as it appears that he actually did the elect angels. His promising to bless the children, in reward of the obedience of the parent, was that, while he expressed his love to both, he might

also express his love of righteousness. But, in receiving rebellious sinners to favour, there required a proviso for the security of his honour, that he might appear to be what he was—*just* as well as *the justifier*. “It became him, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” The glory of the Divine character must not be tarnished. That for the sake of which we are pardoned and justified therefore, be it what it may, must at least be *equivalent*, as to its influence on moral government, to justice having taken its natural course. Hence arises the necessity of the Deity of Christ, in order to our justification. Though the obedience of a mere creature might be the medium of conveying blessedness to his sinless posterity, yet none but that of a Divine person could accomplish the salvation of sinners; because the obedience of a mere creature could not have done such honour to the Divine law as should have been equal to the dishonour which it had received from us; nor could the sufferings of any one that was not God have expressed the Divine displeasure against sin in so striking and impressive a manner as if every transgressor had received his just recompense of reward. But, admitting the Redeemer to be Divine, all is plain and easy. Hence that which is peculiarly ascribed to the Deity of Christ in regard of his sufferings is their *value* or *virtue*. “By *himself* he purged our sins.”—“The blood of Jesus Christ, *his Son*, cleanseth us from all sin,” Heb. i. 3; 1 John. i. 7.

IMPUTATION.

[From a MS. of the author, without date.]

It has been common to suppose that we are so implicated in Adam's transgression, or that such a union subsisted between him and his posterity, as that what was done by the one was done by the other; or that we are really accountable for his obedience, it being our disobedience as much as the act of one part of the body belongs to the whole man. Thus, or to this effect, I myself have written in certain publications; particularly in my answer to Mr. Dan. Taylor. But since that time I have had different thoughts on the subject, which, however, I at present only put down as thoughts, and not as settled articles of faith.

Unless we had full evidence from Scripture of different intelligent beings being so united as that the voluntary actions of one shall properly belong to the other, I ought not to believe that so it is. It is certainly contrary to all our ideas of accountableness, and to every dictate of conscience. If Adam's transgression in Eden were really ours, why do we not *repent* of it as we do for our other sins? Mr. Hall, late of Arnsby, whose ideas on imputation were entirely such as are here opposed, yet describes repentance as “arising from a conviction of *personal* blame.”* We may be sorry for the sin of Adam, and of other sinners; but we never *repent* of that which we in our own persons have not committed.

I. Is there not an important difference between *punishment* and *suffering*? All punishment is suffering; but all suffering is not punishment. If a soldier have his hand cut off for lifting it up against his commander, it is punishment; but if it be shot off in battle, it is mere suffering.

II. Though an innocent creature cannot be justly exposed to punishment, yet may it not be to suffering? If a commander-in-chief order a troop of his best soldiers to scale a wall in the mouth of danger, they are exposed to suffering; nor would they think of replying, as in case of his ordering them to receive each a hundred lashes, “What have we done to deserve this

* Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1780.

treatment?" But if a human commander, for the accomplishment of a wise, just, and good object, may thus expose his innocent men to suffering, why may not the same be said of the great Master of the universe? Have we not been too much in the habit of concluding that suffering necessarily supposes the party to have sinned; and so because we saw the human race suffer, even in their earliest infancy, we have concluded that they must have sinned in the person of their grand progenitor. But do not the brute creation also suffer? yet they have not sinned. Did not the family of Achan suffer death, as well as his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep? yet they were not transgressors in "the accursed thing," any more than the cattle. Are we not so linked together in society that in millions of examples one suffers the consequence of another's crime, though he partook not with him in the guilt? It may be true that *all suffering supposes sin somewhere*. The suffering of the brutes may be a part of the punishment of the sin of man, who has a propriety in them; and the suffering of Achan's family was undoubtedly a part of the punishment of his sin. But yet it does not necessarily suppose sin in the suffering party.

III. May not the same event be a punishment to the guilty party, and to the innocent mere suffering? The death of Achan's sons and daughters, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, as well as his own death, was to him a punishment, but to them mere suffering. And supposing his children to be grown up, and to be entirely under the influence of the love of God and righteousness, they must have hated their father's crime, and have acquiesced in the doom; not on the principle of being participants of his guilt, but of such a measure being a just punishment to him, and on their part adapted to the general good. "Let our lives," they would say, "be made a sacrifice that may stand as a lasting monument to Israel never more to touch the accursed thing!" In such a case, their death, though a part of their father's punishment, yet to them would be merely an affliction, an affliction that should, through the grace of God, introduce them to everlasting life.

Some righteous persons might perish in the overthrow of Judea by the Romans, who had all along sighed and cried for the abominations of the land. To the nation that event was punishment, but to them it might be mere affliction, and of the nature of a blessing. Now what consequence would follow were I to suppose the sentence of death, and of its antecedent miseries, passed upon all mankind in consequence of Adam's sin, to be to him a punishment, but to them merely an affliction?

There are "*other instances*" of imputation as well as that of Adam's sin to his posterity, from which it is possible some light may be derived to this important subject: e. g. our sin was imputed to Christ, and his righteousness is imputed to us. "He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor. v. 21. And as both these instances of imputation are mentioned together, it should seem that they both proceed on the same principle.

In what sense then was our sin imputed to Christ, or how was he "made sin?" Surely not by a *participation* of it, for he is expressly said in the same passage to have *known no sin*. God did not judge him to *be the sinner*, for his judgments are according to truth. The whole seems to have been that for wise and gracious ends *he was treated as though he had been* the sinner, and the greatest sinner in the world.

Further, In what sense is Christ's righteousness imputed to us, or how are we made the righteousness of God in him? Not by a *participation* of it. It is not true, nor will it ever be true, that the holy excellence of Christ is so ours as that we cease to be unworthy, and are deserving of eternal life. The whole appears to be the same as in the former instance, God for the sake

of the obedience of his Son *treats us as though we were righteous, worthy or meritorious.*

Since writing the above, however, I have some doubts whether imputation consist in *treatment*. Rather, is it not that which is the *ground* of treatment? I have said in "Dialogues, Letters, and Essays," vol. ii. p. 50, "Imputation of sin or righteousness consists in *charging* or *reckoning* to the account of the party in such a way as to impart to him its evil or beneficial effects."

TO THE AFFLICTED.

THOSE whose Christian compassion induces them frequently to visit the sick see and hear things of which others can scarcely form any conception. They see affliction, not merely in easy circumstances, wherein it is alleviated as far as possible by the comforts of life, but as it exists in the poor man's dwelling, aggravated by privations and hardships, many of which would seem intolerable to some, even in a time of health. They sympathize with you, and as far as they are able, it is presumed, administer to your relief.

But there is one thing which has particularly struck the writer of this address; namely, *the different manner in which affliction is borne by religious and by irreligious people.* He wishes to be understood as speaking *generally*, rather than *universally*. Some who are thought to be religious are not so; and some that are truly religious are the subjects of morbid nervous sensibility; while others, who are not so, have much constitutional patience and equanimity. But other things being equal, he has perceived a wide difference in favour of religion. In visiting the dwellings of Christian people in times of affliction, his heart has been cheered by their cheerfulness. Their troubles have seemed to be more than balanced by their enjoyments. Hope has glistened in their very tears, and submission to the will of God has brightened their emaciated countenances. But on entering the abodes of the irreligious, such discontent, despondency, and misery have appeared, that he has come away quite dejected. The smile of hope and the tear of joy were there alike unknown: all was darkness, and the prospect of thicker darkness.

Let us try to find out the causes and the cure of this state of mind, which adds so much to the miseries of life. If every one could tell his tale, and would tell the truth, we might hear some such accounts as these:—

My heart was set upon certain things, and I seemed almost to have gained them, when unexpectedly I was seized with this heavy affliction. And now all my plans are broken; I seem likely to die disappointed; and, what is worse, I have thought nothing, or next to nothing, of an hereafter.

I have lived, says another, a thoughtless and careless life, putting the evil day far from me. I began by entertaining a dislike to the worship of God, and so forsook it, and turned the sabbath into a day of sports. I kept bad company, and soon began to doubt the truth of the Bible. I drank, swore, and when in company laughed at religion; though a secret persuasion that it would prove true sometimes made me very unhappy when alone. I laid my account with living as long as my neighbours; but I am afraid now that I shall not recover, and that my soul is lost. Oh how little did I think, a few weeks ago, that I should be so soon arrested in my course! What have I done? What can I do?

I have lived a sober life, says a third, and have not been used to doubt but that through the merits of Christ this would answer every purpose: but since

I have been laid aside, I have been thinking, in case I should die, whether this ground will bear me; and the more I think of it, the more it seems to sink under me. I am a sinner, and know not how my sins are to be forgiven.

I have been brought up in a Christian family, says a fourth, and have heard the gospel from my childhood; yet my conscience tells me that I am not a Christian. I heard the truth, but never received it in the love of it, that I might be saved. I conformed to family worship, but my heart was never in it. So much was it against the grain of my inclination, that I longed to get from under the yoke. At length my father died, and I had what I wished for—my liberty. Since then I have been very wicked. And now I am brought down to death's door. I know not what will be the end. The Lord have mercy upon me!

If any of these cases be yours, or nearly so, allow me to remind you that a time of affliction is a time when God calls you to a serious inquiry into the state of your soul. "In the day of adversity consider." It is the only time, it may be, in which the voice of religion and conscience can be heard. You may have been "as the wild ass used to the wilderness," neither to be turned nor restrained; all those who have sought to reclaim you have but wearied themselves; but as in her month she was to be found, so are you in yours. Consider then that God has laid his hand upon you that he may cause you to feel what he could do, and induce you to hearken while he reasons with you. He has awakened you also to some sense of your danger, that you may feel your need of the salvation of Christ ere it is for ever hid from your eyes. I dare not comfort you on the consideration of your distress of mind as though it were a hopeful sign of salvation. If it lead you to the Saviour, you will be saved; but if not, it may be to you but the beginning of sorrows. Your sins are much more numerous and heinous than you are aware of; it is an evil and bitter thing to have departed from the living God, and to have spent so large a part of the life he gave you without his fear being in you. God might justly cut you off, and cast you into perdition.

But consider the faithful saying, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief of sinners." You have doubtless heard of this, but perhaps have never considered its import. If Jesus came into the world on such an errand, he must be the Messiah foretold by the prophets, the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. If he came into the world to save sinners, the world must have been in a lost and hopeless condition. If any thing could have been done by man towards saving himself, it would doubtless have been left to him: God would not unnecessarily have interfered, especially to send his Son to be made a sacrifice for us. It does not comport with the wisdom of God to send his Son to suffer and die, to accomplish that which might have been accomplished without him. Moreover, if Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, he must have come *with a design*, which is what no mere creature ever did. Whatever design there may be *concerning* our coming into the world, we are not the subjects of it; but Christ was the subject of design. "He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men;" and this from a state of mind that we are called upon to imitate, Phil. ii. 7. His coming into the world was nothing less than *the Word being made flesh, and dwelling among men; or that eternal Life that was with the Father being manifested to us*. But if all this be true, sin must be indeed an evil and bitter thing, and salvation from it a matter of the greatest importance. And shall we so pursue our farms and merchandise as to make light of it? "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." It is sufficient to warrant our coming to him that such are we. Finally, if he came to save the chief of sinners, whatever our sins have been, they can furnish no reason for despair. Even the sin against the

Holy Ghost is not unpardonable as being too great for the mercy of God, or for the atonement of Christ; but as precluding that which is necessary to an interest in both—*repentance*, Heb. vi. 6. If therefore our sins be lamented, and we have faith in Christ, however numerous or heinous they have been, we shall find mercy. If a ship founders at sea, and while her company are some floating on pieces of wreck, and others swimming for their lives, a friendly vessel bears down and throws out a rope to every one of them, would it be for any one to hesitate as to his taking hold of it?

Many in the day of adversity have, like the prodigal, been brought to a right mind; but many are not so. Some are unaffected, and even hardened, under their afflictions. Nothing is heard but murmurings and complainings; and nothing seen but sullen discontent, depression, and despondency. Others, being deeply intrenched in the persuasion that they have lived a good life, all that is said to them respecting the gospel makes no impression on their minds. Others are secure in consequence of having imbibed some false scheme of religion; and others, who are tender at the time, and appear to believe the gospel, are no sooner restored to health than they lose their impressions, and return to their former courses.

Let us review these cases. If affliction has been the means of humbling you, and bringing you to a right mind, you have reason, not only to be reconciled to it, but to consider it among your greatest mercies. It has been good for you to bear the yoke of adversity; and this should teach you to be resigned to the will of God as to your future lot. "It was by affliction," said a good man, "that I was first brought into the way, and by affliction that I have been kept in it. 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have learned thy word.'"

But if the visitations of God have tended only to *harden* you, and to provoke you to *sullenness* and *discontent*, you have reason to fear lest you should be given up to such a state of mind. "Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more."—"Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone!"

If you be full of *self-righteous confidence*, flattering yourself that your life has been good, and that you have nothing to fear, consider whether you be not in the very condition of those whom our Saviour describes as *whole*, and so *needing no physician*. You appear to have no wants; and therefore none of the blessings of the gospel are interesting to you. A very interesting narrative was published a few years since of such a case as this. A worthy minister, on visiting a dying man, was told by him, with great self-complacency, that "he had never been guilty of any particular sins, and was not therefore uneasy on that score."—"To every thing I said," says the minister, "he gave that unlimited assent which, when coming from an unenlightened person, has always appeared to me peculiarly embarrassing. To every truth I stated, his monotonous reply was, 'Yes, sir,'—'To be sure, sir,'—'Certainly, sir,' and the like. I now felt (as I have often done under similar circumstances) discouraged, perplexed, and grieved; and could not but deeply lament the mental darkness under which the poor man appeared to be enveloped. After a short pause, I frankly confessed that I knew not what to say to him; observing that he appeared to have *no wants*—that the blessings of the gospel were for the poor, the wretched, and the lost—that if he were lamenting his sins, crying for mercy, and inquiring the way of salvation, I thought I should know how to address him; but that, with his present views, the gospel must necessarily appear to him of very little value." This faithful remonstrance, together with a charge of having neglected his own salvation for the sake of worldly advantage, which charge the minister was enabled to bring home to his conscience, appears to have been the means of awakening him to a sense of his danger. "What!" said he, "and is it

too late? Is all lost? Is my poor soul abandoned? Have I lived in the neglect of all these things? And is it come to this? Oh what, what shall I do? O my sins! O my poor soul! O my God, my God! shall I be cast off for ever? What must I do to be saved? Is there no way open for me? Oh what, what must I do to be saved?"—The way of salvation being pointed out to him, he appeared with great sincerity to embrace it, and died very happily. But many have died in the very spirit of the Jews, seeking after acceptance with God, without attaining it. And wherefore? "Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone."

But your security may be in consequence of your having imbibed *some false species of religion*, which influences your mind like an opiate, divesting you of all painful reflection, and filling you with dreams of future happiness. A confidence of this sort is more difficult to be shaken than self-righteous hope itself. Those who have not made much pretence to religion have not so great sacrifices to make in embracing the gospel as those who have. You account your darkness light: but "if the light which is *in* us be darkness, how great is that darkness!" There is an intoxicating quality in false religion, and in the false joys excited by it: like strong drink, it produces a kind of happiness at the time, and a vehement desire of repeating the delicious draught; but its end is bitter, Prov. xxiii. 29–35. We have no mind to dispute with you, but wish to declare unto you the gospel of God, and leave it. If the "faithful saying" above referred to be received, it will issue in your salvation; if not, we can only deliver our own souls!

Finally, though your mind may have undergone a change during your affliction, yet recollect that sick-bed repentances are often, though not always, like what is said of the goodness of Ephraim: "As a morning cloud, and as the early dew, it goeth away." If you abound in vows and promises as to your future life, it is rather a sign that you know but little of yourself than of a real change for the better. An immediate apprehension of death is capable of producing great effects, which are often mistaken for a change of heart. Be confident of the truth of Christ's doctrine and promises; but be diffident of yourself. To doubt his word is unbelief; but to be jealous of yourself is one of the fruits of faith. If God should restore you to health, and you prove by your Christian conversation that his word has taken deep root in your mind, your fellow Christians will rejoice over you, and join in blessing God that the day of visitation has been to you a day of salvation.

THE HEAVENLY GLORY.

THE NATURE AND PROGRESSIVENESS OF THE HEAVENLY GLORY.

ONE of the leading characteristics by which the religion of the Bible is distinguished from those systems of philosophy and morality which many would impose upon us in its place, is, that every thing pertaining to it bears a relation to eternity. The object of all other systems is at best to form the manners; but this rectifies the heart. They aspire only to fit men for this world; but this, while it imparts those dispositions which tend more than any thing to promote peace, order, and happiness in society, fixes the affections supremely on God and things above.

That such should be the exclusive property of revealed religion is not surprising, since it is this only that assures us of the existence of an eternal

hereafter. If we relinquish this, all beyond the grave is uncertainty, and our attention will of course be confined to the transitory concerns of a few revolving suns. The conclusion of those who doubt the resurrection ever has been and will be, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But, believing in the Scriptures of truth, immortality opens to our view. This is the seed time and eternity the harvest. All that is known of God and done for him in this life is preparatory to the joy that is set before us.

To this affecting theme, fellow Christians, let us bend our attention. Would we be heavenly-minded, we must think of what heaven is. Would we set our affections on things above, we must know them, converse with them, and perceive their superior value to things on the earth. It is true, when all is done, it is but little we can comprehend. It is a weight of glory which if let down upon our minds in our present feeble state would upset them. It did not appear even to an inspired apostle, while upon earth, what believers "would be;" but if we can only obtain a few ideas of it, a glimpse of glory through the breakings of interposing clouds, it will more than repay us for the utmost attention. What pains do men take by artificial mediums to decry the heavenly bodies! Every discovery, whether real or imaginary, is to them a source of rapture and delight. Yet they expect no possession in these supposed worlds of wonder. It is not the object which they discover, but the act of discovery, which by giving birth to a momentary fame is their reward. And shall we be indifferent towards those blessed realities in which every thing that we discover is our own, and our own for ever?

Let us first inquire into the NATURE of that blessedness which God has prepared for them that love him, and then consider its PROGRESSIVE character.

I have no desire to indulge in speculations concerning the place; nor to enter on any curious inquiries how spirits while separate from their bodies can receive or communicate ideas; nor to throw out conjectures upon any thing which God hath not been pleased to reveal. My object is, as far as may be, to collect the *scriptural* account of things, or to ascertain wherein consists that fulness of joy which is at God's right hand, and which will continue to flow as in rivers of pleasure for evermore.

The easiest and most satisfactory medium of conception which we have of these things appears to me to be furnished by our own *present experience*. The Scriptures abundantly teach us that the blessedness of heaven is the same for substance as that which we now partake of by faith. This is clearly intimated in those passages in which grace is represented as the *earnest* and *foretaste* of glory. Our Saviour is said to have received power "to give *eternal life* to as many as were given him." "And *this*," he adds, "*is life eternal*, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." To whomsoever therefore Christ gives this knowledge, he gives the earnest of the promised possession, and which, as to the nature of it, is the same as the possession itself. The promises to them that overcome, in the second and third chapters of the Revelation of John, agree with what is actually experienced in the measure of the present world, though expressed in highly figurative language, as the "eating of the tree of life," "partaking of the hidden manna," a being "clothed in white raiment," and "made pillars in the temple of God." Were we to read that sublime passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, without observing its introduction, we should undoubtedly consider it as a description of the heavenly state, and of that only:—"Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born who are written in heaven, God the Judge of all, the spirits of just men made perfect, Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling

that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel!" What can this mean but the very heaven of heavens? Yet the apostle tells the Hebrews that they were already "come to" this celestial city, and to all its honours and privileges. On what principle can this be understood but this, that the church below and the church above are one—"the whole family of heaven and earth," and he that cometh to one branch or part of it, cometh in effect to the whole?

If then we can review the sources of our best and purest joys in this world, or observe those of the saints whose history is recorded in Scripture, and only add perfection to them, we have in substance the scriptural idea of heavenly glory. The nature of Canaan's goodly fruits was clearly ascertained by the clusters that were carried into the wilderness.

We have seen already that the grand source of spiritual enjoyment in the present life is the "knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." And what is this but an epitome of the gospel, and the faith of it? To have a just sense of the glory of the Lawgiver and the Saviour, and of the harmony between them in the salvation of lost sinners; to see every Divine perfection as it is manifested in the person and work of Christ; in a word, believingly to contemplate God in a Mediator is eternal life! This was the *water* which Christ imparted, and which to them who imbibed it became in them "a well of living water springing up into everlasting life."

Look at the enjoyments of the Scripture saints, and see if they did not arise from the same spring that shall supply the city of the living God, even in the heaven of heavens. Every thing that manifested the glory of the Divine character was to them a source of enjoyment; and as all God's other works were wrought in subserviency to the redemption of the church by his Son, this was the theme which above all others engrossed their attention. What was it that filled Abraham's heart with joy? What that eclipsed the world in the esteem of Moses? What that made the tongue of David as the pen of a ready writer? It was Christ. That in the "everlasting covenant" which was all his salvation, and all his desire, was its containing the promise of Christ. If we find any of the prophets filled with more than usual ardour, it is when Christ is the theme: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.—Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.—Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." It is easy to see in these and similar passages a beam of heavenly glory shining upon the writers. In short, it was eternal life for them to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he *would* send.

What of heaven there was upon earth during the time of our Saviour's ministry consisted of the knowledge of him, and the knowledge of him involved that of the Father who sent him. Who can read the interview between Mary and Elizabeth, or the words of Simeon in the temple, without perceiving that a beam of celestial glory had descended upon them, and raised them above themselves? "My soul doth magnify the Lord; and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!"—"Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!"

And when Jesus commenced his public ministry, what a charming interest was excited among the people! John, observing him as he walked, said to two of his disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God!" They immediately follow Jesus. Jesus, turning to them, asks, "What seek ye?" They cannot express all they wish at that time and place; but, desirous of a more intimate acquaintance with him, ask, "Where dwellest thou?" The answer was, "Come and see." And when they had spent the evening with him, one of them (Andrew) goes and finds his brother Simon, and said, "We have found the Messiah!" And he brought him to Jesus. The day following Jesus findeth Philip, and said unto him, "Follow me!" Philip findeth Nathanael, and said, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."—"Can there any good thing," said Nathanael, "Come out of Nazareth?" The answer is, as before, "Come and see."

The enjoyments of these people were a heaven upon earth; yet at the same time Christ was nothing to unbelievers. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."—"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."—"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among them, (and they beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Thus it was that of his fulness they all received, and grace for grace. In him the invisible God was in a manner rendered visible; for he who dwelt in his bosom came down and declared him. In beholding his glory, therefore, they beheld the glory of God, and were partakers in measure of eternal life, John i. 10-18.

It is a remarkable saying of our Lord to Nathanael, when his mind was transported with joy and surprise, "Thou shalt see greater things than these—hereafter you shall see *heaven open*, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." The allusion is, I doubt not, to the vision of Jacob at Beth-el; and what the ladder was to him—namely, a medium on which the angels of God ascended and descended, that Christ would be to his church after his resurrection. I say to *his church*; for though the intimation is given to Nathanael, yet it was not of any thing which *he* should see in distinction from others, but in common with them. The pronoun is plural: "Verily I say unto *you*, hereafter *you* shall see heaven open," &c. But what a saying is this! When the wrath of God was poured upon a guilty world, it is expressed by this kind of language: "The windows of heaven were opened." What then can it here denote but that God would, in honour of Him in whom his soul delighted, pour forth a deluge of blessings in his name? Then, when Jesus had said unto his disciples, "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem;" when thousands of Jews found mercy under a single sermon, and tens of thousands from among the Gentiles partook of the benefits of his death; and when, as the great High Priest of our profession, he had entered into the holy of holies, and consecrated a new and living way for the most intimate communion between God and his people,—then was heaven opened.

The words of our Lord to Nicodemus are also here in point: "No man hath ascended up to Heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven." The connexion of the passage will convince us that a *personal* ascent or descent is out of the question. The meaning appears to be this: No man hath known the mind of God, save He that was always with him, and is still with him, dwelling as in his bosom.—Thus the phrase *ascending to heaven* is used in Deut. xxx. 12, and Rom. x. 6.

The Greek might seek after wisdom, and the Jew make his boast of God; but no man should be able to find out the wisdom from above, nor discover the way of life, but by coming to Christ and taking him for his guide. Nicodemus, though a master in Israel, yet, while a stranger to Christ, stumbled at the very threshold of the heavenly doctrine. Christ told him of earthly things, namely, the new birth, which was only one of the first principles of true religion, a subject confined to the earth, and which every babe in grace was acquainted with, and he could not understand it: how then should he climb up as it were into heaven, and discover the mind of God? Christ taught what *he knew*, and they that received not his testimony were strangers to the kingdom of God; but they that received it, looking to him as the Israelites looked to the brazen serpent in the wilderness, found eternal life.

The prayer of our Saviour in behalf of his followers shows also that heaven consists in that which has its commencement in this world: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word: *that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us*, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." What is heaven but to be of one heart with the Father and with Christ, even as they are one? Yet this blessed union is not confined to the heavenly state: it was to take place on earth, and be *visible* to men; how else should the world be convinced by it that Jesus was sent of God? So far then as we enter into the views and pursuits of God and of his Christ, so much we enjoy of heaven; and so far as we come up to this standard in our social and visible character, so much does our conduct tend to convince the world of the reality of religion.

The kingdom of grace, especially the gospel dispensation, is described by Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, in language equally applicable to the kingdom of glory, and which, indeed, at first, brings the latter to our thoughts: "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit."

Once more, The prayer of Paul in behalf of the Ephesians, and of all saints, is very expressive on this subject: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." If there be a sentence in the Bible expressive of ultimate bliss, one would think it were this of being "filled with all the fulness of God;" yet this is held up as an object not altogether unattainable in the present life.

But let us look with close attention at the different parts of this wonderful prayer.

Observe, First, The *character* under which God is addressed: "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." We sometimes hear prayers among us beginning with a great flow of pompous words, and high-sounding names ascribed to the Divine Majesty, without any *relation* to what is prayed for; but the more we examine the prayers recorded in Scripture, the more we shall find that all their prefatory ascriptions are appropriate; that is, they bear an intimate relation to the petitions that follow. Thus Jacob prayed when in fear of Esau: "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac," &c. Thus also David, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." And

thus the souls under the altar, "How long, O Lord, *holy and true*, dost thou not judge and *avenge our blood*?" The same is observable in this prayer of Paul. "*The Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ" is supposed to be through him the *Father* of all that believe in him, even of the whole "family in heaven and earth;" and to be more ready to impart good things to them than the tenderest father can be to his children. The combining also of the church in heaven and the church on earth, and the representing of them as but *one family*, though in different situations, seem designed to furnish a plea that all the blessedness might not be confined to the former, but that a portion of it might be sent, as it were, from the Father's table to those children who had not yet passed the confines of sin and sorrow.

Secondly, The *rule* by which the Lord is entreated to confer his favours: "According to the riches of his glory." By the term "riches," we have the idea of fulness, or all-sufficiency; and by the "riches of his glory," that perhaps of an established character for goodness. Taken together, they suggest that, in drawing near to God, whether for ourselves or others, we must utterly renounce all human worthiness, and plead with him only for his name's sake. This is a plea which has never failed of success.

Thirdly, The *petitions* of which the prayer is composed: "That he would grant you—to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man," &c. By reviewing these petitions, as quoted above, we shall perceive that the first three are *preparatory* to those which follow. The import of them is that believers might be girded, as it were, for an extraordinary effort of mind. He prays for their being possessed of certain things "that they may be able" to comprehend other things. Such is the weakness of our souls for contemplating heavenly subjects, especially "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of redeeming love, that, without grace to prepare us for it, it would be utterly beyond our reach.

The first thing prayed for is that we may be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in our inner man." We may possess strong mental powers, and by cultivating them may be able to reason high, and imagine things that shall fill our own minds and those of others with agreeable amazement; yet without that might which is produced by the Holy Spirit, we may be mere babes in true religion, or, what is worse, "without God in the world." It is being strong in faith, in hope, and in love, that enables the mind to "lay hold of eternal life."

To this is added, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." For one to dwell in the heart of another is the same thing as to be the object of his intense affection; and as all that we at present know of Christ, and consequently all the love that we bear to him, has respect to his character as revealed in the gospel, it is "by faith" that he is said to dwell in us. Did not Christ dwell in the hearts of the Ephesians then already? He did; but the object of the apostle's prayer in this instance was, not that they might be saints, but eminent saints; not that they might merely love Christ in sincerity, but in the highest or most intense degree. And as this prayer is preparatory to what follows, it shows that the more intensely we love him, the more capable we are of comprehending his love to us. We may talk of everlasting love, and fancy ourselves to have a deep insight into the doctrines of the gospel; but if his name be not dearer to us than life, it will be little or nothing more than talk. The deeds of David would appear abundantly more glorious to Jonathan than to those cold-hearted Israelites who had no regard for him. Of all the disciples none were so loving as John, and none have written so largely on the love of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

Once more, He adds, "That ye, being rooted and grounded in love." If Christ's dwelling in our hearts be expressive of love to him, it may seem as

though this part of the prayer was a mere repetition; but the emphasis appears to lie upon the terms *rooted* and *grounded*. They are both metaphorical; one referring to a tree or plant, and the other to a building. Now, seeing it was the desire of the apostle that believers should soar upward in one respect, he is concerned that they should be prepared for it by descending downward in another. If the tree be not well rooted, or the building well grounded, the higher it rises, the greater will be its danger of falling. And what is that in love to Christ, it may be asked, which is analogous to this? It may be its being accompanied in all its operations by a *knowledge* of his true character. One is greatly enamoured of a stranger who has saved his life, and thinks at the same time he should be happy to spend his days with him; but as he comes to *know* him, he finds they cannot live together. He regards him as a deliverer, but dislikes him as a man. Another in similar circumstances not only feels grateful for his deliverance, but is attached to his deliverer. The more he knows of him, the better he loves him, and wishes for nothing more than to dwell with him for ever. The regard of the former, we should say, is not "rooted," or "grounded;" but that of the latter is. It is easy to apply this to the love of Christ, and thus to account for the fall of many fair and towering professors, as well as for the growth of true believers.

But what is the *object* of all these petitions? They are only preparatory, as before observed, to what follows. And what is this? "That ye may be able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." The love ascribed to Christ, is that, no doubt, which induced him to lay down his life for us, and which still operates in the carrying into effect every branch of our salvation. But who can ascertain its dimensions? Whether we consider the extent of its designs, the duration of its effects, the guilt and misery from which it recovers us, or the glory and happiness to which it raises us, we are lost in the boundless theme. How should it be otherwise, when it "passeth knowledge," even that of the most exalted creatures?

The perception which we have of this great subject, however, is termed "comprehending," or *taking hold of it*. It is not peculiar to sublime and elevated genius to soar above the skies. The Christian, borne on the wings of faith, may adopt the language of Milton, and in a much more real and interesting sense:—

"Up-led by thee
Into the heaven of heavens I have presumed,
An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air."

One more step remains ere we reach the top of this Divine climax. In proportion as we comprehend the love of Christ, we are supposed to be "filled with all the fulness of God." If there be a sentence in the Bible expressive of ultimate bliss, I say again, surely it is this. To be filled with God, with the fulness of God, with all the fulness of God—what things are these? Yet by being strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit in our inner man, by Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith, and by being rooted and grounded in love, we are supposed to be *able*, in measure, to grasp the mighty theme of redeeming love, and so to partake of the Divine fulness.

There is a perceivable and glorious fitness in God's imparting his fulness through the knowledge of the love of Christ. First, It is through his dying love that the fulness of the Divine character is *displayed*. Much of God is seen in his other works; but it is here only that we behold his *whole* character. Great as were the manifestations of his glory under former dispensations, they contained only a partial display of him. "No man hath seen God at

any time," said John: "but the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath *declared* him."—Secondly, It is through the dying love of Christ that a way is opened for the consistent *communication* of Divine blessedness to guilty creatures. God's fulness is a mighty stream; but sin was a mountain which tended to impede its progress, and so to prevent our being filled with it. This mountain, by the dying love of Christ, was removed, and cast into the depths of the sea. Hence the way is clear: all spiritual blessings in heavenly places flow freely to us through Christ Jesus. God can pour forth the fulness of his heart towards sinners without the least dishonour attaching to his character as having connived at sin.—Thirdly, It is as knowing the love of Christ that we *imbibe* the Divine fulness. To be filled with the fulness of God, it is not only necessary that the object be exhibited, and a way opened for its being consistently communicated, but that the soul be emptied of those impediments which obstruct its entrance. There is no room for the fulness of God in the unrenewed mind; it is pre-occupied with other things. All its thoughts, desires, and affections are filled with the trash of this world. If it assume the appearance of religion, still it is so bloated with self-sufficiency that there is no place for a free salvation. But knowing the love of Christ, as revealed in the gospel, all these things are accounted loss, and the fulness of God finds free access.

And as it is in the beginning, so it is in the whole of our progress. If we prefer the study of other things to the doctrine of the cross, even of those things which in subserviency to this are lawful, we shall pursue a barren track. We may feed our natural powers, but our graces will pine away. It is by the study of Christ crucified that our souls will be enriched; for this is the medium through which God delights to communicate of his fulness.

Having considered something of the nature of the heavenly blessedness, our next object of meditation is ITS PROGRESSIVE CHARACTER. By the manner in which some have spoken and written of the heavenly state, it would seem not only as if all would possess an equal measure of blessedness, but that this measure would be completed at once; if not on the soul's having left the body, yet immediately on its reunion with it at the resurrection. But such ideas appear to me to have no foundation in the Holy Scriptures. There is no doubt that salvation is altogether of grace, and that every crown will be cast at the feet of Christ; but it does not follow that they shall be in all respects alike. Paul's crown of rejoicing, for instance, will greatly consist in the salvation of those among whom he laboured; but this cannot be the case with every other inhabitant of heaven. And with respect to the completion of the bliss, there certainly will be no such imperfection attending it as to be a source of sorrow, but rather of joy, as affording matter for an endless progression of knowledge, and consequently of love, and joy, and praise. There is no sorrow in the minds of angels in their present state; yet they are described as looking with intenseness and delight into the doctrine of the cross; which clearly indicates a progressiveness in knowledge and happiness. God is perfect, and immutably the same; but it is as he is *revealed* or *manifested* to us that we enjoy him as our portion. If, therefore, he be gradually manifesting himself through time, and thereby causing the tide of celestial bliss to rise higher and higher, it may be the same to eternity. Nay more, if heavenly bliss consist in knowing the love of Christ, and that love, when all is said and done, "passeth knowledge," it must be so; there must either come a period when the finite mind shall have perfectly comprehended the infinite, and therefore can have nothing more to learn, or knowledge and happiness must be eternally progressive.

I might here consider the doctrine as proved; but other evidences will appear by examining the *causes* of it, as taught us in the Scriptures. That

the happiness of saints and angels is now increasing is abundantly evident from the progressive state of various things from whence it rises. Our Lord assures us that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth; but, if so, the gradual progress of his kingdom among men, from its first beginning, must have caused a gradual influx of joy to the heavenly world. The same might be said, no doubt, of other things which are working together for the accomplishment of the Divine designs. But I shall select *two* great events as having an influence in this way beyond any thing else with which we are acquainted. These are, THE FIRST AND SECOND APPEARING OF CHRIST. The one will give us some idea of the increase of heavenly blessedness during the separate state, and the other after it.

The person and work of Christ, as we have seen, is the grand medium by which the Divine character is manifested. Every stage of his undertaking, therefore, may be expected to exhibit it with increasing lustre, and so to augment the blessedness not only of saints on earth, but of saints and angels in heaven. The *appearing* of Christ, whether to save or to judge the world, is an event which the Scriptures seem to have marked with emphasis, and God to have honoured by a peculiar manifestation of his glory. Such is the idea suggested by the following passages: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; but is now made manifest by the *appearing* of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."—"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious *appearing* of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." From the former of these passages we see that the first appearing of our Saviour was the time marked out of God for pouring forth the fulness of his heart, or for manifesting what had been hid in his secret purposes from before the foundation of the world: from the latter we see that his second appearing is not only a time to which Christians may look forward with hope, but that it is itself their hope, "that blessed hope;" as though all other hopes were comprised in it: and, in that it is denominated "glorious," it is intimated that the glory of Christ shall in that day be manifested beyond what it has ever been before.

The influence which the first of these events had on the happiness of the church *on earth* surpassed every thing which had gone before it. Not only was the daughter of Zion called to "rejoice greatly" at the coming of her King, but is directed to "get upon the high mountain," as if to proclaim the glad tidings to the ends of the earth. Yea, fields, and woods, and seas, and heaven, and earth, are called upon to unite in the general joy, Zech. ix. 9; Isa. xl. 8; Psal. xcvi. 11, 12. And is it possible that the blessed above should be uninterested on this occasion? If the repentance of a sinner gives them joy, what must they feel on the appearance of him who came to save a world!

The ministry of angels, and the appearance of other celestial inhabitants during the Lord's residence on earth, afford some idea of the lively interest which they felt in his undertaking.

When the heavenly messengers announced his birth to the shepherds, they did not preach an unfelt gospel; by turning the "good tidings which should be to all people" into a song of praise, they manifested how much their own hearts were in the subject.—In their *ministering* to him after his temptations in the wilderness we see a cordiality resembling that of Melchizedek to Abraham, when he brought forth bread and wine, and blessed him. It was not for them to appear at the scene of conflict, lest the glory of the victory should seem to be diminished; but they may congratulate him on his return, and furnish him with those things which he refused to obtain by miracle at

the instance of the tempter.—The appearance of Moses and Elias on the mount of transfiguration, and their speaking of his *decease* which he should accomplish at Jerusalem, strongly evinces the deep interest which they took in it; and affords a specimen of that which occupied the attention of the heavenly inhabitants.

During our Saviour's sufferings, as under his temptations, it seems to have been ordered that the hosts of heaven, as well as his friends on earth, should in a manner forsake him; not as being uninterested in the event, (for legions of them were ready, if God had given commandment, to have rescued him, or avenged his wrongs,) but that he might grapple as it were single-handed with the powers of darkness, and that to him might be given the whole glory of the victory. Except a single angel, who appeared to strengthen him prior to the conflict, all seem to have stood aloof, and with awful silence witnessed its result. But when, rising from the dead, he began his return from the field of battle, they again met him, as Melchizedek met Abraham, with their blessings and congratulations. The resurrection of our Lord was at too early an hour for the most zealous of his disciples to be present; but the heavenly watchers were there; and, on his leaving the tomb, were stationed to give information to them that would be seeking him. The question which they put to Mary, "Woman, why weepest thou?" would seem to intimate that, if she had known all, she would not have wept, unless it were for joy! As from that day Satan had begun to fall before him, a mighty influx of joy must needs have been diffused through all the heavenly regions.

If we follow our Redeemer in his ascension and session at the right hand of God, where he is constituted Lord of all, angels, principalities, and powers being made subject to him, and where he sits till his enemies are made his footstool, we shall observe the tide of celestial blessedness rise higher still. The return of a great and beloved prince, who should, by only hazarding his life, have saved his country, would fill a nation with ecstasy. Their conversation in every company would turn upon him, and all their thoughts and joys concentrate in him. See then the King of kings, after having by death abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light; after spoiling the powers of darkness, and ruining all their schemes; see him return in triumph! There was something like triumph when he entered into Jerusalem. All the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" And the multitude answered, It is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth; and the very children sung, Hosanna to the Son of David: blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest! How much greater then must be the triumph of his entry into the heavenly Jerusalem! Would not all the city be "moved" in this case, saying, *Who is this?* See thousands of angels attending him, and ten thousand times ten thousand come forth to meet him! The entrance of the ark into the city of David was but a shadow of this, and the responsive strains which were sung on that occasion would on this be much more applicable.

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors;
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
Even lift them up, ye everlasting doors;
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!"

To form an adequate idea of the mighty influx of joy which this event would produce in heaven is impossible: a few particulars of it however are

intimated in the Scriptures. The angels of God, previously to the appearing of Christ, would learn the Divine character principally from the works of creation and providence. When he laid the foundations of the earth, they sang together; and when, in the government of the world which he had made, he manifested his wisdom, power, justice, and goodness, they cried one to another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." But when the doctrine of salvation through the death of Christ was revealed, they are represented as fixing upon this as their chosen theme—"Which things the angels desire to look into."

What an idea does this last quoted passage convey of the intense desire and delight of those holy intelligences while exploring the mysteries of redeeming grace! Stooping down, like the cherubim towards the ark and the mercy-seat, their minds are fixed upon the delightful theme. Yet such was its depth that they did not pretend to fathom it, but merely to *look*, or rather *desire to look into it*. The gospel was to them a new mine of celestial riches, a well-spring of life and blessedness.

Much to the same purpose are the words of Paul to the Ephesians. Speaking of the gospel which was given him to communicate to the Gentiles, he calls it "the mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that *now* unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God." By whatever mediums God had heretofore made known his manifold wisdom, it is through the redemption of the church that it must "now" be viewed, even by the highest orders of intelligences. And thus it was designed to be from the beginning: all things were ordered in the secret purpose of God, and the fit time of every event determined, "to the intent" that the tide of mercy might rise and overflow with the rising glory of his Son, and that the spoils of his warfare on behalf of men should not only furnish them with an everlasting feast, but a surplus as it were to be distributed among the friendly angels. The foundation of this well-ordered frame was laid in creation itself: for God "created all things *by Jesus Christ*;" that is, not merely as a co-worker with him, but as the end to which every thing was made to fit, or become subservient: "All things were created *by him*, and *for him*."

We seem to ourselves to be the only parties under God who are concerned for the spread of Christ's kingdom in the world; but it is not so. The answer of the angel to John, who by mistake was going to worship him, is worthy of our notice: "See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus." This language conveys an idea not only of the lively interest which those holy beings take in the promotion of Christ's kingdom on earth, but of their union and co-operation with us in every thing pertaining to it. We know not in what manner this is effected; but so it is; and as their perception both of the worth and the loss of God's favour is exceedingly more vivid and enlarged than ours, such in their view must be the importance of saving a soul from death. By how much also their love to God and disinterested benevolence to men exceeds the languid affections of sinful creatures, by so much more lively must be the interest which they feel in the progress of this work. The joy ascribed to them on the repentance of a sinner is that which might be expected: how much higher must it rise then when the strong holds of Satan give way in a town, a city, or a country, where sinners have heretofore from time immemorial been led captive by him at his will! While the poor servants of Christ are labouring under a thousand discouragements, and sighing under their own unfruitfulness, they, if they were permitted to speak, would say to each of them, as to Mary, "Why weepst thou?"

It cannot be supposed surely that what has been observed of angels is confined to them, and that the ascension of Christ added nothing to the blessedness of the redeemed themselves. It might be presumed that they who are his bone and his flesh would not be the last either in bringing back the King or in enjoying his triumphs. But we need not rest this conclusion on mere presumptive evidence. Though the visions of John, in respect of *design*, were mostly prophetic of events to be accomplished on earth, yet much of the *scenery* is taken from the work of heaven, and affords some very interesting ideas of that blessed state. Surely the "new song" of the living creatures and the elders who were "round about the throne" may be considered in this light; and they are represented as not only joining with angels in ascribing worthiness to the Lamb, but as dwelling upon one subject peculiar to themselves: "Thou art worthy—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

It is also observable that these living creatures and elders who were redeemed from among men are described as rejoicing over the fall of Babylon, and in the prospect of the marriage of the Lamb; which seems to be only a prophetic mode of describing the overthrow of popery, and the general prevalence of true religion, Rev. xix. But, if so, the church above must be interested in all that is going on in the church below; and must derive a large portion of its enjoyments from the progress of that cause in defence of which millions of its members have shed their blood. The exaltation of Christ, as King of Zion, adds, therefore, to the happiness of both heaven and earth.

In what sense could Christ be said to "prepare a place" for his followers, if his presence did not greatly tend to augment the blessedness of that world whither he went, and render it a sweet resort to them when they should have passed their days of tribulation? If heavenly bliss consist much in social enjoyment, the arrival of *any* interesting character must be somewhat of an acquisition. If our present conceptions, however, be any rule of judging, the being introduced to certain dear friends who have gone before us will be a source of pleasure inexpressible. In this point of view every one who goes before contributes in some degree to prepare a place for those that follow after; and as things continually move on in the same direction, the sum total of heavenly enjoyment must be continually accumulating. But if such be the influence arising from the accession of creatures, what must that have been which followed His entrance who is life itself? His presence would render those blest abodes ten thousand times more blessed! Hence the grand motive to heavenly-mindedness in the New Testament is drawn from the consideration of Christ's being in heaven. "If," said Paul, "ye be risen *with Christ*, seek those things which are above, *where Christ sitteth* on the right hand of God. And what the apostle recommended to others was exemplified in himself; for he had "a desire to depart, and to *be with Christ*, which is far better." But to "be with Christ" is not to be shut up with him in such a manner as to be unacquainted with what is going on in behalf of his kingdom in this world. On the contrary, we shall there occupy a situation suited to a more enlarged view of it. Solomon represents every event as having its proper season, and all the works of God as forming a beautiful whole; but intimates that man in the present life is *too near the object* to be able to perceive it in all its parts. He is too much in the world, and the world in him, to judge of things pertaining to it on a large scale. "I have seen the travail," saith he, "which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in its time: also he hath *set the world in their heart*, so that no man can find out the

work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." But to be with Christ is to be at the source of influence and the centre of intelligence. It is to be in company with him that sitteth at the helm, knowing and directing all things, and to feel a common interest with him in all that is carrying on.

Such are a few of the ideas given us of the effects of Christ's *first* appearing; but the New Testament ascribes full as much if not more to his appearing a *second* time without sin unto salvation. God seems to have determined to honour the *appearing* of his Son by rendering it the signal for pouring forth a flood of blessedness on the created system. The glory which accompanied his first appearing eclipsed every thing which had gone before it. The dispensation which it introduced is the jubilee of the church, in which millions who sat in heathen darkness have been liberated and brought forth to the light of life. But the glory which shall be revealed on his second appearing will be greater still; and the increase of celestial happiness will transcend every thing which eye hath seen or ear heard, or which it hath entered into the heart of man to conceive. Believers have received abundance of grace already, and shall receive abundance more on their arrival at their Father's house; but both are unequal to "the grace that shall be brought unto them at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

It is worthy of notice that the glory of that day is set forth in such language as in a manner to eclipse every thing that may be enjoyed in a separate state before it; and on some occasions it is actually passed over as though it had no existence. Thus, when Paul would comfort the Thessalonians for the loss of their Christian friends, he says nothing of their being immediately present with the Lord; but of their being raised from the dead, and caught up to meet the Lord on his second appearing.

Among the many passages of Scripture which hold up this important truth are the following: "I shall behold his face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness.—Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.—Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.—And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.—Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.—Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.—Surely I come quickly. Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus."

The most plausible arguments that are alleged against the doctrine of a separate state have been drawn from these and such-like passages; and though there be no ground for such a conclusion, yet we are hereby taught to expect that the glory which shall at that time be revealed will greatly transcend every thing that has gone before it. The streams of grace have flowed and overflowed in all their meandering directions; but here they meet and fall into the ocean of glory.

The following particulars may in some measure serve to account for the strong language of the New Testament upon this subject.

First, *Salvation will be then completed*.—It hath pleased God to accomplish this great work by degrees. We are saved from the *curse* of sin, by our Redeemer's having been made a curse for us; from the *dominion* of it, by the renewing of his Spirit; from the *being* of it at death; but the *effects* of it remain till the resurrection. This last act of deliverance is of such importance as to be the assigned object of our Saviour's second appearance. "He shall come a second time without sin *unto salvation*." Christ's engagements in behalf of those whom the Father hath given him extend not only

to the saving of their souls from wrath, but of their bodies from the pit of corruption, and in this have their issue. "This is the Father's will who hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." This deliverance is called "The adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body;" and is represented as that for which believers, even those who had the first-fruits of the Spirit, groaned within themselves. Every part of the work of salvation is great, and accompanied with joy; but this, being the last, will, on this account, in some respects, be the greatest. The husbandman rejoices when his seed is sown, and at every stage of its growth; but the joy of harvest, when he reaps the fruit of his labour, crowns the whole. What the jubilee was to them that were in bondage, that the resurrection will be to the righteous dead. The one was accompanied with general joy, with a public proclamation, with the blowing of the trumpet, and with the liberty of the captives; and so will the other. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first."

That this should augment the happiness of heaven is easily conceived. The reunion of soul and body will both furnish new matter for joy and enlarge our capacity for receiving it. If Christ watches over our dust as a part of his charge, we ourselves cannot be supposed to be indifferent towards it. We know that in contemplating the grave as our long and lonesome habitation, or as that of our friends, we have felt much. The plaintive language of Job has here often been adopted: "Man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep!" But by how much we have sown in tears, by so much we shall reap in joy. To hail the happy day after so long an imprisonment—to find our vile bodies changed, and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body—to feel ourselves no more subject to corruption, dishonour, and weakness, but possessed of incorruption, honour, and immortal vigour, fully adapted to the state to which we shall be introduced—must needs be a source of joy unspeakable. Hence the language of the prophet, which, though it foretells a glorious revival of the church, yet alludes to the joy of the resurrection: "Thy dead shall live: my deceased, they shall arise: awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."*

Secondly, *The opposition which from the entrance of sin into the creation has been carrying on against God shall now come to an end, and all its mischievous effects be brought to a glorious issue.*—For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil; and which purpose will now be fully accomplished. Death is represented as the *last* enemy, which being destroyed in the resurrection, it is supposed that every other enemy shall have fallen before it. Here then will be the triumphant conclusion of the war between Michael and the dragon, the Seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent. The appearing of Christ, to raise the dead and judge the world, marks the season or "time of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Hence the rebellion raised in the dominions of God shall be crushed; pardon conferred on some, punishment inflicted on others, and law, peace, and order restored to their ancient channels. Now, as sin, whether in ourselves or others, has been the source of all our unhappiness, to see it in this manner finished, and the cause of Satan utterly ruined, cannot but produce an influx of joy inexpressible.

Thirdly, *The creatures of God will then be delivered from the bondage of*

* Isaiah xxvi. 19. Lowth's Translation.

corruption, or the yoke of being subservient to his enemies, Rom. viii. 18-23. To magnify "the glory that shall be revealed in us" at the resurrection, the apostles represent it as an object interesting to creation in general, and for which it groaneth and travaileth as it were in pain, longing for our deliverance as the signal of its own. As, when a province rises up against legitimate authority, the greater part, if not the whole, of its resources are drawn in, and made to subserve the interest of the rebels against the rightful sovereign; so when man apostatized from God, all the creatures, whether animate or inanimate, which by the laws of nature were subservient to his happiness, were drawn, as it were, into the confederacy. Sun, moon, stars, clouds, earth, air, sea, birds, beasts, fishes, and all other creatures which contributed to man's happiness, are, through his revolt, in some way or other made to subserve the cause of rebellion. To this "vanity" they are subjected: "not willingly" indeed (for every creature in its proper station naturally inclines to serve and honour its Creator, and whenever it does otherwise it is against nature); "but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope." In other words, The great Supreme, having first established the laws of nature, did not judge it proper to overturn them on account of their abuse; but to permit the creatures to go on serving the cause of rebellion, till in his own due time he should deliver them from their servitude by other means. Yet to show their original bent, and how much their present subjection is against the grain, they frequently rise up, as if to revenge their Creator's cause against their abusers. The sun smites them by day, and the moon by night; the waters drown them; the air, full of pestilential vapours, infects their vitals; the earth trembles under them, and disgorges floods of liquid fire to consume them; and the animals revolt against them, and even seize them for their portion. In a word, nature, by a bold figure of speech, is personified and described as labouring under the pangs of child-birth, longing to be delivered of its cumbrous load.

And as the "redemption" or resurrection of our body will mark the period when this disorder shall come to an end, it is considered as the birth-day of a new creation. Hence the interests of the sons of God are described as including those of creation in general. The latter are, as it were, bound up in the former: the glorious liberty of the one being a glorious liberty to the other, each longs for the same event: "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."

Now, as the new heavens and the new earth will henceforth be the abode of righteousness, and no more subject to the vanity of subserving the cause of sin, this must needs contribute to augment the blessedness of the blessed; for as it would grieve a loyal heart to see the resources of his country turned against their rightful sovereign; so it must rejoice him to see the rebellion crushed, and every thing appropriated to his honour, and the peace, order, and happiness of society. Such are the sentiments expressed in the 148th Psalm, in which every creature in heaven above, and in the earth beneath, according to its capacity, is called upon to join in praising God.

Fourthly, *The glory of Christ as a Saviour will be manifested beyond any thing which has appeared before*.—Christ is glorified whenever a sinner is brought to believe in him, and more so when multitudes flock to his standard; but all this is little when compared to the general assembly of the saved, every one of which furnishes an example of the efficacy of his death. The great Physician appears with his recovered millions, and in the presence of an assembled universe, presents them to the Father. In that day Christ will no doubt be honoured *by* his people; but that which is principally held up to us is his being honoured by others for what is seen in them. He shall come "to be glorified *in* his saints, and admired *in* all them that believe."

Now, as every manifestation of Christ's glory has been productive of an influx of blessedness to his people, and is that indeed in which it consists, this being the greatest of all his manifestations, it may well be supposed to be accompanied with the greatest augmentation of blessedness which has ever been experienced.

Fifthly, *The mystery of God will be finished, or his great designs concerning the world and the church will be accomplished.*—It has been already noticed that one reason why man labours in vain to find out the work of God from the beginning to the end is *his nearness to the object*; or his being in the world, and the world, as it were, in him. Another is, that these parts, though designed to form a whole, resemble, at present, the detached wheels of a machine, before they are put together. God, who sees the end from the beginning, views them as complete; but this is too much for creatures, even the most exalted. The heavenly inhabitants themselves can know things only as they are manifested. Whatever therefore turns up in providence which casts a light on God's designs is to them an object of delightful attention, and serves of course to augment their blessedness. But if the successively putting together of every part of this Divine system has gradually heightened their enjoyments, what must be the effect of the whole being completed? Innumerable events, of which we in this world were ready to think hardly, and they in the other were unable to perceive the use, will now appear wise, merciful, and glorious.

We have been used to speak of creation, providence, and redemption, as if they were distinct systems: but it may then appear that they were in reality one great system; and that the two former have all along subserved the latter. "All things were created *by* him, and *for* him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

But it may be said, One great end of Christ's second coming will be "to judge the world," and that it is difficult to conceive how this can increase the happiness of the righteous, unless they be so swallowed up in selfish feelings as to care only for themselves. I answer, the righteous will not be swallowed up in selfish feelings, and yet their happiness will be abundantly increased. The design of the last judgment is not merely to *decide* the future state of men, but to *manifest* the holiness, justice, and goodness of the Divine proceedings. In this world God requires us to confide in his equity, and does not give account of any of his operations; but in that day every intelligent creature shall perceive not only *what* he does, but *why* he does it. Such a display of things to the wicked must, I acknowledge, be a source of unspeakable misery, as it will deprive them of the small consolation of even thinking well of themselves at the expense of their Creator's character; but that which *silences* them will *satisfy* the righteous, and fill them with sentiments of the highest admiration and esteem. Their present feelings will not be so extinguished as to render them hard-hearted towards any creature. They will rather be overcome by the consideration of the righteousness and fitness of the Divine proceedings. If they be swallowed up it will not be in selfishness, but in the love of God, to whose will all inferior affections ought to be and will be subordinate. There is a satisfaction felt by every friend of justice in the conviction and execution of a murderer. Humanity in this case is not extinguished, but enlarged: it is individual compassion overcome by regard to the general good. Thus, in whatever light we consider the coming of our Lord, it is a "blessed hope," and a "glorious appearing," to all that love it.

The happiness of Jacob in reviewing the issue of that mysterious train of events which brought him and his family down to Egypt must have overbalanced, not only the sorrows which he felt during the suspense, but the joy

of his whole life: much more will the happiness of saints, on reviewing the issue of all the dispensations of God, overbalance, not only their former afflictions, but all their preceding joys.

Great, however, as their happiness will be at the appearing of Jesus Christ, the language used in reference to that period shows it to be but an *introduction* to greater joys: "Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you from before the foundation of the world—*enter ye into the joy of our Lord!*"

The *likeness of Christ*, which is attributed to our "seeing him as he is," seems to be expressive of something more than a freedom from sin. It denotes, not a negative, but a positive blessing; not an *instantaneous*, but a *gradual* assimilation, like that which is insensibly contracted by being in the company of one with whom our hearts unite. We shall, doubtless, from our first introduction into his presence, on leaving this mortal body, be so far like him as to have no remains of contrariety to him; but a positive like-mindedness with him may, nevertheless, be capable of perpetual increase, as his mind shall be more and more discovered by us. The spirits of the just made perfect are happy, as being free from every degree of misery; but not so filled with positive enjoyment as to be incapable of receiving more: and thus it may be with respect to positive holiness. What is holiness but that in which the whole law is summed up,—LOVE? But love is capable of becoming more rooted and grounded, as well as more intense, as the worth of its object becomes more known and appreciated. And as every degree of attainment capacitates the mind for greater attainments, and the objects to be known *pass knowledge*, there is reason to believe that the things which God hath prepared for them that love him include nothing less than an eternal accumulation of blessedness.

DEGREES IN GLORY PROPORTIONED TO WORKS OF PIETY, CONSISTENT WITH SALVATION BY GRACE ALONE.

A CONSTANT reader of the Evangelical Magazine approves of several observations which were made on the parable of the unjust steward (Vol. III. p. 556); but wishes me to show more particularly the consistency of spiritual and eternal blessings being bestowed as a reward of works of piety and charity, and consequently of different degrees of glory being hereafter conferred on different persons, according to their conduct in the present life, with the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. I consider the above as an interesting inquiry, and submit the following as an answer.

In the first place, It seems proper a little more fully to establish the sentiments themselves. Whether we can perceive their consistency, or not, they manifestly appear to be taught in the Holy Scriptures. The same Divine writers who teach the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, teach also that eternal life will be conferred as a *reward* on those who have served the Lord with fidelity, and suffered for his sake in the present world. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In the addresses to the seven Asiatic churches, eternal life, under various forms of expression, is promised as the *reward* of those who shall overcome the temptations and persecutions of the present state. Nor is it a mere promise of eternal life in *general* to those who shall overcome; but of a reward according to the deeds done in the body. This subject will appear with the fullest evidence, if we consider the nature of that enjoyment of which the heavenly state will consist.

First, Heavenly bliss will greatly consist in our being *approved of God*. There is a day approaching, when "God will bring to light the hidden things

of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man have praise of God." That which Enoch had on earth all God's faithful servants shall have in heaven, *testimony that they have pleased God*; and a heaven it will be of itself! But it is impossible that all good men should partake of this satisfaction in an equal degree, unless they had all acted in this world exactly alike.

Secondly, Heavenly bliss will consist in *the exercise of love, supreme love to God*. And, if so, the more we have done for him, the more our hearts will be filled with joy on the remembrance of it. The same principle that makes us rejoice in his service here will hereafter make us rejoice that we have served him; and as love here makes us glory even in tribulation, if God may but be honoured, so there it will make us rejoice that we were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name's sake. It is thus that our present "light afflictions work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" and thus that, by labouring and suffering in his cause, we "lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven." All this supposes that, unless we have equally laboured and suffered for God in this world, we cannot equally enjoy him in the next.

Thirdly, Heavenly bliss will consist in *ascribing glory to God and the Lamb*; but this can be performed only in proportion as we have glory to ascribe. He that has done much for God has obtained more crowns, if I may so speak, than others; and the more he has obtained, the more will he have to cast at the Redeemer's feet. When we hear a Thornton, a Howard, or a Paul, acknowledge, "By the grace of God I am what I am," there is a thousand times more meaning in the expression, and a thousand times more glory redounds to God, than in the uttering of the same words by some men, even though they be men of real piety. The apostle of the Gentiles speaks of those to whom he had been made useful, as if such would be his *joy and crown* another day. But if there were not different degrees of glory in a future state, every one that enters the kingdom of heaven, yea, every infant caught thither from the womb or the breast, must possess the same joyful recollection of its labours, and the same crown, as the apostle Paul. The stating of such a supposition is sufficient to refute it.

Fourthly, Heavenly bliss will consist in *exploring the wonders of the love of God*. Spiritual knowledge expands the soul, so as to render it capable of containing more than it would otherwise do. Every vessel will be filled, as some have expressed it; but every vessel will not be of equal dimensions. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are represented as conspicuous characters in the kingdom of heaven, with whom it will be a blessedness to sit down in communion. Peter and Paul, and other such eminent characters, are prepared for a greater degree of enjoyment than Christians in common.

Some have objected against this doctrine, "that we are all loved with the same love, purchased by the same blood, called by the same calling, and heirs of the same inheritance; and therefore it may be supposed that we shall all possess it in the same degree." But if this reasoning would prove any thing, it would prove too much; namely, that we should all be upon an equality in the present world, as well as in that which is to come; for we are *now* as much the objects of the same love, purchased by the same blood, called by the same calling, and heirs of the same inheritance, as we shall be hereafter; and if these things be consistent with the greatest diversity in this life, there is no conclusion to be drawn from thence but that it may be equally so in that which is to come.

What remains is that we prove *the consistency of this doctrine with that of salvation by grace alone*. If the doctrine of rewards implied the notion of *merit*, or *desert*, the inconsistency of the one with the other would be

manifest. Man, even in his purest state, could merit nothing at the hand of his Creator; since the utmost of what he did, or could do, was his duty: much less is it possible for fallen, guilty creatures to merit any thing at the hand of an offended God, except it be shame and confusion of face. But no such idea is included in the doctrine of rewards, which is only designed to encourage us in every good word and work, and to express Jehovah's regard to righteousness, as well as his love to the righteous.

In the first place, Rewards contain nothing inconsistent with the doctrine of grace, because those very works which it pleased God to honour are *the effects of his own operation*. He rewards the works of which he is the author and proper cause. He who "ordains peace for us"—"hath wrought all our works in us."

Secondly, All rewards to a guilty creature have respect to *the mediation of Christ*. Through the intimate union that subsists between Christ and believers, they are not only accepted in him, but what they do is accepted and rewarded *for his sake*. "The Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offering;" and we are said to "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." As there is no sin so heinous but God, for Christ's sake, will forgive it; no blessing so rich, but he will bestow it; so there is no service so small, but he will reward it. A cup of cold water given to a disciple for Christ's sake will insure a disciple's reward.

Thirdly, God's graciously connecting blessings with the obedience of his people serves to show, not only his love to Christ, and to them, but his *regard to righteousness*. His love to us induces him to bless us; and his love to righteousness induces him to bless us in this particular mode. An affectionate parent designs to confer a number of favours on his child, and in the end to bequeath him a rich inheritance. He designs also to have his mind suitably prepared for the proper enjoyment of these benefits; and therefore, in the course of his education, he studiously confers his favours by way of encouragement, as rewards to acts of filial duty. He gives him a new garment for this, and a watch for that: for his attention to the flocks and herds, he shall have a sheep, or a cow, which he shall call his own; and for his assiduity in tilling the soil, he shall have the product of a particular field. It is easy to perceive in this case that the father does not consider these things as properly the child's due, upon a footing of equity; but to manifest his approbation of filial obedience. Thus our heavenly Father gives grace and glory. Thus it is that *finding* is connected with *seeking*, and *crowns of glory* with *overcoming*. It is thus, as well as by the atonement of Christ, that "grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life." Those who at the last day shall be saved will be sufficiently convinced that it is all of grace, and that they have no room for glorying but in the Lord; while, on the other hand, the moral government of God will be honoured, the equity of his proceedings manifested, and the mouths of ungodly sinners stopped; even when the Judge declares in the face of the universe, concerning the righteous, "These shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

THE FINAL CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS.

[Replies to some objections of the Rev. John Newton, St. Mary Woolnoth.]

I HAVE received a letter from Father Newton, very highly approving of "The Gospel its own Witness;" and understanding that a second edition of the work was now at press, he proposes a few emendations. The worst of it is, that advice offered by such venerable men as him and Dr. John Erskine, and with such a degree of friendship, can hardly be refused; and yet if I were to follow every body's counsel, I might alter all that I have

written. His objections, however, are confined to a few expressions.—See Vol. II. p. 95, line 18–25.

On this statement, accompanied with some other remarks, Mr. Newton asks:—1. “Why may not ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ be expounded figuratively, as in other places; and be referred to the kingdom of God upon earth—the gospel state?” I answer, No: the new heaven and new earth are represented as *following* the general conflagration, 2 Pet. iii. 12, 13. In the Revelation, this state is also represented as *following* the last judgment, chap. xxi. 1, 2.—2. “May we not pray that ‘the will of God may be done upon earth as in heaven,’ without looking so far forward as the final consummation of all things?”—We may in some degree, but not fully, or without having a reference to the final state of things. When we pray to be made like Christ ourselves, we always look forward to the time when we shall be perfected, as the period in which our request shall be *fully* answered. So it is in this case; and as this does not hinder our praying for progressive sanctity in the use of all the means of grace, so neither does the other hinder our praying for the success of Christ’s kingdom. In both cases we cannot pray for the ultimate end without praying for all the means by which it is effected.—3. “Does not the desire of revisiting the spots and scenes of past transactions belong to our present situation and conformation? Will it not, like many of our human and social feelings, have no further influence upon the soul when freed from the body and from the earth?”—It may be so; and I think I shall alter this a little, as well as add something on the second question.—4. “Suppose we had a desire to visit these places after the conflagration, how shall we find them? We cannot now ascertain where Eden was, and many other things, owing perhaps to the alteration produced in the earth by the flood. But the alteration produced by the final conflagration will probably be much greater.”—Perhaps we may then be better geographers than we are now. Many places are at present wisely concealed from us to prevent abuse from superstition, of which we shall then be in no danger.—Such would be my answers to Mr. Newton, if he were a *brother*; but he is a *father*, and so full of love and kindness that I know not what to do with him.

REVIEWS.

THE ABUSE OF REVIEWS.

[Written under a concealed signature several years before the "Strictures on Sandemanianism."]

THE practice of reviewing the publications of the age as they appear is a species of writing much adapted to a periodical work. It is acceptable to the generality of readers to see in a small compass what is going on in the literary and religious world; and even in works which are not wholly devoted to this object, it is agreeable to trace the leading principles of now and then a particular piece which attracts the public attention. But in these, as in all other reviews, there is need of a much greater portion of judgment and candour than many writers possess. If the editor or principal managers of a work of this kind indulge either a partial fondness for some men, or a censorious dislike of others, their review will become a mere vehicle of flattery or abuse.

These reflections have been occasioned by a friend putting into my hands the fourth volume of the *New Theological Repository*. On looking it over, it appeared to me not a little tinctured with these faults; the latter more especially. A writer in the *Biblical Magazine* has already noticed one instance of their petulance, and brought home the charge to the confusion of the writer; and if you judge the following remarks upon the conduct of these gentlemen towards your friend Mr. Fuller admissible, they are much at your service.

On looking over the index of the *Theological Repository*, I observed under the name of this writer a long list of supposed errors laid to his charge. Now, thought I, surely Mr. Fuller has published some good things since this Magazine has made its appearance! But if the other volumes of the work resemble this, and this contain a fair account of him, he must be a very erroneous and dangerous writer: all he publishes is naught, and deserving of reprobation. It is true, they praise his former productions, written twelve or thirteen years ago; but even this seems rather from a design to give an edge to their present censures than from any thing like a regard to what is good in them. Surely, said I, this is not the simple fruit of a regard to truth. Is it owing to some personal antipathy, which they may have conceived against him; or is a disposition to censure the element in which they live?

I observe there is a great deal of apparent coolness and self-possession in all their animadversions, but this is not always at the greatest remove from unchristian bitterness. Mr. Sandeman was very calm; yet he has been accused, and perhaps not without reason, of "gross misrepresentation, illiberal censure, and sarcastical contempt:"* and whether in this case the dis-

* Booth's "Glad Tidings," Preface, p. vii.

ciple be not as his master, they who are acquainted with the productions of both will easily determine.

As to the controversy with Mr. M'Lean, I cannot approve of the conduct of these by-standers, who, as if they doubted whether what their leader has advanced were sufficient, must need obtrude themselves as his coadjutors, and attempt to worry his opponent.

The lengthened list of errors imputed to Mr. Fuller by these gentlemen is little else than an index to Mr. M'Lean's pamphlet; a review, or rather an echo, of which is given in three succeeding numbers of the volume alluded to. It is marvellous what a bone of contention these writers make of that which the Scriptures exhibit as the food of the faithful. They affect to consider faith as a very simple thing, needing no explanation; yet scarcely any writers have said so much to explain it, or made so much of their explanation. A mere review of a pamphlet on this subject shall contain more matter than the original piece which gave occasion for it.

The writers in this work, I observe, have accused Mr. Fuller of error on three leading subjects; namely, regeneration, justification, and particular redemption. Permit me therefore to make a few remarks upon each of them.

1. Mr. F. is criminated for having pleaded for *regeneration being necessary to believing*. He contends, it seems, for "holy dispositions of heart previous to faith." Does he hold with any self-wrought goodness in the heart of a sinner? This will not be pretended. Does he plead that a man may sustain a holy character while an unbeliever? No. Does he plead for any other holiness of disposition than what is essential to the very act of believing? He does not. Now his opponent, notwithstanding the triumphs of the party, has, if I am not greatly mistaken, conceded almost every thing that Mr. Fuller pleads for on this subject.

1. He admits faith to be not only *an act of the mind*, but a *holy act*. But, if so, unless a mind void of holy dispositions can perform a holy action, one would think it must be, after all, as Mr. F. has stated it.—2. He acknowledges faith to be not only "good" or holy, but "an *effect* of the regenerating influence of the Spirit and word of God." But if this be allowed, where is the difference between them? Mr. F. would not object to the influence of *the word* in regeneration, provided it were granted him that it was not by the word savingly believed; for it is regeneration *by faith* that he opposes. His words are, "All that I contend for is, that it is not by means of a spiritual perception, or belief of the gospel, that the heart is, for the first time, effectually influenced towards God." And if the above concession may be depended upon, as expressing the fixed sentiments of Mr. M'Lean, he does not contend that it is; for that which is the "effect" of regeneration cannot, for this reason, be the *cause* or means of it.

2. Mr. F. stands accused of undermining the doctrine of *free justification*; for the fitness of faith to receive it is made, it seems, "to depend on its *moral excellency*." Suppose it were said, it depends on its being *true, living faith*? This undoubtedly is all that Mr. F. intends; and one would think this could not be denied him. In turning to the pages referred to, I find Mr. M'Lean labouring with all his might to prove that his opponent pleads for such a *fitness* in faith as that we are put into a state of justification as a suitable testimony of Divine regard towards it. But surely this is up-hill work. How pitiable is the fate of a controversial writer! After disowning a sentiment in almost every form of language, unless it be that of forswearing it, he is still accused of holding it. His words must be tortured and twisted into a thousand forms, to make them mean what he asserts they do not mean.

After all, Mr. M'Lean has some diffidence about him, though his reviewer has none. He "thinks" this must be Mr. Fuller's meaning. "If he is not greatly mistaken," it is so. Yet Mr. F. declares the contrary. He professes to be of one mind with Mr. M'Lean on this subject; but Mr. M. will not allow it. How is this? It has been observed that the followers of Messrs. Glass and Sandeman have a singular talent for discerning a *self-righteous* spirit in all but themselves. A person in that connexion once called upon a friend of mine, who was nearly of his sentiments as to Christian doctrine; but happening, unfortunately, to discover a partiality for believer's baptism, he was instantly condemned as a Pharisee, and assured that he made a righteousness of it. Thus it is that Mr. M. has discovered the self-righteousness of Mr. F. He first insinuated something of this kind in some marginal notes of the second edition of his treatise on the Commission, and has ever since been labouring to make good his insinuations. If he fail in this the whole of what he has written against Mr. F. upon justification must appear to the reader, as he himself justly observes, "a piece of insipid altercation."

But why does Mr. F. plead for the *moral excellency* of faith, as necessary to justification, if he do not make justification a reward conferred upon it as such? Why do Mr. M. and his party plead for *true* faith, in order to justification? An answer to this question will be an answer to the other. Why does Mr. M. admit the *holiness* of faith? By what he has last written, it should seem, he would not allow such a faith as is *not* holy, "a mere empty speculation," to be justifying. He must admit therefore that we are justified by *that which is* a holy exercise of the mind, and *that which is* a duty, though it is not *for the sake of* any holiness in it, or duty performed by us.* And what does Mr. F. plead for more? Whether faith contains any holy affection or not, makes nothing as to the freeness of justification; because, whatever holiness a creature may possess short of "continuing in all things written in the book of the law, to do them," it is of *no account* in that important article. But if it were otherwise, while Mr. M. and his friends admit faith to be a *holy act* of the mind, though they will have it to be purely intellectual, the same consequence attaches to their notion as to that which they oppose. Let the reader judge, therefore, whether all they have alleged on this subject be any other than "a piece of insipid altercation."

3. The heaviest charge is yet behind. Mr. F. is not only erroneous, but self-condemned. He has abandoned his principles, it seems, on *particular redemption*. He has formerly written well on this subject, but of late has contradicted himself. "A new edition of his former excellent pamphlet," say these editors, "is a desideratum." Mr. F.'s late error, it seems, consists in his placing the peculiarity of redemption, not in the degree of Christ's sufferings, or in any want of sufficiency as to the nature of the atonement, but merely in the *sovereignty of its application*. And this is an error of such magnitude as ought to sink him in the esteem of religious people! "What," say they, "will the Calvinists of the present day say to this view of the subject?" Many of those called Calvinists in the present day are not so. If the words of Calvin upon the very subject in question were printed by Mr. F. as his own, they would be sufficient in the account of great numbers of modern Calvinists to prove him an Arminian. And will the editors of the Theological Repository stoop to appeal to popular religious opinion, which on other occasions they hold in such sovereign contempt? Ardent zeal, on certain occasions, is very condescending. It is said of Mr. M'Lean, that he lately advanced sentiments concerning original sin, and the obedience of

* The reader may see this subject clearly and satisfactorily stated in President Edwards's *Sermons on Justification*.

Christ, which are not commonly received among religious people, nor universally in his own connexions. How is it that these gentlemen, who profess to "respect no man's person," do not hold *him* up to reproach; and ask, What will Calvinists of the present day say to this?

"That this is not the Scripture doctrine," they add, "we think has frequently been shown; but by no one more satisfactorily than by Mr. Fuller himself." Does Mr. F. then, in his former pamphlet, place the peculiarity of redemption upon different ground? With what face can these writers insinuate that he does? Had they quoted his own statement of the doctrine, the reader would have seen that, whether Mr. F. be right or wrong in his views, he set out on the same principle in that piece which he maintains in his later publications. Let him speak for himself. "I suppose Philanthropos is not ignorant that Calvinists in general have considered the particularity of redemption as consisting, not in *the degree* of Christ's sufferings, as though he must have suffered more if more had finally been saved, or in any *insufficiency* that attended them, but in the sovereign *purpose and design* of the Father and the Son, whereby they were constituted or appointed the price of their redemption, the objects of that redemption ascertained, and the ends to be answered by the whole transaction determined. They suppose the sufferings of Christ, in themselves considered, as of infinite value, sufficient to have saved all the world, and a thousand worlds, if it had pleased God to have constituted them the price of their redemption, and made them effectual to that end. These views of the subject accord with my own."

But, it will be asked, does he not here represent Christ as dying in the character of a shepherd for his flock, a husband for his church, and a surety for his people? He does; but each of these particulars is adduced merely in proof of a *speciality of design* in the death of Christ, and not of the want of any sufficiency in the nature of the atonement itself. If they prove more than this, they prove more than the writer manifestly appears to have intended. Every charge therefore of his having relinquished his sentiments, founded on those arguments, must be nugatory. All of them go to establish that the number of the saved was wholly dependent on the *purpose* of the Father, and the *design* of the Son; and wherein this differs from "the peculiarity of redemption consisting in the sovereign application of the atonement," I am not able to perceive. Christ's dying as a shepherd for his sheep, a husband for his church, and a surety for his people, is the same thing in Mr. F.'s account as his dying with a *purpose or design* that his death should be applied to their salvation, rather than others. It is manifest he then thought, as well as now, that the obedience and death of Christ, *in themselves considered*, were, like the sun in the heavens, necessary for an individual, but sufficient for a world; sufficient for all, but effectual only to the elect.

These gentlemen would persuade their readers that upon Mr. F.'s present principles Christ was equally wounded for the transgressions of Judas Iscariot as for those of the apostle John. And if by this were meant no more than that his death was in itself equally *sufficient* for both, it certainly is the sentiment for which Mr. F. pleads, and that in his earlier as well as his later publications. But if it means that there was the same *design* towards both, this is not his sentiment, nor is it to be found in his later publications, any more than in his earlier ones.

A very unjust and unfriendly insinuation has been made by one of your correspondents, as though Mr. F.'s not having answered his opponent Mr. McLean arose from a consciousness of the badness of his cause. That men whose prejudices lie on that side of the question should exult, and labour to provoke him to write, is no more than is common in such cases. But it is

well known that Mr. F. has in several controversies suffered his antagonist to have the last word; and when he has thought proper to write, he has always been so slow in printing that he has seldom answered any considerable work in the same year. From the time of Mr. M'Lean's pamphlet making its appearance his hands have been so full of more important business as scarcely to afford him the opportunity to read, much less to answer that performance.

Whether Mr. F. intends to make any reply is best known to himself. I know, however, that several of his friends have endeavoured to dissuade him from it.—1. From an apprehension that such disquisitions, united with his other labours, may be injurious to his health.—2. Because of the illiberality of his opponent, in having interspersed his performance with a number of insinuations that Mr. F. had *knowingly* and *wilfully* misrepresented him. Such intimations become neither the Christian nor the man; they tend also to divert the reader's attention from truth, and to interest it in what is merely personal. Were I disposed, I am sure that I could make out the charge of *wilful* misrepresentation against Mr. M., in as many instances, and on as good grounds, as those which he has preferred against Mr. F.; but I would scorn the attempt. Whatever misstatements either of them may have given of each other's sentiments, and however difficult it may be to account for them on fair grounds, I am persuaded that neither the one nor the other is capable of doing it *knowingly* and *wilfully*; and a writer that will maintain the contrary, whatever be his talents, is unworthy of an answer.—3. Because of the vast quantity of misconstrued and distorted meaning put upon his words, which will require to be set right; and which is a task not a little irksome both to the writer and the reader, and which few men who can better employ their time would wish to undertake.

THE REV. THOMAS SCOTT'S "WARRANT AND NATURE OF FAITH," ETC.

THE design of this treatise, if we rightly comprehend it, is to discuss various important points advanced in Mr. Booth's "Glad Tidings to Perishing Sinners." We are happy in perceiving that both these respectable writers agree as to the complete *warrant* which every sinner who hears the gospel has to believe in Christ for the salvation of his soul, antecedent to all holy qualifications or dispositions whatever,—a truth which leaves all unbelievers without excuse, which points out the way of peace to awakened sinners, and affords a plain direction to gospel ministers to invite their auditors, without distinction, to a participation of eternal life.

This important truth, though plentifully taught in the Holy Scriptures, and generally, if not universally, embraced by the reformers, puritans, and non-conformists, has been much opposed in the present century. Those writers who have laboured to set aside the gospel offer, as inconsistent with the doctrines of grace, have with it explained away the free invitations of the gospel as they respect the unregenerate; considering them as addressed only to sinners made sensible of their sin, and thirsting after spiritual blessings; and contending that no other descriptions of men have any warrant to embrace them. This notion Mr. Booth has successfully combated, proving, beyond all just contradiction, that the invitations of the gospel are addressed to sinners *as sinners*.

There are several important particulars, however, in which Mr. Booth and Mr. Scott disagree, and which are well worthy the attention of those who

wish for clear and accurate views of evangelical truth. Mr. Booth is partial to the term *warrant*, and seems to have studiously kept the idea of obligation out of sight. Mr. Scott, on the other hand, undertakes to prove that faith in Christ is the *duty* of all who hear the gospel, and observes that no warrant seems to be required for obedience to a plain commandment. Considering faith however as implying an all-important benefit, he admits the propriety of the inquiry. What warrant has a sinner for expecting it from his offended God? In this view, he observes, "the term warrant signifies a ground of encouragement, authorizing an application, and giving sufficient reason to expect success; insomuch that he who applies in the prescribed manner cannot be rejected consistently with the truth of the Holy Scriptures." Such a ground of encouragement Mr. Scott allows to exist in the word of God, irrespective of all holy dispositions whatsoever.

But Mr. Booth not only denies the necessity of a change of heart to *warrant* our believing, but explodes the idea of its being necessary to the act of believing itself; or, as he defines it, of relying on Christ for salvation; contending also that, prior to his justification, the sinner performs no good act, but is an enemy to God. Mr. Scott takes the opposite ground, maintaining that no man ever believed in Christ while under the dominion of sin; that saving faith is the effect of regeneration, or the renewal of an unholy creature to a right spirit; and that those who "work not, but believe in him who justifieth the ungodly," are not persons who are inactive, but who "cease to work in respect of justification;" not enemies of God, but, having transgressed his law, are rendered for ever incapable of being justified by any thing done by themselves; or in any other character than that of ungodly, to whom mercy is shown merely out of regard to the righteousness of him in whom they believe.

To establish these positions, Mr. Scott confines his attention to one leading point, which makes up the body of his performance; namely, *that faith is not a mere act of the understanding, but a holy exercise of the heart*. Our author seems to have apprehended that, if this idea could be established, his work would be done, and to have reasoned on some such principles as the following:—If faith itself be a spiritual exercise, it must be the effect of regeneration; as no sinner, while an enemy to God, can be induced by any influence, human or Divine, to perform that which is spiritually good. Further, if faith be a holy exercise, and precede justification, the sinner when he is justified, though, being a transgressor of the law, he be in the account of the Judge of all "ungodly," yet is not actually at enmity with God, inasmuch as every degree of holy exercise must be inconsistent with such a state of mind.

In the discussion of this leading point—which after all we incline to think Mr. Booth does not deny, though he may have advanced things inconsistent with it—Mr. Scott goes over a great variety of topics, and examines various passages of Scripture, which had been produced on the other side. The most forcible of his arguments appear to be the following:—Our Lord assures us that no man can come to him except he is taught of God, drawn of the Father, and has heard and learned of him. And has this teaching, drawing, hearing, and learning, he inquires, nothing holy in its nature? Faith in Christ is not only the source of all the obedience which follows after it, but is itself *an act of obedience*. But all obedience is the expression of love, and is never performed by an unrenewed heart, not even by Divine influence. Unbelief arises from an evil heart, which "loveth darkness rather than light;" faith therefore, which is its opposite, arises from the love of light rather than darkness. As unbelief is attributed to voluntary blindness, so faith is ascribed to a holy illumination, to "light shining into the heart,"

which gives it a holy bias. Regeneration is assigned as the *reason* why some believed in Christ while others received him not. Of their believing on his name, this is given as the cause; "they *were* born, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Faith in Christ is the *effect* and evidence of regeneration. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." That this is the sense of the passage is evident from similar phraseology being used of other effects and evidences of regeneration by the same writer, and in the same Epistle. "Every one that loveth is born of God.—Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." Repentance is constantly represented as previous to forgiveness, and consequently to justification, of which forgiveness is a branch; it is also generally mentioned as preceding faith in Christ, and in some instances as influential on it. "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.—Repent, and believe the gospel.—If peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.—Ye repented not that ye might believe."

Mr. Booth pleads that the word of God is the means of regeneration, and the seed or principle of eternal life. Mr. Scott replies, not by denying either of these positions, but by suggesting that we cannot explain the *manner* in which God uses the word in regeneration any more than that in which animals and vegetables are produced according to the course of nature. And though the word of God be the seed from whence the fruits of grace arise, yet must the ground be made good ere it will be received so as to become productive.

Mr. Booth alleges the case of the prodigal, as favouring his idea of there being nothing good in a man prior and in order to believing. Mr. Scott replies, "And did our Lord in this parable represent the returning sinner as driven merely by distress to seek deliverance from God? What did he then mean by the expression 'when he came to himself?' Is it not evident that from that time he possessed a right mind? and are not all his expressions those of sorrow and humiliation for sin, and of deep self-abasement?"

Mr. Booth suggests that the publican, in the parable, far from considering himself as possessing any holy disposition, appears as a criminal deserving of destruction; and who dare not lift up his eyes to heaven even when he cried for mercy. Mr. Scott replies, "The question is not in what light the publican viewed himself, but whether there was nothing in his spirit intrinsically better than in that of the boasting Pharisee; and whether his self-abasing cry for mercy was not an exercise of true holiness. That it sprang from humility and contrition, and was not extorted by mere terror, the Lord himself testifies. "I tell you that this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that humbleth himself shall be exalted." This testimony ought to be decisive.

Finally, Mr. Booth suggests that, if there be any holiness previous to justification, those characters in whom it is found may be justified, if not wholly, yet in part, by their own righteousness. Mr. Scott replies, by alleging a principle in which we supposed all Calvinistic divines were agreed; namely, that no degree of good whatever, in creatures who have once broken the Divine law, can in the least avail towards their justification; and that a renunciation of our own righteousness, imaginary or real, is of the essence of faith in Christ.

We have felt much interested in this serious discussion. The parties appear in some few instances to have mistaken each other's meaning, as is commonly the case more or less in controversial writings. On the one hand, the question is not whether a carnal heart will, *of its own accord*, believe in Christ, but whether it does so, *under Divine influence*, without any predisposition of the will. On the other hand, the question in dispute is not con-

cerning a *warrant*, but a *willingness* to believe; nor in what light it is necessary for a sinner to view himself in his application for mercy, but of what manner of spirit it is necessary for him to be ere he will rightly apply. Neither do we perceive how regeneration by or without the word can affect the question at issue between these writers, which is, whether regeneration precede faith. If faith were understood as a belief of the word, and the mind were allowed to be passive in it, it possibly might; but if the belief of the word be not faith, but, as Mr. Booth considers it, something "presupposed," the influence of the word upon the soul, whatever it is, and in whatever way, one should think must be the same. The mind is certainly active in its "reliance" on Christ for salvation, and such activity we think Mr. Booth will not assert to be the effort of an unregenerate heart.

We earnestly wish those who may have read one of these treatises to read the other, and any thinking serious mind will find himself amply repaid for the perusal.

THE REV. A. BOOTH'S "GLAD TIDINGS," ETC.

WE have already expressed our sentiments of this work in reviewing Mr. Scott's "Warrant and Nature of Faith," which was occasioned by it. In the present edition Mr. Booth has made some alterations, and some additions. We observe with pleasure he has expressed himself with more caution, as to the nature of faith in Christ, than before. In the first edition, "a firm persuasion of his being the promised Messiah, and that the Christian religion is from God," was excluded from the definition, and only considered as something "presupposed" in believing. But in this it is "a general persuasion" of these truths only that is thus represented. This we consider as unexceptionable.

We wish Mr. Booth had been equally attentive in his revision of chap. iii., wherein the objections are answered. As to those persons who plead for any disposition of heart being necessary to *warrant* an application to Christ, whoever they are, we have nothing to say in their behalf. But those who, with Mr. Scott, consider regeneration as necessary, in the nature of things, to believing, whether they be right or wrong, appear to be rather unfairly treated. Far be it from us to accuse this truly respectable writer of wilful misrepresentation; we are persuaded he is incapable of it. But it is no uncommon thing for an author, in the heat of controversy, to be insensibly warped from the line of a fair and impartial statement of the sentiments of his opponent.

"It is objected," says Mr. Booth, "though it be not necessary for a sinner to *know* that he is born again before he believe in Jesus Christ, yet regeneration itself must precede faith; for, the heart of a sinner being naturally in a state of enmity to the Divine character, he will never turn to God, while in that situation, for pardon and acceptance." To this he answers, "Before this objection can justly be considered as valid, it must be evinced not only that regeneration precedes faith, but also that it is necessary to *authorize* a sinner's reliance on Jesus Christ." But why must this be first evinced? The objection, from whomsoever Mr. Booth took it, appears manifestly not expressive of the sentiments defended by Mr. Scott; who, we are persuaded, detests the idea of any holy disposition *authorizing* a sinner to come to Jesus. He contends however that without it he never *will* come. A state of mind may be necessary, in the nature of things, to our coming to Christ, which is no part of the "warrant" for so doing. Mr. Booth himself admits a specula-

tive change of mind, with a conviction of sin, to be so; yet, as he elsewhere justly observes, "It is not under the notion of being deeply awakened in conscience that sinners must first believe in Jesus, but as transgressors." Why then may not Mr. Scott, or those of his sentiments, be allowed to argue in the same manner with respect to the necessity of a change of heart? Why does Mr. Booth insist that, if it be necessary at all, it must be necessary for the purpose of *authorizing* him to come? Finally, Why does Mr. Booth allege that a persuasion of regeneration being necessary to believing must lead the awakened sinner to "investigate the state of his own soul in search of it, with much the same solicitude as if he considered it as a warrant." All these allegations appear to be equally directed against what he allows as what he opposes. If conviction of sin may be necessary to believing, without affording any warrant for it, so may regeneration; and if a persuasion of the necessity of regeneration to believing must needs turn the attention of a sinner into a wrong direction, such a persuasion respecting conviction of sin must have the same effect.

Again, "It has with confidence been demanded," says Mr. Booth, "whether, if sinners must not come to Christ as penitent, and as possessing a holy disposition, they are to believe in him as impenitent, and as under the reigning power of their depravity. But this, adds he, like some other objections, is not pertinent; for the question is, what is the proper warrant for a sinner to believe in Jesus?" Now, so far as we are able to judge, the contrary of this is true. The question here was not, what is the proper warrant for a sinner to believe in Jesus? for that is not a matter of dispute; but, *what is the state of his heart in the moment when he first believes?*—Mr. Booth's answer appears to be evasive. "A sinner must come," he says, "neither as penitent nor as impenitent, but merely under the character of one that is guilty and perishing." The term *as*, in the objection, means the character which the sinner actually sustains; but, in the answer, the character under which he is to view himself. It is thus, as we apprehend, that the objection is evaded. Mr. Booth would not say that, in coming to Christ, a sinner is neither penitent nor impenitent; yet, to meet the objection, it is necessary he should say so; for the question is not, under what character a sinner must view himself in coming to Christ; but what character, with regard to penitence or impenitence, does he actually sustain?

It is not our object to enter into Mr. Booth's reasonings, many of which we cordially approve; but barely to state, in a leading instance or two, wherein we conceive he has not done justice to his opponents.

We shall only add a few remarks on the note which Mr. Booth has introduced in answer to a passage in our review of Mr. Scott's "Warrant and Nature of Faith." It was our design in that review to give, according to the best of our capacity, an impartial statement of the controversy. Mr. Booth however complains of a misapprehension of his meaning. He had said, "If sinners be reconciled to God and his law, previous to believing in Jesus, and to a view of revealed mercy, it should seem as if they had not much occasion either for faith, or grace, or Christ. Because it must be admitted that persons of such piety are already accepted of God, bear his image, and are in the way to heaven." On this passage we remarked, Mr. Booth suggests that, if there be any holiness previous to justification, those characters in whom it is found may be justified, if not wholly, yet in part, by their own righteousness. We have no objection to acknowledge, on a revision of the subject, that Mr. Booth's words did not warrant this construction; and that it had been better to have quoted them as they were than to have put any construction upon them. We also acquit Mr. Booth of the obnoxious principle alluded to. But, having said thus much, it requires to

be added that the above sentence, which stands the same in both editions, appears to be far from defensive.

First, It represents that which is pleaded for only as *an essential part* of a sinner's return to God, as though it were *a whole*, sufficient to denominate his character as a saint, and to prove his being accepted of God. It was necessary that the prodigal should come to himself, justify his father's conduct, and condemn his own, before and in order to his return; but the necessity of his return was not thereby superseded, nor was he accepted of his father until he did return. It is true, the father beheld him "while a great way off," and met the first movement of his heart towards him; but, whatever were his kind designs, he was not accepted, according to the established laws of the house, till he had actually returned. It was not necessary that while he thus justified his father's character he should be ignorant of his readiness to forgive. Without a persuasion of this, however he might have reproached himself, he could have had no encouragement to return as a supplicant. Nor is it supposed that a sinner, in being brought to justify God as a Lawgiver, must needs be ignorant of his being revealed as the God of grace; but the question is, whether, in the order of things, it be possible for him to see or believe any grace in the gospel, beyond what he feels of the equity of the law. He may be persuaded of God's exercising what is called pardon; and knowing himself to be a sinner, exposed to wrath, he may be affected with it: but it cannot possibly appear to him to be a *gracious* pardon, any further than as he feels reconciled to the justice of his claims as a Lawgiver. To suppose it possible that we should believe the doctrine of grace, without being first made to feel the equity of the law, so as to justify God and condemn ourselves, is to suppose a contradiction. There is no grace but upon this supposition, and we cannot see that which is not to be seen. Whatever promises there may be to the least degree of holiness, if they respect the first movement of the heart towards Christ, it is under the consideration of its *issuing in faith in him*, without which no works of a sinful creature can be accepted; such promises therefore ought not to be brought for the purpose of superseding it. "He that cometh to God must first believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Many promises also are made to believing; but if from hence we were to infer that a man is sufficiently blessed in *believing*, so as to render *coming* to God unnecessary, we should put a force upon the Scriptures. Believing is supposed to have its immediate issue in coming, and therefore is treated in the Scriptures as in effect the same thing, John vi. 35.

Secondly, It is supposed that, when once a sinner is accepted of God, he has but little occasion for either faith, or grace, or Christ, in comparison of what he had before. "If after a person is reconciled to the Divine character," says Mr. Booth, "he applies to Christ for justification, he cannot, consistently with his new state, believe in him as justifying *the ungodly*, nor consider himself as entirely worthless, and on a level with sinners in general." But, 1. This supposes him not only to be renewed in the spirit of his mind, but to be *conscious* of it, which Mr. Booth's opponents do not contend for. 2. Supposing he were conscious of it, did not "Abraham believe on him that justifieth the ungodly," and that many years after his being a good man and a believer? and did he not consider himself at that time as "entirely worthless, and, as to acceptance with God, on a level with sinners in general?"—See Rom. iv. 3-5, compared with Gen. xv. 6; xii. 1-3; Heb. xi. 8. We might add, does not every good man stand in the same need of faith, and grace, and Christ, with respect to justification, as at the first moment when he believed? And, in all his approaches to God for this blessing, does he not consider himself as "entirely worthless, and upon a level with sinners in general?"

MR. BOOTH'S SERMON,—“THE AMEN OF SOCIAL PRAYER.”

* [This sermon was one of a series of discourses on the Lord's prayer, delivered at the monthly meeting in London, and published by desire of the ministers who heard it.]

THE summary of prayer given by our Saviour to his disciples stands unequalled for conciseness and comprehensiveness. Every petition, and almost every word in such a prayer, may be expected to contain an important meaning. That such a meaning is comprehended in the concluding term, and which forms in itself a perfect sentence, the judicious author of this sermon has fully evinced. Previous to his attempting this, however, he expresses his utter dislike of the practice of preaching from a single word, as a trial of skill, and offers what must appear to every candid reader a sufficient reason for his complying with the request of his brethren in this instance.

Having stated the scriptural meaning of the term “Amen,” he proceeds to consider various important truths, directions, encouragements, cautions, and reproofs, which are suggested by it. Particularly, That to close our prayers with a suitable Amen they are required to be offered with *understanding*; for without knowing the revealed will of God, and our own unworthiness as sinners before him, believing in the all-sufficient atonement and prevailing intercession of Christ, and depending on the aid of the Holy Spirit, we cannot hope for success in our petitions—With *fervour*; for if we be not in earnest in our prayers, our Amen loses its emphasis, and becomes a superficial formality, a mere word in course—Also with *expectation*; for the animating principle of our “so be it” arises from the grounds we have to believe that *so it shall be*. Our *obligation* to pray is not from hence; but our *encouragement* is. We are not warranted to expect an answer to our prayers at the time and in the manner we may prefer; but in God's time and manner we are. We have no ground to hope for success in prayer against the prevalence of our corruptions, unless we also watch against them; but, so praying, we have.

Further, That the Amen of prayer suggests various reproofs and solemn cautions, both to those who lead and those who unite in the worship. Particularly *in him who leads*, or is the mouth of the assembly, it reproves all words which persons of the weakest capacity do not understand; all quaint expressions, or terms or phrases that are adapted to raise a smile, or which in any way savour of wit or contrivance; all ambiguous language, or words of doubtful meaning; all contending or arguing for or against a doctrine; and every thing like anger, envy, or malignity, or which has a natural tendency to interfere with devout attention, deep solemnity, and the lively exercise of holy affections towards God; for to all or any of these things how shall a serious assembly say, Amen?—*In those who silently unite* in this solemn duty it cautions against, and severely reproves, every degree of negligence respecting their attendance at the place of prayer, before the devotional exercise begins; all wandering thoughts and inattention during the exercise; all unkind, unsociable, and immoral feelings towards one another; and all aversion of heart from the genuine meaning of the ascriptions, confessions, or petitions, which are presented; for, with such frames and feelings, how can they with a good conscience say Amen?

The sermon concludes with a very solemn and interesting address to those who take the lead in prayer, those who unite in it, and those who pay little or no regard to it. On the whole, the writer of this review feels thankful to God, and the worthy author, for having seen this highly interesting publication.

MEMOIRS OF REV. JAMES GARIE.

It is good to read the lives of holy men; and the more holy they have been the better. Some readers, it is true, are not satisfied unless they discover in others the same low, grovelling, half-hearted kind of life which they find in themselves. But satisfaction of this sort is better missed than found. It is good to be reprov'd, and stirred up to labour after greater degrees of spirituality than any which we have hitherto attained.

It is good also to observe the difference between the accounts of the same person as communicated by a friend, and by himself. As given by the former, the character appears nearly faultless; as depicted by the latter, it abounds with imperfection. Whence this difference? We *know* more of ourselves than any other person can know of us. What then will our lives be, when declared by Him who knoweth all things? Well might one of the greatest and best of men desire that he might be *found in him!*

It is pleasant that in the same years, months, and days that we have been walking in the ways of God ourselves, others, whom we know not, were travelling in the same direction, and with kindred sensations. What a society shall we find assembled, when we get home! We read the lives of eminently holy men in former times, and, when we come to their decease, are ready to ask with a sigh, Are there any such men to be found in these days? God hath a reserved people, however, in this as well as in every other age.

The characters of men are chiefly known by *trial*. It is not how we may feel and conduct ourselves in times when we have nothing in particular to affect us; but how we bear the temptations and afflictions, the smiles and the frowns, the evil reports and the good reports of the world, that determines what we are. Mr. Garie had his share of these trials. Doubtless there are men who have passed through greater; but his were sufficient to furnish proof of his being not only a true christian, but an eminent servant of Jesus Christ. In his removals from place to place, he appears to have kept his eye on one object, and in patience to have possessed his soul.*

While, however, we admire his piety, meekness, and patience, it becomes us to learn instruction from the things which befell him. In his first removal we see the danger of congregational churches submitting to the influence and direction of a few opulent individuals, (whose desire it frequently is to obtain a minister who shall deal gently with their vices,) till, lightly esteeming their greatest mercies, they are justly deprived of them.

In determining on the question of joining the Established Church, we find him frankly avowing the influence of early spiritual advantages which he had there received, of the amiable and dear friends he had in it, and of what he accounted the leadings of Providence. But no mention is made of his inquiring into *the revealed will of Christ* upon the subject; nor any intimation given that, after having examined the Scriptures, he was convinced that a national establishment was the most consistent with them.

In the repulses he met with, we cannot but perceive the lamentable evils which arise from the church being so connected with the world as that the best interests of a Christian congregation shall be decided by the prejudices and intrigues of men who care not for its spiritual welfare, and the greater part of whom may be strangers to true religion.

* Mr. Garie encountered great hazards in preaching the gospel in Ireland in 1790, particularly in Sligo, where his chapel was burned soon after its opening, and his life threatened.—Ed.

We are glad to find that Mr. Garie's family, like that of Mr. Pearce, has been thought worthy of the patronage of the religious public. It speaks well for our times that the families of men who have been eminent in disinterested labours for God are provided for by his people. The spirit discovered in Mr. Garie's diary will both reprove and provoke to emulation those who are in any degree like-minded; and may convince others that religion is not a cunningly devised fable, but a solemn reality.

MR. BEVAN'S DEFENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

CONCERNING the atonement or satisfaction of Christ, Penn and Claridge profess to reject what they term "the vulgar doctrine of satisfaction;" and our author allows them to have disowned "vicarious atonement," and "the appeasing of vindictive wrath."* We should be sorry to affix ideas to terms which were not in the mind of the writer; but, if we understand them, atonement is reparation made to the injured authority of the Divine law. "Vicarious atonement" is for that reparation to be made by a substitute, who endures the curse of the law in the sinner's stead; and "the appeasing of vindictive wrath" is not the changing of God's mind from hatred to love; but having expressed his displeasure against sin, in the death of his Son, justice is satisfied, and he can now consistently display his compassion to sinners for Christ's sake.

We do not think it was the intention of these writers to favour the Socinian doctrine; but in opposing the crude notion of Christ's having so paid the debt as to lay the Governor of the world under a natural obligation to discharge the debtor, and that immediately, or without the intervention of repentance and faith, we cannot but observe that they have made very near advances to it. We earnestly entreat our author and his connexions to reconsider this subject, and carefully to examine whether they may not renounce this notion, without giving up our Saviour's "vicarious atonement," or his having endured the curse of God's righteous law in the sinner's stead. Were we to abandon this idea, we could affix no meaning to a great part of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah; nor should we feel any solid ground on which to rest our everlasting hopes.

In chap v. and vi. our author proceeds to examine the sentiments of the early Friends concerning the Scriptures. Penn, Barclay, and others, certainly were not Socinians on this subject, any more than on the foregoing ones; but they wrote much to prove that the Scriptures were not the only, nor the primary, rule of faith and manners; for this honour they ascribe to the Spirit as dwelling in man. This position, though wide of Socinianism, yet led them to write in a manner very capable of being turned by an ingenious Socinian to the advantage of his cause.

It is with pleasure we find the early Friends acknowledging the Scriptures to have been written by Divine inspiration, and to be the words of God; and

* The introductory part of the following review is omitted, as relating merely to the circumstances under which the "Defence" was written; it was occasioned by the representations of Hannah Barnard, an American preacher of the Society of Friends, and of Mr. Evans in his "Sketch of the different Denominations," that the original tenets of that Society were Socinian.

In Mr. Fuller's republication of Mrs. Hannah Adams's "View of Religions," to which he prefixed his "Essay on Truth;" the article "Friends" was supplied by Mr. Bevan, with whom Mr. F. had become intimately acquainted.—ED.

also that "whatever doctrine or practice, though under pretensions to the immediate dictates and teachings of the Spirit, is contrary to them, ought to be rejected as false and erroneous." But we do not perceive the consistency between this and their denying them to be the principal rule of faith and manners; that is, the principal rule by which the other is to be judged of. Ought we to try the truth of the Scriptures, then, by their agreement with what we suppose to be the dictates and teachings of the Spirit within us, or the truth of these supposed dictates and teachings by their agreement with the Scriptures? The above concession appears to be in favour of the latter, and so to decide the question.

We readily admit that the Spirit of God is greater than the Scriptures, as God is greater than the greatest of his works; and that by his renewing influence the mind is taught to know what it would never form just conceptions of without it. This we consider as that anointing of which the apostle speaks, by which believers are said to "know all things." But we do not perceive the propriety of calling this "a rule of faith and manners." The extraordinary revelations of the Spirit, such as those of David, concerning his pursuit of the Amalekites; and to Paul, respecting his going into Bithynia,—were indeed a rule to them, as much as a written revelation is to us. But it is very unsafe to reason from them to the ordinary teachings of the Holy Spirit, since the "sealing up of the vision and prophecy." The one was a revelation of new truths to the mind; the other enables us to discern the glory of that which is already revealed. The former supplied the want of a perfect rule, while the sacred writings were incomplete; the latter teaches us how to walk by it, now that it is completed. The teaching of the Holy Spirit, we conceive, is that which forms us by the rule, rather than the rule itself.

It has been said by Antinomians that it is not the moral law, but the Holy Spirit in their hearts, which is a rule to them. Our answer has been, You confound the rule of a holy life with the cause of it. Whatever is a rule to us must be known or knowable by us; but the Holy Spirit in the heart is a secret spring, of which we can know nothing but by its effects. It is the source of all spiritual judgment and action; but the rule by which we are to judge and act is God's revealed will. Whether this answer be just,—and if it be, whether it does not apply alike to both cases,—we hope will be seriously and candidly considered.

With respect to the question between our author and his opponent, we have no hesitation in saying that the early Friends would neither have approved nor endured the opinions of Hannah Barnard. It is true they each set up a rule superior to the Scriptures; but that of the one is the reason of the individual; the other, the teachings of the Spirit. By the rule of Hannah Barnard, many parts of the present canon of Scripture are rejected as untrue; by theirs, the whole is admitted to be authentic. She rejects the account of the miraculous conception, of the miracles, and of the resurrection of Christ. But Barclay considers it as "damnable unbelief not to believe all those things to have been certainly transacted which are recorded in the Holy Scriptures concerning them."

The seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth chapters contain a review of the charges exhibited against Hannah Barnard, with her answers, &c. The former appear to be worded with great caution, and proved, beyond all just contradiction. By her answers, in several instances, she departs from Christian ground, and ought to rank as a deist. The partiality discovered for her cause by Mr. Evans, in his "Sketch of the Denominations," adds another to the numerous proofs which have gone before that Socinianism feels a sympathy (as of one that is near akin) with infidelity.

The sentiments of the Friends on the unlawfulness of war, under the Christian dispensation, are well known. Hannah Barnard has advanced a step further, maintaining that war is in itself wrong; and consequently that the wars of the Jews with the seven nations of Canaan could not have been made with the Divine approbation. Were we to judge the sentiments of the Friends by those of Anthony Benezet, who considers war as having been suffered rather than approved under the Old Testament, in like manner as men were "suffered to put away their wives," we must acknowledge that we could not perceive their consistency with the commandments of God to Israel to make war on the Canaanites, and his displeasure against those who refused. But as he is not one of the early Friends, and what he has written is considered as only his private opinion, the sentiments of the Society on this subject are to be sought elsewhere.

Their disapprobation of all war appears to be confined to the Christian dispensation, and to be founded on such passages as Matt. v. 38, 39, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." They suppose that the law warranted a retaliation of injuries; but that the gospel requires forbearance and forgiveness. We do not think it was the design of our Lord, in this passage, to oppose the genius of the gospel dispensation to that of the law, but to rectify the abuses which had been made of the latter by the false glosses of the Jews, who perverted the lawful punishments of the magistrate, as allowed in Exod. xxi. 24, to the purposes of revenge and private retaliation. But whatever we may think of this, and of the lawfulness of resisting unjust aggression, or threatened invasion, we see nothing in the principle, as maintained by the Friends, that reflects on the justice of the wars of Israel, which they consider as founded on Divine authority.

Upon the whole, though we differ from the Friends in many important particulars, and have, we hope with Christian candour, stated our objections to some of them, yet there are many things in this work which afford us pleasure. It is gratifying to see so unanimous and decided a stand made against the spirit of infidelity, under the form of Unitarianism; and to find it conducted with so much calmness and justice. Such cases as those of Hannah Barnard are permitted to try, not only individuals, but societies. It is pleasant also to observe in our author a familiar acquaintance with the writings of others besides those of his own denomination. We cannot but from hence entertain a hope that he, and the Friends in general who may give the foregoing remarks a perusal, will take them in good part, and candidly consider the force of them. It is from such a mutual interchange of sentiments between different denominations, who have been in different habits of thinking, that each is likely to derive advantage. In this way we may be candid, charitable, and liberal, without becoming indifferent to religious principles.

The work itself is elaborate, and fraught with information on the subjects it embraces. It contains much close thinking and conclusive reasoning. We will only add, that, though it is natural and proper for a society to vindicate the principles of its first founders when they are misrepresented, yet, in pursuing this object, there is danger of considering their opinions as oracular. "The first of considerations," as this writer allows, "is not, who has believed?—but, what is the truth?"

THE REV. CHARLES JERRAM'S LETTERS ON THE ATONEMENT.

THE many able productions which have appeared in defence of this important doctrine might seem to render all future vindications of it unnecessary. But while its adversaries write and labour to exhibit it in a false and exceptionable point of light, its friends must write also, though it be only to restate its evidence, and to correct their misrepresentations.

By the advertisements at the end of these Letters we learn who was the author of the excellent "Letters to a Universalist," hitherto known by the name of SCRUTATOR. The occasion of both these pieces appears to be nearly the same. The Universalists in the neighbourhood of Mr. Jerram having been very assiduous, it seems, in propagating their principles, he has felt it his duty to vindicate the doctrines which they have attempted to discredit.

But how is this? Do Universalists disown the atonement? It is well known that the adversaries of the atonement have long been friendly to Universalism; and Mr. Vidler was warned, at the outset of his career, "to beware of the whirlpool of Socinianism;" but is it so that they have actually formed a junction? The writer opposed in these Letters does not *profess* to reject the doctrine of atonement, but to give a new *explanation* of it. Such, we recollect, was the object of a pamphlet published not long since by a Mr. John Simpson of Hackney, entitled, "Plain thoughts on the New Testament Doctrine of Atonement;" and the explanation given by him amounted to this, namely, The reconciliaton of the mind to God, or conversion!

But wherein is the difference between the scheme of these writers and that of Socinians in general? According to Mr. Simpson, it lies in this: many of the latter, with Dr. Taylor, make atonement to consist in the reconciliation of our heathen ancestors to Christianity, to the superseding of personal conversion in their descendants; and this, he thinks, renders it almost, if not altogether, a nullity. To this we take the liberty of adding, Socinians in general renounce not only the doctrine, but the word *atonement*, which they are very well aware conveys the idea of *satisfaction*. But Mr. Simpson, and the Universalists, though they agree with their brethren in rejecting the *doctrine*, yet seem to think it best to retain the *word*, and to put their own sense upon it.

Mr. Jerram considers this merely a piece of artifice. "Under pretence of being advocates for the atonement," he says, "they have attempted to undermine it, renouncing the doctrine, while they retain the name. They have chosen to call this doctrine, as it has for ages been understood by all denominations of Christians, any thing but the *atonement*; and have appropriated the name to a set of notions which bear no more resemblance to the ideas which it has hitherto been accustomed to designate than the writings of Socinus to the Epistles of St. Paul. This artifice has so far succeeded as sometimes to prevent the alarm which a naked statement of their real sentiments would have occasioned. Persons who have always been taught to consider the atonement of Christ as the only foundation of a sinner's hope might have been startled at an avowed opposition to it; but by retaining the name, though the thing be given up, the change they are persuaded to make appears less formidable. And when such sentiments have been addressed to minds of a speculative turn, and who have never been well-grounded in the principles they profess to believe, they have seldom been without effect.

At first they were *not disposed to contend for trifles*, so long as they conceived the principal doctrine remained unimpeached; and feeling desirous of being ranked among 'the candid and liberal inquirers after truth,' they next *lent a favourable ear* to every thing that presented itself under the mask of improvement. To this succeeded a number of flattering compliments addressed to their vanity—and now the work is done. They presently discover the absurdity of their former opinions, and look down with pity or contempt on those who still hug the chains of prejudice, and creep on in the obsolete path of their forefathers. They commence the zealous disciples of Socinus—the 'rational' worshippers of the *all-benevolent* Deity—and all this without relinquishing an iota of the doctrine of atonement!"

The work before us contains four letters, which Mr. Jerram has addressed to his opponent. In the first he states the question at issue. Declining all contention about the term *satisfaction*, he endeavours to ascertain the thing which he means to defend. "I collect," says he, "from your letter, that you mean to set aside every other consideration in the pardoning of sin but the mercy and love of God; you oppose every thing *vicarious* in the nature of Christ's death, every idea of making an atonement to Divine justice, or of Christ's suffering any thing in the place of sinners." This doctrine Mr. Jerram maintains; and proceeds to answer no less than sixteen objections which his opponent had raised against it. In the second letter, he endeavours to establish the doctrine from the general current of Scripture; in the third, from the nature of the Jewish sacrifices and priesthood; and in the fourth from the fitness of things.

At the close of several valuable notes, taken principally from the elaborate and masterly work of Dr. Magee, on the same subject. In the last of these notes Mr. Jerram has taken occasion to vindicate his friend, Mr. Fuller, from a very unfair statement given by Mr. John Evans, in his "Sketch of the different Denominations;" in which Mr. Fuller's views on this important doctrine are ranked with those of Arians and Sabellians. It would seem as if these writers, like the hero across the Channel, were very much in want of help, or they would not wish to press those into an alliance with them who are known to be averse to their system.

If the reader has seen the "Letters to a Universalist," before referred to, he will observe that the present are less diffuse; and, what may appear not a little surprising, are written in a very gentle and argumentative strain, and without any reference to the learned languages. The sarcastic "Scrutator" is here the calm, dispassionate, but decided advocate for what appears to him a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. To account for the difference, we must have recourse to the preface to his former pamphlet. "He was not ignorant," as he then observed, "that when a man sits down to debate a point with another he should avoid every appearance of personality, and, as far as possible, whatever might even indirectly hurt the feelings of his opponent. The investigation of truth is the only object at which he should aim. But the office of a reviewer is widely different. It is his province to hold up the disputants to the view of the world; to praise what is commendable, and to correct what deserves censure. It belongs to him to point out the perspicuity, strength, and conclusiveness of an argument, as well as the candour and ingenuousness with which it is conducted; nor is it less his duty, however painful, to expose the petulance of little minds, the arrogance of the sciolist, the unsupported claims to candour of the illiberal, and to wrest the palm of victory from the hand of the vanquished."

THE VOICE OF YEARS.

THE late Mr. Huntington was, beyond all doubt, an extraordinary man; and his labours have produced extraordinary effects. Whatever opinion we entertain of their good or evil tendency, all know that he has gathered together a great body of people, and impregnated their minds with principles which will not soon become extinct. And as he has not only preached, but wrote, his labours may be expected to produce effects for many years to come: on this account, it becomes a duty to ascertain their nature and their tendency.

The author of the piece before us appears to have been well qualified for his undertaking, both as to his means of knowing Mr. Huntington, and the unprejudiced state of his mind towards him. He is also evidently a man of close observation and serious reflection.

There are two questions, however, which, on reading his performance, have arisen in our minds. First, Whether the account which he has given of Mr. Huntington's "good qualities," supposing it to be just, includes any indications of personal religion? Secondly, Whether the account of his good and bad qualities can be made to consist with each other?

If our object were to ascertain whether, in the judgment of charity, Mr. Huntington was, or was not, a true Christian, justice would require us first to ascertain, as far as possible, the correctness or defectiveness of these accounts of him; but this not being our object, we may suppose them to be correct, and, as far as human observation can extend, perfect. Our inquiry, then, is simply this: Whether those "good qualities" which are here ascribed to him, and weighed against his evil ones, have any thing truly good in them? If they have not, and yet are allowed, notwithstanding all his faults, to prove him a good man, the consequence may be fatal to thousands, who shall venture to follow his example.

To us it appears that the good qualities ascribed to Mr. Huntington, taken in connexion with the comments by which they are explained, are of an *equivocal* character; they may accompany true religion, or they may not. There is not a Christian grace, nor the exercise of a Christian grace, necessarily contained in any one of them. No one will say that a "plain and natural" manner of speaking has any religion in it. If there be any thing of this, it must be looked for in his being "Scriptural, experimental, and evangelical:" yet when by the first of these terms is meant little more than that his discourses abounded in Scripture quotations, supposed to be gathered out of a concordance; by the next, that, in preaching, he was wont to tell of his own feelings, which corresponded with those of others like-minded with him; and by the last, that he dwelt on *some* of the great truths of the gospel; what is there in all this indicative of true religion? The same may be said of his being "independent, contemplative, and laborious:" they may be connected with true religion, or they may not. They are not the things which prove "the root of the matter to have been in him."

It may be said that the author does not profess to give Mr. Huntington's character as a Christian, but as a minister. It is an unhappy circumstance, however, in a case wherein the good and the bad are to be weighed one against the other, that his good qualities, as a minister, should prove nothing for him as a Christian, while his bad qualities as a minister prove every thing against him as a Christian. His good qualities contain nothing decisive of his goodness; but his bad qualities are indications of the predominancy of a spirit which is not of God.

We proceed, secondly, to inquire whether the account of Mr. Huntington's good and bad qualities can be made to consist with each other.

It has long been common for some, who have disapproved of Mr. Huntington's spirit and conduct, to speak of him, notwithstanding, as preaching *the pure gospel*. And our author, though he will never allow him, he says, to have preached it *fully*, yet seems willing to grant that he preached it as far as he went, and that, upon the whole, he was "evangelical." Nay, more: he represents him as often expatiating upon the truths of the gospel "with a cheerfulness and fluency which sufficiently testified his own interest in them, and his ardent desire that his hearers should be partakers with him in the blessings of a new and everlasting covenant." Yet he is described, at the same time, as being conceited, overbearing, vindictive, proud, inaccessible, covetous, and, we may add, blasphemous, continually swearing to the truth of his dogmas, by the life of God!!! We do not understand how these things can be made to agree.

It is true, as Mr. CECIL observes, that the preaching of Christ is "God's ordinance, and that although Christ may be ignorantly, blunderingly, and even absurdly preached by some; yet God will *bless his own ordinance*." But we think there is a material difference between these failings and those *moral* qualities which are ascribed to Mr. Huntington. We can reconcile the former with true religion, but not the latter.

Allowing, however, that God may bless his own truth, let it be delivered by whom it may, yet is there no reason to suspect whether doctrine imbibed by such a mind is free from impure mixture? whether, if the vessel be tainted, the liquor will not taste of it?

One thing is clear; they who "lack virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity," or are "lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, unthankful, unholy," are not allowed by the Scriptures to understand or believe the truth. The former are described as "blind, and such as cannot see afar off;" and the latter as "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth;" nay, as "resisting the truth; men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith," 2 Pet. i. 9; 2 Tim. iii. 1-8. How far men may preach the truth without understanding or believing it, in the Scriptural sense of the terms, we shall not decide; but certainly we should suspect whether truth from such a source, or through such a medium, is likely to be very pure.

The Scriptures do not acknowledge men of unholy lives as ministers of the gospel, but declare, in the most peremptory terms, that "he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, *and the truth is not in him*," 1 John ii. 4. Our Lord himself, when warning his followers against false prophets, assured them that "a good tree could not bring forth evil fruit," any more than an evil tree could bring forth good fruit; "wherefore," saith he, "by their fruits ye shall know them," Matt. vii. 18-20.

We do not say that such was Mr. Huntington's character, but barely that, *if the account given of him in this performance be just*, we do not perceive what else it could be. We suppose, therefore, that either Mr. Huntington's character must have appeared to this observer of him much worse, or his preaching much better, than it really was.

We should apprehend, merely from this performance, and without any reference to his publications, that whatever portion of truth his preaching might contain, there was a vein of false doctrine running through it, which tainted it to the bone and marrow, buoyed up himself and his admirers in false hope, and rendered his ministry unworthy of the character of "evangelical." And if this were to be suspected, without any reference to his publications, how much more likely does it appear when they are taken into the

account! In all that we have seen of them, the object of the writer appears to have been to exhibit *himself*. How this can comport with the character of a Christian minister we do not understand. "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." And if the obedience and death of Christ were in honour of the Divine law, we do not understand how Christ could be either believed in or preached, while the law was degraded. We may degrade *the works of the law as a ground of justification*; this the apostle did: but he that thinks meanly of the law itself must think meanly of the gospel, as doing honour to it. If there be no glory in the law, there is none in the gospel.

To allege that there are things in the precepts of the New Testament which are not *specifically* required by the decalogue is mere evasion. This was not the question between Mr. Huntington and "other ministers;" but whether the Divine law, as summed up by our Lord in love to God and our neighbour, does not comprehend all duty, and be not binding on all men, believers and unbelievers. It was not the *defectiveness* of the decalogue, in comparison with the precepts of Christ, that led Mr. Huntington to degrade it. Had this been the case, the subject of "Christian duty," as inculcated in the New Testament, would have occupied a place in his ministry; but Mr. Huntington, it seems, "*never said any thing of that kind!*"

We doubt whether the apostle Paul would have acknowledged such a doctrine to be the gospel, or such a character as that which is ascribed to him to consist with Christianity; and whether, instead of selecting things out of it for imitation, he would not have sought them in other characters. "Brethren," said he to the Philippians, "be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." We have no doubt, however, of the truth and importance of our author's remarks on preaching Christ. Whatever be our "qualifications," or talents, if the person and work of Christ be not the favourite theme of our preaching, we had better be day-labourers than preachers.

ANSWERS TO QUERIES.

THE FALL OF ADAM.

“Was the fall of Adam *foredetermined* or only *foreseen* by God.”

THE concern which the decrees of God have with the fall of man has often been the subject of inquiry. I do not see the reason, however, why this particular fact should be singled out from others. There is nothing revealed, that I know of, concerning the fall of man being the object either of the Divine foreknowledge or decree. The Scriptures declare, in general, that God knoweth the end from the beginning, from which we may conclude with certainty that he knew all the events of time, all the causes and effects of things, through all their multiplied and diversified channels. The Scriptures also ask, “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” which intimates that the providence and purpose of God are concerned in whatever cometh to pass. The volitions of free agents, the evil as well as the good, are constantly represented as falling under the counsels and conduct of Heaven. Never did men act more freely nor more wickedly than the Jews, in the crucifixion of Christ; yet in that whole business they did no other than what “God’s hand and counsel determined before to be done.” The delivery of Christ into their hands to be crucified, as performed by Judas, was a wicked act; yet was he “delivered according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” The proof that the fall of man was an object of Divine foreknowledge is merely *inferential*; and from the same kind of proof we may conclude that it was, all things considered, an object of predetermination.

That this subject is deep and difficult, in the present state, is admitted, and wicked men may abuse it to their own destruction; but the thing itself is no less true and useful, if considered in the fear of God. There is a link, as some have expressed it, that unites the purposes of God and the free actions of men, which is above our comprehension; but to deny the fact is to disown an all-pervading providence; which is little less than to disown a God. It is observable, in one of the foregoing passages, that Peter unites “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” together, and seems to have had no idea of admitting the one without the other. It is also worthy of notice, that, in his manner of introducing the subject, it appears to have no tendency whatever to excuse them from guilt, by throwing the blame on the Almighty: on the contrary, it is brought in for the purpose of conviction, and actually answered the end; those to whom it was addressed being “pricked in their hearts,” and crying out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

The decrees of God seem to be distinguishable into *efficient* and *permissive*. With respect to moral good, God is the proper and efficient cause of it. This James teaches: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights;” particularly the blessing of

regeneration, which contains all moral goodness in embryo: as it follows, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth."

With respect to moral evil, God permits it, and it was his eternal purpose so to do. If it be right for God to permit sin, it could not be wrong for him to determine to do so, unless it be wrong to determine to do what is right. The decree of God to permit sin does not in the least excuse the sinner, or warrant him to ascribe it to God, instead of himself.

The same inspired writer who teaches, with respect to good, that "it cometh from above," teaches also in the same passage, with respect to evil, that it proceedeth from ourselves: "Let no one say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil; neither tempteth he any one. But every one is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." And, as if he considered the danger of mistaking on this profound subject, he adds by way of caution, "Do not err, my beloved brethren."

ACCOUNTABILITY OF MAN.

"1. Since, on the present constitution of things, men never had a disposition to love and serve God, nor can it be produced by any circumstances in which they can be placed, now can they be accountable for what they never had, and without Divine influence never can have?"

"2. If it be said that man is accountable from his powers and constitution, and therefore that God requires of him perfect obedience and love as the result of his possessing a moral nature; still how is it consistent with the goodness of God to produce accountable beings in circumstances wherein their rebellion is certain, and then punish them for it?"

"3. If the reply to these difficulties be founded on the principle, that, from what we see, we cannot conceive of a constitution which hath not either equal or greater difficulties in it, is it not a confession that we cannot meet the objections and answer them in the direct way, but are obliged to acknowledge that the government of God is too imperfectly understood by us to know the principles on which it proceeds?"

"The above queries are not the effect of any unbelief of the great leading doctrines of the gospel; but as every thinking man has his own way of settling such moral difficulties, you will confer a favour on me if you will state how you meet and answer them in your own mind."

If the querist imagines that we profess to have embraced a system which answers all difficulties, he should be reminded that we profess no such thing. If it answer all *sober* and *modest* objections, that is as much as ought to be expected. The querist would do well to consider whether he be not off Christian ground, and whether he might not as well inquire as follows: How could it consist with the goodness of God, knowing as he did the part that men and angels would act, to create them? Or, if he had brought them into being, yet, when they had transgressed, why did he not blot them out of existence? Or, if they who had sinned must needs exist and be punished, yet why was it not confined to them? Why must the human race be brought into being under such circumstances?

I remember, when a boy of about ten years old, I was bathing with a number of other boys near a mill-dam, and, the hat of one of my companions falling into the stream, I had the hardihood, without being able to swim, to attempt to recover it. I went so deep that the waters began to run into my mouth, and to heave my feet from the ground. At that instant the millers, seeing my danger, set up a loud cry, "Get back! get back! get back!" I did so, and that was all.—What the millers said to me, modesty, sobriety, and right reason say to all such objectors as the above, "Get back! get back! get back!" You are beyond your depth! It is enough for you to know that God HATH created men and angels, and

this notwithstanding he knew what would be the result; that he HATH NOT blotted them out of existence; and that he HATH NOT prevented the propagation of the human race in their fallen state. These being FACTS which cannot be disputed, you ought to take it for granted, whether you can understand it or not, that they are consistent with righteousness; for the contrary is no other than *replying against God*.

Whatever objections may be alleged against an hypothesis, or the meaning of a text of Scripture, on the ground of its inconsistency with the Divine perfections; yet, in matters of acknowledged *fact*, they are inadmissible. If God HATH DONE thus and thus, it is not for us to object that it is inconsistent with his character; but to suspect our own understanding, and to conclude that, if we knew the whole, we should see it to be right. Paul invariably takes it for granted that *whatever God doth is right*; nor will he dispute with any man on a contrary principle, but cuts him short in this manner: "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!" It was enough for him that God had said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." This, as if he should say, is the FACT: "He *hath* mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he *hardeneth*." He knew what would be the heart-risings of the infidel—"Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" But does he attempt to answer this objection? No; he repels it as Job did: "He that reproveth God, let him answer it.—Nay, but, O man, who art thou that *repliest against God*? *Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*"

Let the querist consider whether his objections be not of the same family as those which were made to the apostle, and whether they do not admit of the same answer. Is it not *fact* that though sinners "never had a disposition to love and serve God, and no circumstance in which they can be placed will produce it," yet *they are accountable creatures, and are invariably treated as such in the Scriptures*? God requires them to love and serve him just as much as if they were of opposite dispositions, and "finds fault" with the contrary. Instead of allowing for the want of disposition, he constantly charges it as the very thing that provokes his displeasure. Hundreds of proofs might be produced; but I will only refer you to two or three, Jer. vi. 15-19; Matt. xii. 34-37; John viii. 43-47. It is upon these FACTS that we rest our persuasion; and not upon a supposed perfect comprehension of the Divine government, nor yet upon the ground of its "having the fewest difficulties." We say, God *actually* treats the want of disposition not as an excuse, but as a sin; and we take it for granted that "what God does is right," whether we can comprehend it or not. However, in this case, it happens that with the testimonies of God accord those of conscience and common sense. Every man's conscience "finds fault" with him for the evils which he commits willingly, or of choice; and instead of making any allowance for previous aversion, nothing more is necessary to rivet the charge. And, with respect to the common sense of mankind in their treatment one of another, what judge or what jury ever took into consideration the previous aversion of a traitor or a murderer, with a view to the diminishing of his guilt? On the contrary, the tracing of any thing to that origin rivets the charge, and terminates the inquiry. With the united testimony therefore of God, conscience, and common sense on our side, we make light of objections which, as to their principle, were repelled by an apostle, and which are retained only in the school of metaphysical infidelity.

MORAL INABILITY.

FIRST, You inquire "whether any person *by nature* possesses that honest heart which constitutes the ability to comply with the invitations of the gospel?" I believe the heart of man to be by nature the direct opposite of honest. I am not aware, however, that I have any where represented an honest heart as constituting our ability to comply with gospel invitations, unless as the term is sometimes used in a figurative sense, for moral ability. I have said, "There is no ability wanting for this purpose in any man who possesses an honest heart." If a person owed you one hundred pounds, and could find plenty of money for his own purposes, though none for you; and should he at the same time plead inability, you would answer, *there was no ability wanting, but an honest heart*: yet it would be an unjust construction of your words, if an advocate for this dishonest man were to allege that you had represented an honest heart as that which *constituted the ability to pay the debt*. No, you would reply, his ability, strictly speaking, consists in its being *in the power of his hand*, and this he has. That which is wanting is an honest principle; and it is the former, not the latter, which renders him accountable. It is similar with regard to God. Men have the same natural powers to love Christ as to hate him, to believe as to disbelieve; and this it is which constitutes their accountableness. Take away reason and conscience, and man would cease to be accountable; but if he were as wicked as Satan himself, in that case no such effect would follow.

Secondly, If no man by nature possess an honest heart, you inquire, "Whether, if I be not what you call an *elect sinner*, there are any means provided of God, and which I can use, that shall issue in that 'honesty of heart' which will enable me to believe unto salvation?" Your being an elect or a non-elect sinner makes no difference as to this question. The idea of a person destitute of honesty using means to obtain it is in all cases a contradiction. The use of means *supposes the existence* of an honest desire after the end. The Scriptures direct to the sincere use of means for obtaining eternal life; and these means are, "Repent, and believe the gospel;" but they no where direct to such a use of means as may be complied with without any honesty of heart, and in order to obtain it. Nothing appears to me with greater evidence than that God *directly requires uprightness of heart*, not only in the moral law, but in all the exhortations of the Bible, and not the dishonest use of means in order to obtain it. Probably you yourself would not plead for *such* a use of means, but would allow that even in using means to obtain an honest heart we ought to be *sincere*; but if so, you must maintain what I affirm, that nothing short of honesty of heart *itself* is required in any of the exhortations of Scripture; for a sincere use of means *is* honesty of heart. If you say, "No; man is depraved; it is not his duty to possess an honest heart, but merely to use means that he may possess it;" I answer, as personating the sinner, I have no desire after an honest heart. If you reply, "You should pray for such a desire," you must mean, if you mean any thing, that I should express my *desire* to God that I may have a *desire*; and I tell you that I have none to express. You would then, sir, be driven to tell me I was so wicked that I neither was of an upright heart, nor would be persuaded to use any means for becoming so; and that I must take the consequences. That is, I must be exposed to punishment, because, though I had "a price in my hand to get wisdom, *I had no heart to it*." Thus all you do is to remove the obstruction further out of sight: the thing is the same.

I apprehend it is owing to your considering human depravity as the *misfortune*, rather than the *fault*, of human nature, that you and others speak of it as you do. You would not write in this manner in an affair that affected *yourself*. If the debtor above supposed, whom you knew to have plenty of wealth about him, were to allege his want of an honest heart, you might possibly think of *using means with him*; but you would not think of directing him to use means to become what at present he has no desire to be—an honest man!

Thirdly, You inquire, if there be no means provided of God which I can use that shall issue in that honesty of heart which will enable me to believe unto salvation, “how can the gospel be a *blessing bestowed upon me*; seeing it is inadequate to make me happy, and contains no good thing which I can possibly obtain or enjoy?” If I be under no other inability than that which arises from a dishonesty of heart, it is an abuse of language to introduce the terms “possible, impossible,” &c., for the purpose of diminishing the goodness of God, or destroying the accountableness of man. I am not wanting in power provided I were willing; and if I be not willing, there lies my fault. Nor is any thing in itself less a blessing on account of our unreasonable and wicked aversion to it. Indeed, the same would follow from your own principles. If I be so wicked as not only to be destitute of an honest heart, but cannot be *persuaded to use means in order to obtain it*, I must perish; and then, according to your way of writing, the gospel was “inadequate to make me happy, and was no blessing to me!” You will say, I might have used the means; that is, I might *if I would*, or if I had possessed a sincere desire after the end: but I *did not* possess it; and therefore the same consequences follow your hypothesis as that which you oppose.

If these things be true, say you, we may *despair*. True, sir; and that is the point, in a sense, to which I should be glad to see you and many others brought. Till we despair of all help from ourselves, we shall never pray acceptably; nor, in my judgment, is there any hope of our salvation.

Let a man feel that there is no bar between him and heaven except what consists in his own wickedness, and yet that such is its influence over him that he certainly never will by any efforts of his own extricate himself from it, and he will then begin to pray for an interest in salvation by *mere grace*, in the name of Jesus—a salvation that will save him *from himself*; and, so praying, he will find it; and, when he has found it, he will feel and acknowledge that it was grace alone that made him to differ; and this grace he is taught in the Scriptures to ascribe to the purpose of God, given him in Christ Jesus before the world began.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD, AND WHETHER IT EXTENDS TO THE NON-ELECT.

[An original letter to a friend in reply to the inquiry.]

“Since God never intended those that are not his elect to know the power of his grace in Christ Jesus, how can we extol the love of God in seeking the salvation of men, except in relation to those whom he designed to save! And how can we speak of the love of God to men at large, except on the general ground that it is among the mass of mankind that his chosen can be found, and therefore that they will hear and obey the gospel when preached unto them? In fewer words, What is the love which God hath for those whom he hath not chosen to eternal life?”

I CANNOT undertake to free this subject or any other from difficulty; nor do I pretend to answer it on the principles of reason. If I can ascertain

certain principles to be taught in the word of God, I feel it safe to reason from them; but if I proceed beyond this, I am at sea.

Respecting the first member of this question, I am not aware of having represented God as "seeking the salvation of those who are not saved." If by the term *seeking* were meant no more than his furnishing them with the means of salvation, and, as the moral Governor of his creatures, sincerely directing and inviting them to use them, I should not object to it. In this sense he said of Israel, "O that they had hearkened to my voice!" In this sense the Lord of the vineyard is described as *seeking* fruit where he finds none, Luke xiii. 7. But if it be understood to include such a desire for the salvation of men as to do all that can be done to accomplish it, I do not approve of it. I see no inconsistency between God's using all proper means for the good of mankind as their Creator and Governor, and his withholding effectual grace, which is something superadded to moral government, and to which no creature has any claim.

As to the second member, God may be said, for aught I know, to exercise love to *mankind*, as being the mass containing his chosen people; but I cannot think this idea will answer. It appears to me an incontrovertible fact that God is represented in his word as exercising goodness, mercy, kindness, long-suffering, and even love towards men as men. The bounties of Providence are described as flowing from *kindness* and *mercy*; and this his kindness and mercy is held up as an example for us to *love* our enemies, Matt. v. 44, 45; Luke vi. 35, 36. And this the apostle extols; calling it, "The riches of his goodness," &c., keenly censuring the wicked for despising it, instead of being led to repentance by it, Rom. ii. 4. And what if God never intended to render this his goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering effectual to the leading of them to repentance? Does it follow that it is not goodness? And while I read such language as this, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"—and that the ministry of reconciliation was in this strain—"We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech [men] by us; we pray [them] in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God,"—I can draw no conclusion short of this, that eternal life through Jesus Christ is freely offered to sinners as sinners, or as Calvin, on John iii. 16, expresseth it, "He useth the universal note both that he may invite all men in general unto the participation of life, and that he may cut off all excuse from unbelievers. To the same end tendeth the term *world*; for although there shall nothing be found in the world that is worthy of God's favour, yet he sheweth that *he is favourable unto the whole world*, when he calleth all men without exception to the faith of Christ. But remember that life is promised to all who shall believe in Christ, so commonly, that yet faith is not common to all men; yet God doth only open the eyes of his elect, that they may seek him by faith."

If God had sent his Son to die for the whole world, and had offered pardon and eternal life to all who should believe in him, *without making effectual provision for the reception of him in a single instance*, what would have been the consequence? Not one of the human race, you may say, would have been saved, and so Christ would have died in vain. Be it so. Though this would not have comported with the *wise and gracious designs of God*, yet it does not appear to me inconsistent with his justice, goodness, or sincerity. If he had called sinners to repent, believe, and be saved, while he withheld the *means* of salvation, it would have been so; but not in his merely withholding the *grace* necessary to turn the sinner's heart.

If I mistake not, this second member of the question proceeds on the

principle that there can be no good-will exercised towards a sinner in inviting him to repent, believe, and be saved, unless effectual grace be given him for the purpose. But this principle appears to me unscriptural and unfounded. Supernatural and effectual grace is indeed necessary to the *actual production* of good in men; but is never represented as necessary to justify the goodness of God in *expecting or requiring it*. All that is necessary to this end is, that he furnish them with rational powers, objective light, and outward means. In proof of this, let all those scriptures be considered in which God *complains* of men for not repenting, believing, obeying, &c.; e. g. in the complaint against Chorazin and Bethsaida, no mention is made of supernatural grace given to them; but merely of the "mighty works" wrought before them, Matt. xi. 20-24. The complaint of the want of "reverence for his Son" (which proves what he had a right to expect) was not founded on his having furnished them with supernatural grace, but with objective light, means, and advantages, Matt. xxi. 33-38. God gave no effectual grace to those who are accused of bringing forth wild grapes instead of grapes; yet he *looked for grapes*, and asked what he could have done more for his vineyard that he had not done? Isa. v. 4. The strivings of the Spirit, which sinners are described as *resisting*, (Gen. vi. 3; Acts vii. 51,) could not for this reason mean the effectual grace of the Holy Spirit, nor indeed any thing wrought in *them*, but the impressive motives *presented to them* by the inspired messages of the prophets: see Neh. ix. 30. And thus I conceive we are to understand the complaint in Deut. xxix. 4, "The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day." It is inconceivable that Moses should complain of them for the Lord's not having given them supernatural grace. The complaint appears to be founded on the non-success of the most impressive *outward means*, which ought to have produced in them a heart to perceive, eyes to see, and ears to hear. Such is the scope of the passage—"Moses called to all Israel, and said, Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land. The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles; yet the Lord, by all these impressive means, *hath not given you an heart to perceive*," &c.

From the whole, I conclude that there are two kinds of influence by which God works on the minds of men: First, That which is common, and which is effected by the ordinary use of motives presented to the mind for consideration. Secondly, That which is special and supernatural. The one is exercised by him as the moral Governor of the world; the other as the God of grace, through Jesus Christ. The one contains nothing mysterious, any more than the influence of our words and actions on each other; the other is such a mystery that we know nothing of it but by its effects. The former *ought* to be effectual; the latter *is* so.*

You sum up the question in fewer words by asking, What is the love which God hath for those whom he hath not chosen to eternal life? I should answer, *The good-will of the Creator*, whose tender mercies are over all his works. It is that tender regard for the work of his hands which nothing but sin could extinguish, and which in the infliction of the most tremendous punishments is alleged in proof of its malignity, and to show how much they were against the grain of his native goodness, and that he would not have punished the offenders after all had not the inalienable interests of his character and government required it. Such are the ideas conveyed, I think, in Gen. vi., "I will destroy man *whom I have created*

* See Bellamy's *True Religion Delineated*.

from the face of the earth;" and in Isa. xxvii. 11, "He that *made* them will not have mercy upon them, and he that *formed* them will show them no favour."

THE PRAYER OF THE WICKED.

"Ought a wicked man to pray?"

THE declaimer who denied this position seems to have had an eye to those passages of Scripture which declare "the sacrifice and way of the wicked to be an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. xv. 8, 9;) and to have concluded from them that God does not require any sacrifice or prayer at their hands. But, if so, why did Peter exhort the sorcerer to pray? Acts viii. 22. And wherefore is the fury of God denounced against the families that call not upon his name? Jer. x. 25. An hypothesis which flies in the face of the express language of Scripture is inadmissible, and the framer of it, to be consistent, should avow himself an infidel.

If he meant only to deny that God requires such prayers as wicked men actually offer, the prayer of a hard, impenitent, and unbelieving heart, I have no controversy with him. God cannot possibly approve any thing of this kind. But then the same is true of every other duty. Wicked men do nothing that is well-pleasing to God; nothing which is aimed at his glory, or done in obedience to his authority; every thing that is done is done for selfish ends. If they read the Scriptures, it is not to know the will of God and do it; or, if they hear the word, it is not with any true desire to profit by it. Even their pursuit of the common good things of this life is that they may consume them upon their lusts; hence the very "ploughing of the wicked is sin," Prov. xxi. 4. Yet the declaimer himself would scarcely infer from hence that it is not their duty to read the word of God, nor attend to the preaching of the gospel, nor pursue the necessary avocations of life; neither would he reckon it absurd to exhort them to such exercises as these.

The truth is, wicked men are required to do all these things, not carnally, but with a right end and a right spirit. In this way Simon Magus, though "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity," was exhorted to pray; not with a hard and impenitent heart, but with a spirit of true contrition. "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." To repent and pray is the same thing in effect as to pray penitently, or with a contrite spirit. Wicked men are required to read and hear the word, but not with a wicked spirit; and to plough the soil, but not that they may consume its produce upon their lusts.

There are not two sorts of requirements, or two standards of obedience, one for good men, and the other for wicked men; the revealed will of God is one and the same, however differently creatures may stand affected towards it. The same things which are required of the righteous, as repentance, faith, love, prayer, and praise, are required of the wicked, John xii. 36; Acts iii. 19; Rev. xv. 4. If it were not so, and the aversion of the heart tended to set aside God's authority over it, it must of necessity follow that a sinner can never be brought to repentance, except it be for the commission of those sins which might have been avoided consistently with the most perfect enmity against God! And this is to undermine all true repentance; for the essence of true repentance is "godly sorrow," or

sorrow for having displeased and dishonoured God. But if, in a state of unregeneracy, a man were under no obligation to please God, he must of course have been incapable of displeasing him; for where no law is, there is no transgression. The consequence is, he can never be sorry at heart for having displeased him; and as there would be but little if any ground for repentance towards God, so there would be but little if any need of faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. If in a state of unregeneracy he were under no obligation to do any thing pleasing to God, and were so far rendered incapable of doing any thing to displease him, so far he must be sinless, and therefore stand in no need of a Saviour. Where there is no obligation, there can be no offence; and where there is no offence, there needs no forgiveness. Thus the notions of this declaimer, who, I suppose, would be thought very evangelical, will be found subversive of the first principles of the gospel.

ASPECT OF GOSPEL PROMISES TO THE WICKED.

[Suggested by certain queries addressed to the writer on his exposition of the beatitudes.]

THE queries put to me, with so much candour and kindness, by a Constant Reader, are such as I feel no difficulty in answering. And I do it with the greater pleasure, because it is not the first time of my being misunderstood on this subject; and I might add, in one instance, largely misrepresented. Your correspondent then will give me credit, when I assure him that I should never think of addressing an awakened sinner in the way in which he supposes I should not; but in the way in which he supposes I should. If he be still at a loss how to reconcile this acknowledgment with the passage he calls in question, I must request him to consider whether there be not a manifest difference between comfort being held out in a way of *invitation*, to induce a sinner to return to God by Jesus Christ, and its being given in a way of *promise*, on the supposition of his having returned. The wicked is *invited* to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and to return unto the Lord; and all this while he is wicked. Mercy also, and abundant pardon, are *promised* him, not, however, *as wicked*, but *as forsaking his way and his thoughts, and as returning to the Lord*. The weary and heavy laden, by which I understand sinners considered as miserable, are *invited* to come to Jesus with their burdens; but it is *as coming to him*, and *as taking his yoke*, that rest for their souls is *promised* to them. All the comfort contained in the gospel is to be presented to the sinner in a way of invitation; but no comfort is afforded him in a way of promise, but as repenting and believing the gospel. "Say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him."—"There is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked."

Now it requires to be noticed that the beatitudes, which I was expounding, are not *invitations to believe*, but *promises to believers*. In saying, "The gospel has no comfort for impenitent, though distressed sinners, in their present state," I meant, it promises no mercy *but* on supposition of their coming off from that state to Jesus Christ. My design was not to direct the attention of the awakened sinner to any thing in himself for comfort; but to beat him off from false comforts, by assuring him that mere distress was no proof of his being, as yet, in a state of salvation. If such a one should ask me, *What must I do?* I should think of nothing but of pointing him to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the

world. But if he tell me his tale of woe, under an idea that *something may be found in it* to which the promises of mercy are made, (and such cases are not uncommon,) I should answer, Think nothing of this, my friend; unless your distress lead you to relinquish every false way, and to cast yourself as a perishing sinner on Jesus Christ for salvation, it is of no account. The gospel promises nothing to mere distress. Your concern is not to look into yourself for evidences of grace, (the existence of which, at present, is extremely doubtful, and the discernment of it may be impossible,) but to the atonement of Christ, the hope set before you.

POWER AND INFLUENCE OF THE GOSPEL.

“What is the true meaning of those parts of the New Testament which declare the gospel to have a powerful operation in the souls of men, especially in believers? See Rom. i. 16; 1 Cor. i. 18, 24; 1 Thess. ii. 13. And is the power of the gospel in any sense to be distinguished from the power and influence of the Holy Spirit; or are they always connected; or do both include one and the same Divine operation?”

THAT the gospel of Christ has an influence on the souls of men cannot be denied: as a means it is naturally adapted to this end. Even where it is not cordially believed, it is often known to operate powerfully upon the mind and conscience. It is natural to suppose that it should do so: the human mind is so formed, as that words, whether spoken or written, should influence it. We cannot read or hear a discourse of any kind, if it be interesting, without being more or less affected by it; and it would be very surprising if the gospel, which implies our being utterly undone, and relates to our everlasting well being, should be the only subject in nature which should have no effect upon us. The gospel also being indited by the Holy Spirit, the influence which it has upon the minds of men is ascribed to him. It was in this way, that is, by the preaching of Noah, that the Spirit of Jehovah “strove” with the antediluvians. It was in this way that he was “resisted” by the Israelites; that is, they resisted the *messages* which the Holy Spirit sent to them by Moses and the prophets. Hence the expressive language in the confession recorded in Neh. ix. 30, “Many years didst thou testify against them *by thy Spirit* in thy prophets.” Also the pointed address of Stephen, to those who rejected the gospel of Christ, in Acts vii. 51, “Ye do always resist *the Holy Ghost*: as your fathers did, so do ye.” This, for aught I can conceive, may with propriety be called the *common* operation of the grace of God.

As the gospel has an effect upon the minds and consciences even of many who do not cordially believe it, much more does it influence those who do. In them it works *effectually*, transforming them into its own likeness, 1 Thess. ii. 13. Their hearts are cast into it as into a mould, and all its sacred principles become to them principles of action. The grace, the wisdom, the purity, the justice, and the glory of it, powerfully subdues, melts, and attracts their hearts to love and obedience. The *power* of God had often been exerted by various means, and to various ends. Thunder and smoke, blackness and darkness and tempest, as displayed on Mount Sinai, were the power of God unto conviction. Overwhelming floods, and devouring flames, in the case of the old world, of Sodom and Gomorrah, were the power of God unto destruction. Nor were these means better adapted to their ends than is the gospel to be the power of God unto salvation. It has ever pleased God by this means, weak and despised as it is in the account of men, “to save them that believe.”—“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

The above is offered as an answer to the former part of the question. But it is inquired, "Is the power of the gospel upon believers in any sense to be distinguished from the power and influence of the Holy Spirit?"

That the power of the gospel in the hearts of believers is the power of the Holy Spirit is admitted. All that the gospel effects is to be attributed to the Holy Spirit, who works by it as a means. It is called "the sword of the Spirit," Eph. vi. 17; its influence, therefore, is as much the influence of the Spirit as that of a sword is of the hand that wields it. That obedience to the truth by which our souls are purified is "through the Spirit," 1 Pet. i. 22. Indeed all the means, whether ordinances or providences, or whatever is rendered subservient to the sanctification and salvation of the souls of men, are under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The influence, therefore, which they have to these ends is reckoned *his* influence. But it does not follow from hence that "the power of the gospel is in no sense to be distinguished from the power of the Holy Spirit, or that the one is always connected with the other, or that they both necessarily, and in all cases, include one and the same Divine operation." The contrary of each of these positions appears to be the truth. The passages already adduced speak of the influence of the word upon those, and those only, who believe; and then the question is, How is it that a sinner is brought to believe?

The word of God cannot, in the nature of things, operate effectually *till it is believed*; and how is this brought about? Here is the difficulty. Belief, it may be said, in other cases is induced by evidence. This is true; and if the hearts of men were not utterly averse from the gospel, its own evidence, without any supernatural interposition, would be sufficient to render every one who heard it a believer. But they are averse; and we all know that evidence, be it ever so clear, will make but little impression upon a mind infected with prejudice. The Scriptures speak of "sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth," as distinct things; and as if the one was antecedent to the other, 2 Thess. ii. 13. They also tell us that "the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, and she attended to the things which were spoken by Paul." We are said to "believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead," Eph. i. 19, 20. It would not require more power to believe the gospel than any other system of truth, if the heart were but in harmony with it; but as it is not, it becomes necessary that a new bias of heart should be given as a preparative to knowing or embracing it. The Scriptures not only speak of knowledge as the means of promoting a holy temper of heart, but of a holy temper as the foundation of true knowledge. "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord," Jer. xxiv. 7.

If it be objected that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," I answer that faith must have an object, or it cannot exist. The word of God is the objective cause of faith; but it does not follow from hence that it is its sole or compulsive cause. Eating cometh by food, and food by the blessing of God upon the earth. Food may be said to be the objective cause of a man's eating, seeing he could not have eaten without food; but it does not therefore follow that food was the impulsive or sole cause of his eating; for had he not been blessed with an appetite, he would not have eaten, though surrounded by food in the greatest plenty.

If it be further objected that we can form no rational idea of the influence of the Holy Spirit, any otherwise than as through the medium of the word; I answer, we can form no idea of the influence of the Holy Spirit at all, either with or without the word, but merely of its effects. We may

indeed form an idea of the influence of truth upon our minds, but we cannot conceive how a Divine influence accompanies it. Nor is it necessary that we should, any more than that we should comprehend "the way of the Spirit," in the quickening and formation of our animal nature, in order to be satisfied that we are the creatures of God. It is sufficient for us that we are conscious of certain effects, and are taught in the Scriptures to ascribe them to a Divine cause.

THE NATURE OF REGENERATION.

"Does the Spirit of God, in regeneration, produce a new principle in the heart, or only impart a new light in the understanding?"

THE question, as stated by your correspondent, I consider as important, and as admitting of a satisfactory answer. Whether I shall be able to afford him satisfaction, I cannot tell; but will do the best I can towards it. If we were called to determine *how* or in *what manner* the Holy Spirit operates upon the human mind, great difficulties might attend our inquiries; but the purport of this question seems to relate, not to the *modus* of his operations, but to the *nature* of what is produced. To this I should answer, The Spirit of God in regeneration *does* produce a new principle in the heart, and not merely impart a new light in the understanding. The reasons for this position are as follow:—

First, That which the Holy Spirit imparts in regeneration corresponds with his OWN NATURE: it is *holiness*, or *spirituality*. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." But mere light in the understanding, as distinguished from the bias or temper of the heart, has nothing in it spiritual or holy; it is a mere exercise of intellect, in which there is neither good nor evil. The Scriptures, it is true, make frequent mention of spiritual light, and of such light being imparted by the Spirit of God; but the terms *light* and *knowledge*, as frequently used in Scripture, are not to be understood in a literal, but in a figurative sense. As spiritual darkness, or blindness, is not a mere defect of the understanding, so spiritual light is not the mere supplying of such a defect. Each of these terms conveys a *compound* idea; the one of ignorance and aversion, the other of knowledge and love. Hence the former is described as *blindness of the heart*, and the latter as *understanding with the heart*. If I understand any thing of the theory of the human mind, there is a kind of action and reaction of the understanding and the affections upon each other. We are not only affected with things by our judgment concerning them, but we judge of many things as we are affected towards them. Every one feels how easy it is to believe that to be true which corresponds with our inclinations. Now, *so far* as the decisions of the judgment are the consequence of the temper of the heart, so far are they either virtuous or vicious. Of this kind is *spiritual blindness*. Men do not *like* to retain God in their knowledge. They *desire* not the knowledge of his ways. Hence ignorance, in this figurative or compound sense of the term, is threatened with the most awful judgments: "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that *know* thee not."—Christ will come "in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that *know not God*." Of this kind also is *spiritual light*. Hence the following language: "I will give them a *heart to know me*."—"God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined *in our hearts*, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This is that holy

or spiritual knowledge which it is *life eternal* to possess; of which the *natural* man is destitute; which would lead us to *ask for living water*; and which, had the Jewish rulers possessed, "they would not have crucified the Lord of life and glory."—"Ye neither know me nor my father," said our Lord to the Jews: "if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also." The want of this knowledge was the sin of the Jews; and, as we have seen already, stands threatened with Divine judgments: but the mere want of knowledge, according to the strict and literal meaning of the term, and where it arises not from any evil bias of heart, which has induced us to slight or neglect the means, is not criminal; on the contrary, it excuses that which would otherwise be criminal. Ahimelech pleaded his ignorance of David's supposed rebellion, before Saul; and it ought, no doubt, to have acquitted him. If the Jews had not enjoyed such means of knowledge as they did, comparatively speaking, they *had not had sin*.—Further, Spiritual knowledge, or knowledge according to the figurative or compound sense of the term, has the promise of *eternal life*; but knowledge, literally taken, as distinguished from the temper of the heart, may exist in the most wicked characters, such as Balaam and Judas; and though in itself it be neither good nor evil, yet it may be, and generally is, an occasion of greater aversion to God and religion. Thus our Lord told the Jews: "Ye have both seen and hated both me and my Father." Thus also many among us who have long sat under the preaching of the gospel, and long been the subjects of keen conviction, feel their enmity keep pace with their knowledge; and thus, at the last judgment, sinners will see and know the equity of their punishment; so that "every mouth will be stopped, and all become guilty before God;" yet the enmity of their hearts, there is reason to think, will be thereby heightened, rather than diminished. In short, mere knowledge is in itself neither good nor evil, though it is essential to both good and evil; that is, it is essential to moral agency. If knowledge were obliterated from the mind, man would cease to be an accountable being. In every condition of existence, therefore, whether pure or depraved, he retains this, in different degrees; and will retain it for ever, whatever be his final state.

From hence I conclude that what is produced by the Holy Spirit in regeneration is something very different from mere knowledge.

Secondly, That which the Holy Spirit produces in regeneration corresponds with the nature of *DIVINE TRUTH*; but the nature of Divine truth is such that mere light in the understanding is not sufficient to receive it. In proof of the former of these positions, I refer to the words of the apostle, in Rom. vi. 17, "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you," or rather, according to the marginal reading, "into which ye were delivered."* The gospel, or the "form of doctrine" which it contains, is a *mould*, into which the heart, softened like melted wax, is, as it were, "delivered," or cast, and whence it receives its impression. Every mark or line of the gospel mould leaves a correspondent line in the renewed heart. Hence Christians are represented as having the "truth dwelling in them;" their hearts being a kind of counterpart to the gospel. That mere light in the understanding is not sufficient to receive the gospel will appear by considering the *nature* of those truths which it contains. If they were merely objects of *speculation*, mere light in the understanding would be sufficient to receive them; but they are of a *holy* nature, and therefore require a correspondent temper of heart to enter into them. The sweetness of honey might as well be known by the sight of the eye as the

* Εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε

real glory of the gospel by the mere exercise of the intellectual faculty. Why is it that the "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them;" but "because they are spiritually discerned?" A spiritual or holy temper of heart is that in the reception of gospel truth which a relish for poetry is in entering into the spirit of a Milton or a Young. Mere intellect is not sufficient to understand those writers; and why should it be thought unreasonable, or even mysterious, that we must possess a portion of the same spirit which governed the sacred writers in order properly to enter into their sentiments?

Thirdly, That which the Holy Spirit communicates in regeneration corresponds with the nature of DIVINE REQUIREMENTS. In other words, the same thing which is required by God as the Governor of the world is bestowed by the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption; both the one and the other is not mere light in the understanding, but a heart to love him. The language of Divine requirements is as follows:—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength." "Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts, and be no more stiffnecked."—"Make you a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"—"Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth, and with all your hearts." The language of the promises is perfectly correspondent with all this, with respect to the nature of what is bestowed:—"And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul."—"A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."—"And I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me."

Fourthly, That which the Holy Spirit communicates in regeneration, being the great remedy of human nature, must correspond with the nature of the MALADY: but the malady of human nature does not consist in simple ignorance, but in the bias of the heart; therefore such must be the remedy. That regeneration is the *remedy* of human nature, and not the implantation of principles which were never possessed by man in his purest state, will appear from its being expressed by the terms "washing" and "renewing;" the *washing* of regeneration, the *renewing* of the Holy Spirit; which convey the ideas of *restoring* us to purity, and *recovering* us to a right mind. Regeneration implies degeneracy. The nature of that which is produced therefore by the one must correspond with that which we had lost, and be the opposite of that which we possessed in the other. Now that which we had lost was *the love of God and our neighbour*. "Love is the fulfilling of the law;" love, therefore, comprehends the whole of duty; consequently the want, or the opposite of love, comprehends the whole of depravity. If it be said, No, the "understanding is darkened"—True, but this is owing to the evil temper of the heart, Eph. iv. 18.* There is no *sin* in being ignorant, as observed before, any further than that ignorance is voluntary, or owing to some evil bias. That we are sure is the case with wicked men, with respect to their not understanding the gospel. "Why do ye not understand my speech?" said our Lord to the Jews. The answer is, "Because ye cannot hear my word." His word did not suit the temper of their hearts; therefore they could not understand it. Prejudice blinded their eyes. Here then lies the malady; and, if the remedy correspond with it, it must consist in being "renewed in the spirit," or temper, "of our minds;" and not merely in having the intellectual faculty enlightened.

* *Διὰ τὴν πύρωσιν τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν*, Through the callousness of their heart.

It may be said, we cannot love that of which we have no idea; and therefore light in the understanding is necessary to the exercise of love in the heart. Be it so; it is no otherwise necessary than as it is necessary that I should be a *man* in order to be a *good* man. There is no virtue or holiness in knowledge, further than as it arises from some virtuous propensity of the heart, any more than there is in our being possessed of human nature. This, therefore, cannot be the grand object communicated by the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

Should it be further objected, That those who plead for a new light in the understanding mean by it more than mere speculative knowledge—that they mean *spiritual* or *holy* light, such as transforms the heart and life; to this I should answer, If so, the light or knowledge of which they speak is something more than knowledge, literally and properly understood: it must include the temper of the heart, and therefore is very improperly distinguished from it.

To represent men as only wanting light is indeed acknowledging their weakness, but not their depravity. To say of a man who hates his fellow man, "He does not *know* him—if he *knew* him, he would love him;" is to acknowledge that the enmity towards the injured person is owing to mere mistake, and not to any contrariety of temper or conduct. The best of characters might thus be at variance, though it is a great pity they should, especially for any long continuance. If this be the case between God and man, the latter is not so depraved a creature as we have hitherto conceived him to be. The carnal mind is not *enmity* against God, but merely against an evil being, which in his ignorance he takes God to be. To this may be added, if sin originate in simple ignorance, (which is supposed, in that the removal of this ignorance is sufficient to render us holy,) then it is no more sin; nor is there any such thing as moral evil in the universe. So far as we can trace our actions to simple ignorance, or ignorance in which we are altogether involuntary; so far, as we have already seen, we may reckon ourselves ignorant, even in those cases wherein, had we not been ignorant, we should have been guilty. These are serious consequences; but such as at present appear to me to be just.

The above is submitted to the consideration of *Tardus*, and the reader, as the result of the maturest reflections of the writer.

FAITH NOT MERELY INTELLECTUAL.

THE candour and ingenuity of your correspondent induce me, though the subject seemed to be concluded, to offer a brief reply. And if I understand his FIRST QUESTION, it amounts to this, "Whether faith includes any thing *more* than an exercise of pure intellect or not, yet it will be allowed to include *something intellectual*; and is not that a duty? Surely faith in *all its parts* is the duty of every one."

I answer, The exercise of the intellectual faculty may be necessary to a holy exercise, and yet make no part of the holiness of it. We cannot perform any spiritual act without the powers of humanity; but it is not *as human* that they are spiritual or contain obedience to God. If, as the Scriptures teach, "*love* be the fulfilling of the law, and all the law be fulfilled in one word, love;" all the various acts, whether corporeal or mental, which are the subject of commandment, can be no other than the diversified expressions of love. So much of love as there is in them, so much

of obedience, and no more. Take away love from *fear*, whether of God or our parents, and you reduce it to a mere dread of displeasure as a natural evil, which has nothing holy in it, but may exist in all its force even in devils. Take away love from the exercise of *charity*, and it ceases to be obedience to God or benevolence to man.

Even those exercises which have their more immediate seat in the intellectual faculty, as knowing and judging, have just so much of holiness or unholiness, and are just so much of the nature of obedience or disobedience, as they contain in them of love or aversion. Knowledge is no further an exercise of duty, nor ignorance of sin, than as the means of Divine instruction are voluntarily used or neglected. The same may be said of judgment. If I decide, though it be in favour of truth, yet if it arise not from a candour of mind that is willing to receive it as the will of God, whatever be its bearings, there is no more *obedience* in it than in the just notions of the discreet scribe, Mark xii. 23. If, on the contrary, I judge erroneously, it is no further an exercise of *disobedience* than as I am warped by an evil bias of heart, which inclines me to reject or neglect the truth. Error which proceeds not from these causes is mere *mistake*, for which none is criminated either by God or man. If David had been a conspirator against Saul, lying in wait for his life, as the latter suggested, and Ahimelech had erred in treating him as he did, yet knowing nothing of all this, less or more, he ought to have been acquitted.

The same remarks apply to *faith* and *unbelief*. As to the latter, I suppose it will be allowed to be just so far a sin and no further than as it arises from aversion to the truth, which leads men to reject or neglect it. Yet it may be said of this, as well as of faith, "Does Mr. F. hold the dissent of the understanding to be *any part* of unbelief? If so, surely unbelief *in all its parts* is a sin." But unbelief is not a sin, considered simply as an exercise of the intellectual faculty; or rather that which is such is not the unbelief of the Scriptures, which is attributed to a corrupt state of the will, and from whence *alone* arises its sinfulness, 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8. And why should not the same be allowed of faith? If a mere dissent of the understanding be not the unbelief of the Scriptures, a mere assent of the understanding cannot be the faith of the Scriptures. So far as any thing is an exercise of pure intellect, uninfluenced by the disposition of the soul, it is merely natural; and duty is no more predicable of it than of the sight of the eye, or any other natural exercise. Nothing is duty any further than as it is voluntary, or arises from the moral state of the mind. No duty therefore can be performed by a depraved creature, but in consequence of regenerating grace.

This is a truth so clearly taught in the Scriptures that I wonder your correspondent should call it in question. Does he not know that "the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be;" and that therefore "they that are in the flesh cannot please God?" If this passage, as well as many others, do not teach us that no *obedience* is or can be yielded while the sinner is "in the flesh,"—that is, in a state of unregeneracy,—what does it teach? But if this be allowed, and faith admitted, as it is, to be an act of obedience to God, it must of necessity be preceded by regeneration; otherwise they that are in the flesh may please God.

If I have not strangely mistaken your correspondent, he admits of as much as this in his last paper. He admits the necessity of candour of heart, or of the mind being purged from prejudices by Divine influence, *in order to believing*; and very properly places the *duty* of men in such an unprejudiced attention to Divine truth. "The gospel," says he, "proves

its author as the sun its Creator ; and we need only to attend, and to have the mind purged from prejudices, that we may possess complete conviction concerning both. This is the indispensable duty of all, though no man will perform it but through Divine influence." Again, "Though the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, but accounts them folly ; yet a person under the influence of the Spirit of God, delivered from the blinding prejudices common to men, and attentive to the Divine testimony, judges it to be true."

If these be really the fixed principles of your correspondent, and not merely a slip of the pen, we are agreed ; and there needs no further discussion on the subject.

As to the SECOND QUESTION, I do not know of any thing worth disputing between us. Whether *believing Christ*, and believing *in* or *on* Christ, convey precisely the same idea or not, we are agreed that both are characteristic of real Christianity, and have the promise of salvation.

Whether I be able to maintain what I suggested, that the former of these phrases ordinarily respects Christ as *a witness of the truth*, and the latter as being himself *the sum and substance of truth*, or not, I am not aware of any doctrine of the gospel, or any sentiment which either of us embraces, being affected by it. From a brief review of the passages referred to, I have but very little doubt of the phrase, believing *in* or *on* Christ, being ordinarily expressive of believing him to be the Messiah, and *the only way of salvation*, that is, the sum and substance of truth, rather than *a witness of the truth*. It is true, he sustained both these characters ; and accepting or rejecting him in either involved a reception or rejection of him in both. But I wish to examine this matter more closely than I have hitherto been able to do, for want of leisure ; not because I apprehend any consequence to hang upon it, but merely to come at the true meaning of Scripture language.

FAITH REQUIRED BY THE MORAL LAW.

"In what sense is faith reckoned (Matt. xxiii. 23) by our Saviour amongst the weightier matters of the law ?"

I HAVE no doubt but that a belief of the gospel of Christ, even such a one as is connected with salvation, is required by the moral law, and is one of its most weighty matters ; for the moral law requires love to God with all the heart : and love to God would certainly lead us to embrace any revelation which he should make of himself ; such a revelation especially in which the glory of God is provided for in the highest degree. But the term *faith*, in Matt. xxii. 23, I consider as synonymous with *fidelity* or *veracity*, being ranked with *judgment* and *mercy*, which are duties of the second table.

CHRISTIAN LOVE.

"As all mankind are *alike* sinners in the eyes of God, exposed to his anger, under his control, and within the power of his grace, are they not *alike* entitled to our compassion and regard? And as all the saints are alike chosen of God, redeemed by Christ, sanctified by the Spirit, &c., are they not *alike* entitled to our affection and esteem? Seeing also that much has been said and done to diffuse the gospel, and promote a spirit of brotherly love among real Christians of all denominations, is it not inconsistent with this general design that the various friends of missionary societies among Episcopalians, Independents, Baptists, &c., should appear to be so intent on promoting the particular interests of their respective societies as not to feel an *equal* concern for the rest? One is fervently praying for the missionaries in the east, and makes their labours the topic of his conversation, while those in the south are nearly overlooked, or lightly regarded; and *vice versa*. But why not bestow a like degree of love and zeal upon the common cause?"

THE above statement overlooks an important truth; namely, that though all sinners are alike under God's eye, control, and anger, and within the power of his grace, yet they are not alike *within our knowledge, care, and charge*. And although all saints are alike entitled to our esteem, as chosen of God, as redeemed by Christ, as sanctified by the Spirit, &c., yet they are not all *known alike to us, nor alike under our immediate watch and care*. The wall of Jerusalem, considered as a whole, was an object that interested every godly Jew who had a mind to work, yet every man *repaired next unto his own house*, and consequently was more assiduous to raise that part of it than any other. If any one, indeed, has been so intent upon his piece of the wall as to be regardless of the rest, and careless about the work as a whole, it had been criminal; but, while these were properly regarded, he might be allowed to be particularly attentive to his own special work, to which he was appointed. It is wisely ordered that it should be so; for if the mind were taken up entirely in generals, by aiming at every thing, we should accomplish nothing. The Turks and Chinese are alike sinners, and stand in need of mercy as well as the people to whom a minister preaches; but he is not equally obliged to pray for, and seek to promote, their salvation as he is that of the people "over whom the Holy Spirit hath made him an overseer." The children of heathen families are alike objects of God's knowledge, anger, &c., as those of our own; but they are not alike known to us, nor equally objects of our paternal care.

It is very possible that Episcopalians, Independents, Baptists, &c. may be each too much concerned about their own party, and too inattentive to the prosperity of others, even in those respects wherein they consider them as conforming to the mind of Christ; but perhaps the whole of this ought not to be attributed to a sinful partiality. Let one society speak of the mission to Africa and the East; another inform us of what God is doing by a Vanderkemp and a Kitcherer; and another of what he is accomplishing by Carey and his companions, &c. In all this they only "build against their own houses," and report progress to their brethren for the stimulating of the whole. Only let them bear good-will one to another, and rejoice in all the goodness vouchsafed to either of them; and the wall will rise, and in due time the work of one will meet that of another, so as to form a whole.

CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

[From the Biblical Magazine.]

THE question proposed in the first number of your Magazine, p. 13, is, I confess, attended with some "difficulty;" and, without pretending to "pronounce a decisive sentence" upon it, I beg leave to offer a few remarks tending to prosecute the inquiry.

Your correspondent, Minimus, "understands by *Christian charity* the second great command, as confirmed and illustrated by our Lord Jesus Christ." That he did by his doctrine and conduct illustrate "the second great command," and display all the virtues of "Christian charity," is undoubtedly true; but it may admit of a doubt whether these be exactly of the same import; because—(1.) There seems to be a difference between the *nature* of Christian charity and that love which is required in the second commandment. The latter is love to our *neighbour*; the former is love to a *Christian*: the latter is love for *his own sake*; the former is love for *Christ's sake*: the latter is pure *benevolence*; the former includes *complacency*. The Scriptures denominate Christian charity to be a *brotherly love*, or a love to Christians as brethren: "Be ye kindly affectioned one to another, with *brotherly love*, in honour preferring one another."—"Let *brotherly love* continue," Rom. xii. 10; Heb. xiii. 1. According to this, the object of Christian love must be one who is esteemed a Christian brother; but the object of the second great command extends to all mankind, irrespective of their moral qualities. (2.) Christian love is by our Lord called "A new commandment." Speaking to his disciples, he says, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another," John xiii. 34. Some, indeed, have supposed that it is so called on account of its being revived by our Lord, after having been neglected by the Jews, and discountenanced by their teachers: others have thought that it is so called by way of excellence; but the peculiar phraseology of the passage is not satisfactorily accounted for by either of these suppositions. It rather seems that Christian charity, or love, is called "a new commandment" because of its being a love to Christians *as such*, which, though virtually contained in the second great command, yet was not specifically required by it. The church of God was now no longer to be national, but should be formed of Christians individually, amongst whom there should be no other bond of union than that of pure Christianity. Hence it is that this "*new commandment*" is suited to a new dispensation.

If the distinction here attempted be at all just, then "the *duties* of Christian charity" do not so properly relate to our dispositions and conduct toward our "fellow men" as toward our *fellow Christians*; and, with respect to the latter, it appears to me that these duties are equally concerned in "the judgment we form of their actions and characters" as in "our disposition and conduct toward them."

With respect to the question, "Whether charity ought to have any influence on our judgment, or be equally free from a favourable as from an unfavourable bias," I would answer, No further than to induce us to put a good construction upon every thing that will admit of it. If an action will bear a favourable or an unfavourable construction, uncharitableness will induce the judgment to suspect the worst—charity to hope the best. It "hopeth all things, believeth all things."

CHARACTER NOT DETERMINED BY INDIVIDUAL ACTS.

"Was not David a regenerate man when he slew Uriah by the sword of the children of Ammon; and, if so, how can we reconcile his conduct with the apostle's assertion—that 'no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him,' 1 John iii. 25?"

THE difficulty here suggested would vanish, if it were considered that, while the *quality of actions* is determined by their relation to the Divine law, the estimate we form of *character* must be regulated by the *habitual course* of the life and conduct. If we were to form our opinion of men from particular events in their lives, we should pronounce Noah a drunkard, Aaron an idolater, Jacob a liar, David a murderer, and Peter an apostate; and each of these characters is excluded from the kingdom of God. But such a judgment would evidently be harsh and erroneous, because these things were not of a piece with their general character, but most entirely opposed thereto. The apostle, in the words referred to, is describing those who "*go in the way of Cain*," and whose character and spirit resemble his. Such a man, he affirms, "hath not eternal life abiding in him."

But in this sense David was not a murderer. His sin, in the matter of Uriah, was not the result of those principles on which his character was formed, but a melancholy proof of the force of temptation, even in the case of an eminently good man.

SATAN'S TEMPTATIONS.

"1. Ought we to ascribe any part of our conduct which is not absolutely sinful to the agency of Satan? There appears to have been nothing 'absolutely sinful' in the conduct of the Corinthians towards the incestuous.

"2. How are we to know, in all cases, whether our actions be produced by the force of Satan's temptations, operating on the depravity of our will and affections, or whether those actions be the effects of our depravity merely, without Satanic influence?"

I FREELY confess that I am unable to speak to the second question in *any case*. Neither do I know what to ascribe to the Holy Spirit, or to holy angels, as being *conscious* of the influence of either. It is only the effect produced of which I am conscious. I am taught in the Scriptures to ascribe whatever is good to the Holy Spirit. I am also taught in the Scriptures, especially in the prophecies of Daniel, that holy angels have great influence on the minds even of princes, and consequently on the great events of the world. But no one, I suppose, is *conscious* of any thing of the kind. We all know that the minds of men are influenced by thousands of causes without themselves. Man is a leaf shaken by every wind; the least accident may so affect him as to give a turn to the most important concerns of his life. We also know that no influence from without us destroys our agency or accountableness. If we were to take away a man's life, in order to obtain his property, we should not think of excusing ourselves by alleging that we were *influenced to do so* by some person having told us that he was very rich.

I apprehend we are not so much to consider Satan as working immediately as mediately. He is "the god of this world;" the riches, pleasures, and honours of it, together with the examples of the wicked, are the means by which he ordinarily works upon the souls of men. The bird need not fear the fowler, if it avoid the snare; nor the fish the fisherman, if it do but shun the bait.

Respecting the *occasion* of the question, I beg leave to say that the extraordinary exertions of the late excellent minister referred to have, in my judgment, been noticed by some persons with undue severity. Had they properly attended to the account which Mr. PEARCE himself has given of this matter, every unfavourable idea would have vanished; and pity, blended with love and admiration, would have superseded every complaint. In the *Memoirs* of this dear man, p. 197, when writing to an intimate friend, he thus expresses himself:—"Should my life be spared, I and my family, and all my connexions, will stand indebted, under God, to you. Unsuspecting of danger myself, I believe I should have gone on with my exertions till the grave had received me. Your attention sent the apothecary to me, and then first I learned, what I have since been increasingly convinced of—that I was rapidly destroying the vital principle. And the kind interest you have taken in my welfare ever since has often drawn the grateful tear from my eye. May the God of heaven and earth reward your kindness to his unworthy servant, and save you from all the evils from which your distinguished friendship would have saved me."—To another of his friends he also declared, very seriously, that, "if ever he incurred guilt of this kind, it was through error of judgment respecting the strength of his constitution, and that he adopted a system of precaution as soon as he apprehended danger."

It has also been insinuated by some that his persuasion that he ought to be a missionary must have been a delusion, as appeared from the result; for he did not go. But if this be just reasoning, it was delusion also in Mr. Grant; for he was taken away almost immediately after his arrival at the scene of action. The desire likewise of David to build a house for God must have been altogether delusion; though we are assured it was taken well of Him by whom actions are weighed. The truth is, there are but few men who are proper judges of such a character. We are most of us at so great a distance from his spirit as to be in danger of thinking such extraordinary zeal to be a species of extravagance.

THE OBEDIENCE AND SUFFERING OF CHRIST.

"1. Did not the law of God require of Christ, considered as a man, a perfect obedience on his own account? If it did, how can that obedience be imputed to sinners for their justification?"

"2. How does it appear to be necessary that Christ should both obey the law in his people's stead, and yet suffer punishment on the account of their transgressions; seeing obedience is all the law requires?"

To the *former* I should answer, The objection proceeds upon the supposition that a public head, or representative, whose obedience should be imputable to others, must possess it in a degree over and above what is required of him. But was it thus with the first public head of mankind? Had Adam kept the covenant of his God, his righteousness, it is supposed, would have been imputed to his posterity, in the same sense as the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers; that is, God, to express his approbation of his conduct, would have rewarded it, by confirming him and his posterity in the enjoyment of everlasting life; yet he would have wrought no work of supererogation, nor have done any more than he was required to do on his own account.

But though, for argument's sake, I have allowed that the human nature of Christ was under obligation to keep the law on his account; yet I question the propriety of that mode of stating things. In the person of Christ the Divinity and humanity were so intimately united, that perhaps we ought

not to conceive of the latter as having any such distinct subsistence as to be an agent by itself, or as being obliged to obey or do any thing of itself, or on its own account; Christ, as man, possessed no being *on his own account*. He was always in union with the Son of God; a public person, whose very existence was for the sake of others. Hence his coming under the law is represented, not only as a part of his humiliation, to which he was naturally unobliged, but as a thing *distinct from his assuming human nature*; which one should think it could not be, if it were necessarily included in it. He was "made of a woman, made under the law;"—"made in the likeness of men, he took upon him the form of a servant;"*—"being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death."

As to the *second* question, Obedience is not all that the law requires of a *guilty* creature (and in the place of such creatures our Saviour stood): a guilty creature is not only obliged to be obedient for the future, but to make satisfaction for the past. The covenant made with Adam had two branches: "Obey, and live; sin, and die." Now the obedience of Christ did honour to the preceptive part of the covenant, but not to the penal part of it. Mere obedience to the law would have made no atonement, would have afforded no expression of the Divine displeasure against sin; therefore, after a life spent in doing the will of God, he must lay down his life; nor was it "possible that this cup should pass from him."

As obedience would have been insufficient without suffering, so it appears that suffering would have been insufficient without obedience; the latter was *preparatory* to the former.† "Such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." And such a meetness could not have *appeared*, but by a life of obedience to God. As a Mediator between God and man, it was necessary that he should be, and appear to be, an enemy to sin, ere he should be admitted to plead for sinners. Such was our Redeemer to the last, and this it was that endeared him to the Father. "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Finally, the sufferings of Christ could go only to the removal of the curse; they could afford no title to eternal life, which being promised on condition of obedience, that condition must be fulfilled in order to insure the blessing. Hence it is by "the righteousness of one" that we partake of "justification of life."

The great ends originally designed by the promise and the threatening were to express God's love of righteousness and his abhorrence of unrighteousness; and these ends are answered by the obedience and sufferings of Christ, and that in a higher degree, owing to the dignity of his character, than if man had either kept the law or suffered the penalty for the breach of it. But if Christ had only obeyed the law, and had not suffered; or had only suffered, and not obeyed; one or other of these ends must, for aught we can perceive, have failed of being accomplished. But his *obedience unto death*, which includes both, gloriously answered every end of moral government, and opened a way by which God could honourably, not only pardon the sinner who should believe in Jesus, but bestow upon him eternal life. Pardon being granted with a view to Christ's atonement would evince the resolution of Jehovah to punish sin; and eternal life being bestowed as a reward to his obedience would equally evince him the friend of righteousness.

* See Doddridge's Translation of Phil. ii. 7.

† I use the terms *obedience* and *suffering*, the one to express Christ's conformity to the precept of the law, the other his sustaining the penalty of it; though, in strict propriety of speech, the obedience of Christ included suffering, and his suffering included obedience. He laid down his life in obedience to the Father.

JESUS GROWING IN WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE.

“How could Jesus grow in wisdom and knowledge, if he were the true God, and consequently infinite in both?”

If there be any difficulty in reconciling these ideas, it must be on the supposition that a union of the Divine and human natures in the person of Christ implies a *communication of properties*; i. e. that whatever property belongs to him as a Divine person it must, on his assuming human nature, belong to him as human. But I know of no such sentiment being held by any Trinitarian. It is always maintained, so far as I know, that as Christ was very God, he retained all the peculiar properties of Godhead; and as he was made very man, he assumed all the peculiar properties of manhood. The above supposition, so far from belonging to the doctrine of what is called the hypostatical union, is utterly inconsistent with it; for if the union of the human nature to the Divinity imply that it must become infinite in wisdom and knowledge, it also implies that it must become omnipresent and almighty. And it might be with equal propriety asked, How could Jesus grow in stature and strength, if he were infinite in power? as, How could he grow in wisdom and knowledge, if he were infinite in both? But this is equivalent to asking, How could he be “a child born,” and yet he be called “the mighty God?” that is, How could he be both God and man?

Further, If a union between the Divine and human natures of Christ imply a communication of properties, why should not that communication be mutual? There is just as much reason for concluding that all the imperfections of humanity should be imparted to the Divinity as that all the perfections of Divinity should be imparted to the humanity. But this would form a contradiction; as it would be supposing him to retain neither perfection nor imperfection, and so to be neither God nor man.

But if we admit the Scripture account of things, no such consequences will follow. *If that eternal Life that was with the Father was so manifested to us as to be capable of being heard, and seen with our eyes, and looked upon, and handled*; in other words, if he were a Divine person, always existing with the Father, and was manifested to us by the assumption of human nature, and if each nature, though mysteriously united, yet retain its peculiar properties; all is consistent. Things may then be attributed to Christ which belong to either his Divine or his human nature; he may be a child born, may grow up from infancy to age, increase in knowledge, in wisdom, and in stature; be subject to hunger, and thirst, and weariness, and pain; in a word, in all things “be made like unto his brethren;” and at the same time be, in another respect, “the mighty God,”—“upholding all things by the word of his power.”

“If thou be the Son of God,” said Satan, “command that these stones be made bread.” This was insinuating that it was inconsistent for so Divine a personage, who had the command of the whole creation, to be subject to want; but the answer of Jesus intimates that he was also the Son of man; and that, as such, it was fitting that he should feel his dependence upon God.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, after asserting the dignity of the great Author of Christianity, as not only superior to angels, but acknowledged by the Father as God, “whose throne was for ever and for ever,” obviates an objection that would arise from his deep humiliation; showing the necessity there was for his being made like unto his brethren, chap. i., ii.

Socinians may amuse themselves and their admirers by talking of the ab-

surdity of God being exposed to suffering, and of a man of Judea being the Creator of the world. They know well enough, if they had candour sufficient to own it, that it is not as God that we ascribe the former to him, nor as man the latter: yet, owing to the intimate union of Divinity and humanity in his person, there is an important sense in which it may be said that "the Prince," or author, "of life" was killed; that "God purchased his church with his own blood;" that "hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us;" that "our great High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God, was touched with the feelings of our infirmities;" and that he who was born in Bethlehem "was before all things, and by him all things consist."

READING THE SCRIPTURES.

I do not wish the following remarks to supersede any other answer which may enter more fully into the subject. All I have to offer will be a few hints from my own experience.

In the first place, I have found it good to appoint *set times* for reading the Scriptures; and none have been so profitable as part of the season appropriated to private devotion on rising in the morning. The mind at this time is reinvigorated and unencumbered. To read a part of the Scriptures, previous to prayer, I have found to be very useful. It tends to collect the thoughts, to spiritualize the affections, and to furnish us with sentiments wherewith to plead at a throne of grace. And as reading assists prayer, so prayer assists reading. At these seasons we shall be less in danger of falling into idle speculations, and of perverting Scripture in support of hypotheses. A spiritual frame of mind, as Mr. Pearce somewhere observes, is as a good light in viewing a painting; it will not a little facilitate the understanding of the Scriptures. I do not mean to depreciate the labours of those who have commented on the sacred writings; but we may read expositors, and consult critics, while the "spirit and life" of the word utterly escape us. A tender, humble, holy frame is perhaps of more importance to our entering into the mind of the Holy Spirit than all other means united. It is thus that, by "an unction from the Holy One, we know all things."

In reading by myself, I have also felt the advantage of being able to pause, and think, as well as pray; and to inquire how far the subject is any way applicable to my case, and conduct in life.

In the course of a morning's exercise it may be supposed that some things will appear hard to be understood; and I may feel myself, after all my application, unable to resolve them. Here, then, let me avail myself of commentators and expositors. If I read them *instead* of reading the Scriptures, I may indeed derive some knowledge; but my mind will not be stored with the best riches; nor will the word "dwell richly in me in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." If, on the other hand, I read the Scriptures, and exercise my own mind on their meaning, only using the helps with which I am furnished when I particularly need them, such knowledge will avail me more than any other; for, having felt and laboured at the difficulty myself, what I obtain from others towards the solution of it becomes more interesting and abiding than if I had read it without any such previous efforts. And as to my own thoughts, though they may not be superior nor equal to those of others, in themselves considered, yet, if they be just, their having been the result of pleasing toil renders them of superior value to me. A small portion obtained by our own labour is sweeter than a large inheritance

bequeathed by our predecessors. Knowledge thus obtained will not only be always accumulating, but of special use in times of trial; not like the cumbersome armour which does not fit us, but like the sling and the stone, which, though less brilliant, will be more efficacious.

I may add, it were well for those who can find leisure to *commit to writing* the most interesting thoughts which occur at these seasons. It is thus that they will be fixed in the memory; and the revision of them may serve to rekindle some of the best sensations in our life.

DIFFERENCE IN THE FRAME OF MIND WHEN ENGAGED IN SOCIAL AND SECRET PRAYER.

I TAKE it for granted that Stephanus means to say that *at the same time* when it was common for him to find great liberty and zeal in public prayer, it was usual for him to be lifeless, barren, and uncomfortable in private; otherwise there would be no difficulty in the case. That such a state of mind should excite a jealousy of himself is not surprising. Stephanus inquires after its *cause* and *cure*.

As to the former, permit me to ask, Are you not more influenced by the presence of creatures than by His presence who fills heaven and earth? Is there not a spice of vanity that prompts you to wish to appear to advantage when in company with your fellow men; an emulation that stimulates invention, and which by a kind of intellectual friction, like that of the wheels of a machine, warms your faculties, and works up your powers to an earnestness that is in danger of being mistaken for religious zeal? Such has not unfrequently been the case among professors of religion.

Let me further ask, Have you not indulged in some besetting sin, to which God and your conscience only have been witness? Private prayer is the season for such things to come to remembrance, rather than in the exercise of more public duties. Hence it may be that your face shall be covered with shame, and your soul be struck as by the darts of death, when in private; while in your more public exercises, not considering yourself as called upon to confess private sins, you may think but little about them. Let me suppose Stephanus to be a young man, and to have offended his father. Should he be admitted into public company with his father, he will not feel so great a difficulty in addressing him there, as if he was introduced into a private apartment, and was obliged to converse with him alone. In the former case, his private feelings, as being unknown to the company, will not be noticed; in the latter, the conversation can turn upon nothing else. I do not presume to determine that this is the case with Stephanus; but this I say, such causes are adequate to such effects, and it becomes Stephanus to inquire if they have no influence in his case.

As to the *cure*, that is certainly a very important step which he proposes—declining to engage in public prayer. Let him rather betake himself to private prayer, attended with close examination and humiliation before God: this will render public prayer more easy. If Stephanus had offended his father, as supposed above, and if, after a little free conversation with him in public company, he should feel dejected and sullen, and should be ready to resolve that he would never enter a company again with his father, because, though he could speak freely to him there, yet he was always reserved when alone, would this be lovely? Let him rather reflect, and ask, Is there not a cause? Let him resolve on this wise, I will arise and go to my Father in

secret, and will say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Let him give no rest to his eyes, nor slumber to his eyelids, till all is reconciled; otherwise, whether he pray in public or desist, his soul will be exposed to the most imminent danger.

NATURE OF INDWELLING SIN.

"Is the love of sin eradicated from the regenerate? Though it lives in them, is it not their sorrow and detestation?"

If the question had been whether the love of sin be the governing, prevailing, and habitual principle in the regenerate, there could be no doubt of its being answerable in the negative. Holiness is represented as the law of the believer's mind. It is the governing and habitual principle of his soul, and that which gives it its leading bias. It is that which rules in the ruling power of the soul—"the mind;" which is equal to saying that it reigns. If a rightful prince, after being driven from his throne by a rebellion, should so far recover it as to rule in the proper place of rule, and compel his enemies to quit the reins of government, and seek refuge in their private haunts, he is truly said to reign. Thus the grace of God becoming "the law of the mind," and the power of carnality being driven, as it were, to take its main residence in "the members," working not by open daylight, but by deeds of darkness, the former, and not the latter, is truly said to have the dominion over us. And as every being is denominated by his governing disposition, so holiness is that from which believers are denominated in the Scriptures; it is that which gives them their *character*.

There is a sense in which good men, as well as others, are *sinner*s, as every good man will acknowledge; but when the Scriptures describe them, it is not as sinners, but as *saint*s. The character of *sinner*s distinguishes the unregenerate. Though, strictly speaking, "there is no man that doeth good, and sinneth not," yet believers are described as not doing evil, but good. "He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil is of the wicked one."—"He that is born of God sinneth not."—"He that loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him." All these modes of speaking are descriptive not of what is universal, but of what is general and habitual. Sin is the constant course of the wicked, but righteousness of the righteous.

But to say that the love of sin is *eradicated* from the regenerate, is saying that sin has no place in their affections, and that their affections are never entangled by its influences; and wherein this differs from saying that they are sinless I do not understand. If sin has no place in the affections, it has no place in the soul; for the affections are the proper seat of good and evil. As the whole of duty is summed up in love, so the whole of sin may be summed up in the contrary.

Moreover, if sin has no place in our affections, it has none in our *choice*; for choice is an affection of the mind, by which it prefers one thing to another, or likes this rather than that. When the acts of the will are distinguished from those of the affections, it is rather a distinction of degree than of nature. But if all evil choice were eradicated, all sin would be eradicated. Whatever there was, it must absolutely be involuntary; and that which is such is not sin. It is impossible for the mind to feel any conscious

guilt on account of it, any more than for the contortions of a convulsed state of the body.

Dr. Owen, in his admirable treatise on "the Nature of Indwelling Sin," has proved, I think, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the essence of all sin lies in aversion of heart, and that this aversion is "universal, to all of God, and in all of the soul." Nor need we have recourse to the judgment of Dr. Owen: experience will teach every reflecting mind that he sins not, but as his will and affections are drawn away from God after things which are forbidden.

I have observed this opinion to be maintained on very different grounds. Some worthy characters, observing the loose conduct of certain professors, and their attempts to excuse themselves by pleading that believers are not free from the love of sin, and therefore they ought not to be criminated or suspected on that account, may have been tempted to maintain the contrary, as necessary to the honour of God and religion. But God does not require us to defend his cause by stretching any doctrine beyond what it will bear. Such characters ought rather to be told that every plea for self-indulgence taken from the sins of God's people indicates a *prevailing* love of sin, which is inconsistent with true religion.

In other instances, the same thing is maintained by loose characters themselves, who, while they are living in sin, contrive to transfer the *love* of it from themselves to the "old man" that is within them. Paul, speaking of himself as a renewed man, represents the working of evil in him as contrary to the *habitual* bias of his soul; as repugnant to the *governing* principle of his mind; and, therefore, as being not *himself*, but sin that *dwelt in him*. Paul, however, was not a loose character; nor did he speak in this manner from a desire to excuse himself in sin. That which he said of himself in an improper or figurative sense, such people understand literally, and infer that sin in them is absolutely involuntary. The opposite principles of good and evil, denominated "the old and new man," they consider as distinct *agents*, or as voluntary beings, who carry on a contest, of which the man himself is only an involuntary spectator. But as in all the exercises of grace it is *we* that repent, believe, love, &c.; so in all the exercises of evil it is *we* that sin, and that must be accountable.

The querist asks, "Whether sin, though it dwells in the regenerate, be not to their sorrow and detestation." Undoubtedly it is; and herein the experience of Paul is opposed to theirs who make use of his language to excuse themselves in sin. The body of sin was to him "a body of death," which rendered him "wretched," and from which he longed more than any thing to be "delivered." But a detestation of sin, unless it were perfect in degree, does not imply the *eradication* of love to it. The same soul, as influenced by opposite principles, may be the subject of both hatred and love. In proportion however as one operates, the other must necessarily subside.

PRESERVATION AGAINST BACKSLIDING.

"What are the best means of preservation against backsliding?"

It is usual with us to confine the idea of a backslider to a good man. I apprehend the Scriptures do not use the term always in this sense. Backsliding always supposes a religious profession; but does not necessarily imply that this profession is sincere. The ungodly Israelites, who had not *the fear*

of God in them, are termed backsliders in Jer. ii. 19. Saul and Judas would be accounted backsliders, in the Scriptural sense of the term, as well as David and Peter. The backslidings of the latter were partial, and of the former total.

But I shall suppose the querist to be a good man, and that he feels a proneness to depart from the living God; perhaps some particular temptation may entangle him, or easy-besetting sin perplex him: he may have had several narrow escapes from open scandal, and may be apprehensive that in some unguarded moment he may be drawn into that which may ruin his future peace and usefulness.

Were I a stranger to such exercises, I should be but ill qualified to write upon the subject. The case of backsliders has lately been much impressed upon my mind. Great numbers I am persuaded among professing Christians come under this denomination. At present I shall only offer three or four directions to the consideration of the querist, or any other whose case they may suit.

Every means should be used that may stop the avenues of temptation, or prevent its coming in contact with the evil propensities of the heart.—If there be nitre in our habitations, it becomes us to beware of fire. Such was the counsel of our Lord to his disciples in a season of peculiar danger; “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” He had himself entered that field, and came out a conqueror; but he knew what was in man, and counselled them rather to avoid than court the contest. In cases where the heart begins to be seduced by temptation, it will soon become restless, solicitous, and importunate; it will moan after it, and be exceedingly fruitful in devices to get into the way of it; it will persuade conscience, for once, at least, to be silent; it will blind the mind to the evil, and paint the desirableness of the good; and, if all this will not do, it will promise to be only a looker-on, or that thus far it will go, and no further.—But if thou hast any regard to God or his cause, or to the welfare of thine own soul, *consent thou not!* Temptation leads to sin, and sin to death. Whatever company, amusement, occupation, or connexion has frequently *caused thee to offend*, that is the *eye* that requires to be plucked out, lest thy soul bleed in the end beneath the stroke of God’s displeasure.

2. Beware of the *first stages* of departure from God. All backslidings begin with the heart, Jer. ii. 19. From hence are the *issues of life*. Private prayer, it may be, at first becomes wearisome; no communion with God in it: it is then occasionally neglected: hence public ordinances cease to afford their wonted pleasure; Christian society is dropped; the world takes up your attention, and you have little or no time to spare for religion; some carnal acquaintance, perceiving you to be coming, draws you on; recommends you to read some one of the liberal productions of the times, by which you are to learn that there is no need to be so rigid in religion, and no harm in frequenting the theatre, or in devoting a part at least of the Lord’s day to visiting or amusement. These are a few of the seeds of death, from whence have sprung many a bitter harvest.

“Beware of sin, then, crush it at the door
If once ’tis in, it may go out no more!”

BUNYAN.

3. If thou hast in any degree been drawn aside, give no rest to thy soul till thy sin is crucified, and thy conscience reconciled by the blood of the cross. It is too common for sin to be worn away from the memory by time and new occurrences, instead of being washed away at the gospel fountain; but where this is the case, the stain is not removed, and its effects will sooner

or later appear, perhaps in a form that may cause the ears of every one that heareth it to tingle. "He that honoureth me," saith the Lord, "will I honour; and he that despiseth me shall be lightly esteemed." If we care so little for the honour of God's name as to be unconcerned for secret faults, we may expect he will care as little for the honour of ours, and will give us up to some open vice that shall cover us with infamy.

4. If some extraordinary temptation or easy-besetting sin perplex thee, bend not thy attention so much to the subduing of that particular evil, as to the mortification of sin in general; and this not so much by directly opposing it as by cherishing opposite principles.—We may heal an eruption in a particular part of the body, and yet the root of the disease may remain, and even be gathering strength. We may also be employed in thinking of our sins without gaining any ascendancy over them; on the contrary, they may by those very means obtain an ascendancy over us. If we go about to quench a fire by directly contending with it, we shall presently be consumed by its flames; but, by applying the opposite element, it is subdued before us. It is thus that the Scriptures direct us: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." The heart cannot be reduced to a vacuum; if spiritual things do not occupy it, carnal things will. It is by walking with God and conversing with the doctrine of the cross that we shall become dead to other things; and this will go to the root of the evil, while other remedies only lop off the branches.

MINISTERIAL CALL AND QUALIFICATIONS.

"How may a man ascertain his election of God to the ministry of the gospel? And what are sufficient qualifications for that important office?"

I CONCEIVE an answer to the latter part of the question will enable a person to decide upon the former; it being a principle which may be taken for granted, that whoever possesses the essential qualifications for the Christian ministry is called of God to exercise them. "Every man that hath received the gift" is commanded of God "to minister the same as a good steward of the manifold grace of God." Only let him take heed that "if he speak, it be according to the oracles of God."

Now the Scriptures are not silent on the qualifications of a bishop: see 1 Tim. iii. 1-7. By a bishop I must be allowed to understand, not a lord in lawn, but a Christian pastor. And besides those requisites which belong to his moral and religious character, there are two things which appear to be absolutely necessary to the discharge of this sacred office; one is, that he have a true *desire after it*, and the other, *an ability for it*. The former of these qualifications is included in the terms, "if a man *desire* the office of a bishop." It is supposed that this desire shall spring from a pure motive, and not from the love of ease, affluence, or applause; but from a concern to glorify God and promote the salvation of men. It is necessary, in my judgment, that there should be a *special desire* of this sort; a kind of fire kindled in the bosom, that it would be painful to extinguish. The latter qualification is contained in those expressive terms, "*apt to teach*." He must possess not only an inventive mind, but a kind of natural readiness in communicating his ideas.

Neither of these qualifications is sufficient in itself. A man may have a desire after the Christian ministry, and that desire may arise from the purest motives; and yet, having no competent ability for the work, he is certainly

not called of God to be employed in it. I doubt not but the Lord will take it well that it was in the heart of such persons to build him a house, though their desire may never be accomplished. On the other hand a person may not only be a good man and judicious, but possess a readiness in communicating his ideas; and yet, having no special *thirst* after the work of the ministry, or of thus promoting the salvation of souls, he is unfit to engage in it.

Of the former qualification, every man must be his own judge; for who else can be acquainted with his desires and motives? Of the latter, those with whom we stand connected. Whether we be "apt to teach" is a question on which we ought not to decide ourselves: those are the best judges who have heard us, and been taught by us. When a congregation of Christians invite a person to serve them in the gospel, it is sufficient proof that they consider him as equal to the undertaking. If a person so invited be but clear as to the former qualification, I conceive he may leave the latter to the judgment of others; and conclude that, so long as a door is opened for him to preach the gospel, he is called of God to do so.

FUGITIVE PIECES.

THE NECESSITY OF SEEKING THOSE THINGS FIRST WHICH ARE OF THE FIRST IMPORTANCE.

A GREAT part of the evil which prevails in the world consists in an entire neglect of what God commands, or in doing what he has expressly forbidden; but not the whole of it. There may be an attachment to many things which in themselves are right, and yet the whole may be rendered worse than void by the want of *order*, or a regard to things according to their importance. Our Lord did not censure the Pharisees for attending to the lesser matters of the law, but for attending to them "to the neglect of the greater." If we pursue things as primary which ought to occupy only a secondary or subordinate place in the system, we subvert the whole, and employ ourselves in doing what is worse than nothing.

I think I see the operation of this principle among us, and that to a wide extent. I see it among the unconverted, among the converted, and among different parties or denominations of Christians.

First, It is by this that great numbers who lay their accounts with obtaining the kingdom of heaven will be found to have deceived themselves. It may be too much to say of them that they do not seek the kingdom of God; but they seek it not as a *first* or primary object. The world is their chief good, and the kingdom of God only occupies a secondary place in their affections. They wish to attend to their everlasting concerns, but they cannot spare time. Now we can commonly spare time for that which we love best. The sensualist can find time for his pleasures, and the man of the world for getting money. They can think of these things when sitting in the house, or walking in the way; and every thing else is made to bend, or give way to them. The result is, this preposterous conduct mars the whole; for God and religion must be supreme, or nothing. There are certain relations, even among us, in which it is impossible to be contented with a secondary place. If a wife give her heart to another than her husband, and aim only to oblige him so far as to keep him in tolerably good humour, it is what cannot be endured: he must be first, or nothing; and such is the claim of heaven.

Secondly, It is owing to this, among other causes, that many Christians go from year to year in doubt, with respect to their interest in Christ and spiritual blessings.—It is very desirable to have clear and satisfactory views on this subject. To live in suspense on a matter of such importance must, if we be not sunk in insensibility, be miserable. How is it that so much of this prevails among us; when, if we look into the New Testament, we shall scarcely see an instance of it among the primitive Christians? Shall we cast off all such characters as unbelievers? Some have done so, alleging that it is impossible for a person to be a believer without being conscious of it. Surely this is too much; for if the grace of God within us, whatever be its degree, must needs be self-evident to us, why are we directed to keep his

commandments as the means of "knowing that we know him?" The primitive Christians, however, had but little of this fear; and the reason of it was, they had more of that *perfect love* to Christ, to the gospel, and to the success of it, than we have, which tended to "cast out fear." If we make our personal comfort the *first* object of our pursuit, (and many attend the means of grace as if they did,) God will make it the *last* of his; for it is a general principle in the Divine administration, "Him that honoureth me I will honour; but he that despiseth me shall be lightly esteemed." If we seek the honour of God, we shall find our own peace and comfort in it; but if we make light of him he will make light of us, and leave us to pass our days in darkness and suspense.

Thirdly, It is owing, if I mistake not, to the same cause that various denominations of Christians, who at some period have been greatly blessed of God, have declined as to their spiritual prosperity. Several of our religious denominations have arisen from a conscientious desire to restore Christianity to its primitive purity. From this motive acted, I believe, the greater part of the Reformers, the puritans, the nonconformists, and the Baptists. I do not know that any one of these denominations were censurable for the separations which they made from other professing Christians. It may be alleged that they have torn the church of Christ into parties, and so occasioned much evil; yet some of them did not separate from the church of Christ, but from a worldly community calling itself by that name; and those who did, pretended not to be the only people of God in the world, but considered themselves merely as "withdrawing from brethren who walked disorderly." It is a melancholy fact, however, that no sooner have a people formed themselves into a new denomination than they are in the utmost danger of concentrating almost all their strength, influence, zeal, prayers, and endeavours for its support; not as a part of Christ's visible kingdom, wishing all good to other parts in so far as they follow Christ, but as though it were the whole of it, and as though all true religion were circumscribed within its hallowed pale. This is the essence of a sectarian spirit, and the bane of Christianity.

I am a Dissenter, and a Baptist. If I confine my remarks to the faults of these denominations, it is not because I consider them as greater sinners in this way than all others, but because I wish more especially to correct the evils of my own connexions.

If we wish to promote the *dissenting* interest, it must not be by expending our principal zeal in endeavouring to make men Dissenters, but in making Dissenters and others Christians. The principles of dissent, however just and important, are not to be compared with the glorious gospel of the blessed God; and if inculcated at the expense of it, it is no better than tithing mint and cummin, to the omitting of the weightier matters of the law. Such endeavours will be blasted, and made to defeat their own end. Those Dissenters among whom the doctrines of the puritans and nonconformists have fallen into disrepute are generally distinguished by this species of zeal; and it is principally from such quarters that complaints are heard of "the decline of the dissenting interest." Where they are believed and taught, and their progress, whether among Dissenters or others, viewed with satisfaction, we hear of no such complaints. It is a curious fact that, while a certain description of Dissenters are inquiring into the causes of the decline of the dissenting interest, a certain description of the established clergy are inquiring into the causes of its increase!

If we wish to see the *Baptist* denomination prosper, we must not expend our zeal so much in endeavouring to make men Baptists, as in labouring to make Baptists and other Christians. If we lay out ourselves in the common cause of Christianity, the Lord will bless and increase us. By rejoicing in

the prosperity of every other denomination, in so far as they accord with the mind of Christ, we shall promote the best interests of our own. But if we be more concerned to make proselytes to a party than converts to Christ, we shall defeat our own end; and however just our sentiments may be with respect to the subjects and mode of baptism, we shall be found symbolizing with the Pharisees, who were employed in tithing mint and cummin, to the neglect of judgment, mercy, and the love of God.

PARTY SPIRIT.

THERE appears to be a mistaken idea, too commonly prevailing in the religious world at present, respecting what is called a *party spirit*.

Many professors, while they endeavour to promote the interests of religion in *general*, too often neglect to pay that attention which is due to the interest and welfare of that class or denomination of Christians in *particular* with which they are or have been connected. It is not uncommon to see one of these "*candid*" Christian professors keep at a distance from his own denomination, or party, where that denomination stands most in need of his countenance and support; while he associates with another party, which is sanctioned by numbers and worldly influence. And when the inconsistency of his conduct is hinted at, he will excuse himself by saying, in the cant phrase of the day, That it is his wish to promote the interests of religion in *general*, and *not to serve a party*. I wish some of your correspondents would expose the conduct of such fawning professors in its true colours; and endeavour to convince them that in vain are all pretensions to Christian *candour* where *consistency* and *integrity* are wanting.

EVIL THINGS WHICH PASS UNDER SPECIOUS NAMES.

THERE is something in the nature of evil, which, if it appear in its own proper colours, will not admit of being defended or recommended to others; he, therefore, who is friendly to it is under the necessity of disguising it, by giving it some specious name, in order to render it current in society. On the other hand, there is something in the nature of good, which, if it appear in its own proper colours, cannot well be opposed: he therefore who wishes to run it down is obliged first to give it an ill name, or he could not accomplish his purpose. This species of imposition, it is true, is calculated only for superficial minds, who regard words rather than things; but the number of them is so great in the world, and even in the church, that it has in all ages been found to answer the end. In the times of the prophet Isaiah, there were those who "called evil good, and good evil, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter;" but as the woe of heaven was then denounced against the practice, it becomes us to beware of going into it, or being imposed on by it.

It is not the design of the writer to trace this abuse of language through any part of his history or politics, or any other worldly department; but merely to notice a few terms which are very current in our religious circles:—such as *moderation*, *liberality*, *charity*, &c., on the one hand; and *bigotry*, *narrowness of mind*, and *ill-nature*, on the other.

There is a spirit gone forth in the present age which is calculated to do more harm in the church of God than the most erroneous doctrine that has been advanced since the days of the apostles. It bears a favourable aspect towards those systems of divinity which depreciate the evil of sin, the freeness of grace, the dignity of Christ, and the glory of his righteousness as the only ground of acceptance with God; so much so that it is seldom known to oppose them. Or if, for the sake of preserving its reputation, it strikes an occasional blow at them, yet it is with so light a hand as never to hurt them. It takes no decided stand on this side or that, and thereby obtains admission among all parties. If the friends of Christ meet together, it wishes to meet with them, though it be only to oppose every measure which may bear hard upon its favourite designs, and would take it very unkind to be treated as an intruder. If his enemies be assembled, it will also be there; and, if no untrusty brother be in company, will commonly manifest itself to be then most in its element.

Now, let a spirit of this kind make its appearance in any other department than religion, and observe how it will be treated. In the year 1745, for instance, when the great question in the country was, Shall we support the reigning family, and the constitution; or shall we admit the pretender, with popery and arbitrary power in his train? what would have been thought of a man who should have pretended to be on neither this side nor that, but talking against war, and in favour of moderation, liberality, and charity towards the unhappy youth, (who by landing on our shores had greatly endangered his life,) made use of all his influence to oppose every decided measure tending to drive him from the country? "Sir," they would have said, "you are on the side of the pretender, and deserve to be taken up as a traitor." And had he complained of their bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and ill-nature, his remonstrance would have deserved no regard. But is the cause of *God* and *truth* of less importance than the temporal prosperity of a nation? Surely not!

If, indeed, our differences consist merely in words; or, though they should be things, yet if they do not affect the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, considering the imperfections which attach to the best of men, a spirit of moderation or forbearance is here in character. When we have frankly spoken our minds, we may with a good conscience leave it, and join with our brethren, notwithstanding, in the work of the Lord. But in differences which respect the principles above mentioned, compromise would be treason against the Majesty of heaven. There were cases in which an apostle allowed that "every one should be fully persuaded in his own mind;" but there were cases also in which "the doctrine of Christ" was given up; and if any man came as a minister without this, Christians were directed "not to receive him into their houses, nor to bid him God speed." Such conduct in the present times would raise a great outcry of bigotry, and illiberality; a plain proof this that what passes among us under the names of moderation and liberality is in a great degree antichristian.

What is *moderation*? The Scriptures recommend a yielding and gentle disposition in things wherein our own name or interest only are concerned.—Such is the moderation enforced by Paul; but when the *continuance of the truth of the gospel* was at issue, he refused "to give place even for an hour." The Scriptures also recommend forbearance in Christians one towards another; but this is far from that spirit of indifference which would confound truth and error, religion and irreligion, the friends of Christ and the men of the world.

What is *liberality*? The term denotes freedom, or enlargedness of mind. It is applied in the Scriptures merely to that simple, sincere, and bountiful spirit, which communicates freely to the needy, and stands opposed to a

sinister, close, contracted, and covetous disposition. The application of it to sentiments may be proper, when used to describe that enlargedness of mind which arises from an intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures, and an extensive knowledge of men and things. A rigid attachment to modes and opinions merely of human authority is often seen in persons who have read but little, and thought less. Had they seen more of the religious world, and heard more of what is to be said against the notions in which they happen to have been educated, their tenacity, we may commonly say, might be abated; in other words, they might be more liberally minded, and moderate in their censures against those who differ from them. But to attribute all attachment to principles, and even modes of worship, to illiberality of mind, is itself illiberal. If an attachment, whether it be to one or the other, be the effect of impartial research, and a firm persuasion that they are the mind of God as revealed in his word, it is so far from indicating a bigoted, contracted, or illiberal mind, that it may arise from the contrary. The more we understand of Divine truth, the more our minds will be enlarged, and the more decided will be our opposition to error. To call that liberality which holds all doctrines with a loose hand, and considers it as of no importance to salvation whether we believe this or that, is a gross perversion of language. Such a spirit arises not from enlargedness of mind, or from having read much, or thought much; but from *the vanity of wishing to have it thought that they have*. This vanity, when flattered by weak or interested men, induces the most ignorant characters to assume imperious airs, and to exercise a kind of contemptuous pity towards those who cannot treat the gospel with the same indifference as themselves. A minister who has wished for the liberty of playing fast and loose with Christian doctrines, without being disrespected by his congregation, has been known to compliment them as an enlightened people, and to praise them for thinking for themselves; while in fact they have neither thought, nor read, nor understood, unless it were a few political pamphlets, and the doctrine of getting money.

It seems to be a criterion of this species of liberality that we think well of characters, whatever be their principles, and entertain the most favourable opinion of their final state. The writer was some time since in a company where mention was made of one who believed in the final salvation of all men, and perhaps of all devils likewise. "He is a gentleman," said one, "*of liberal principles*." Such principles may, doubtless, be denominated liberal, that is, free and enlarged in one sense;—they are free from the restraints of Scripture, and enlarged as a net which contains a great multitude of fishes, good and bad; but whether this ought to recommend them is another question. What would be thought of one who should visit the felons of Newgate, and persuade them that such was the goodness of the government that not one of them, even though condemned, would be finally executed? If *they* could be induced to believe him, they would doubtless think him a very liberal-minded man; but it is likely the government, and every friend to the public good, would think him an enemy to his country, and to the very parties whom by his glozing doctrine he had deceived.

It is usual to call that man liberal who thinks or professes to think for himself, and is willing that every other person should do the same. This, if applied to civil society, is just. Christianity will persecute no man for his religious principles, but meekly instruct him, in hope that God peradventure may give him repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. But apply the principle to religious society, and it is inadmissible. If one member of a Christian church be not accountable to another for what he believes, an infidel, in demanding the Lord's supper from a Christian minister as a qualification for office, demands no more than the other may conscientiously

and scripturally comply with. In refusing to unite with an unbeliever, or a profligate, or one who in my judgment rejects what is essential to the gospel, I do not impose my faith upon him; but merely decline having fellowship with what I consider as a work of darkness.

The writer is acquainted with several dissenting churches at this time which for some years past have acted upon what they call *a liberal ground*: that is, they have admitted men of all sorts of principles into their communion: and if some who once professed to be friendly to the doctrine of salvation by grace, the Deity and atonement of Christ, acceptance with God through his righteousness, the necessity of the new birth, &c., become their avowed enemies, they take no notice of them; but leave them, as they say, to judge for themselves. The consequence, however, is, that many of these churches have, in a few years, become extinct; and those which remain have become mere worldly communities, going into many of the dissipations and follies which are practised by none but people who make no pretence to serious religion. I have generally observed that those who are thus liberal in regard to principles are seldom far behind as to their practices. Cards, balls, plays, &c., are with them innocent amusements. Such assuredly was not the liberality of Paul. He was, however, of an enlarged mind, and wished much for Christians to be *also enlarged*. But how? By opening their doors to worldly men, and holding fellowship with all sorts of characters? Not so; but by the direct contrary.—Read 2 Cor. vii. 11, to the end: “O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you; our heart is enlarged.—Ye are not straitened in us, but in your own bowels.—Be ye also enlarged.—Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” From hence it would seem that true enlargedness of mind is inconsistent with an indiscriminate communion with unbelievers or worldly characters. And this accords with universal experience. Those Christian societies who are careful to preclude or exclude the enemies of the gospel are in a good degree of one heart, and will feel themselves at liberty to engage in every good work in their social capacity. But those communities which are open to all will never be agreed in any thing which requires self-denial, diligence, or devotedness to Christ. One will make this objection to the measure, and another that; so that nothing will be effected. This is being yoked together with unbelievers; it is like yoking the sprightly horse with the tardy ass, which, instead of helping, only hinders him, and may in time so break his spirit as to render him nearly as tardy as the other. In vain do we separate from national establishments of religion to corrupt ourselves. Nonconformity to the ceremonies of the church is of no account, if it be attended with conformity to the world. If the seven Asiatic churches had been originally formed on these liberal principles, how came it to pass that they were censured for having those “among them” who held doctrines inconsistent with Christianity? On such principles, they might have excused themselves from blame, inasmuch as those individuals were only permitted to think and act for themselves.

SCRIPTURAL TREATMENT OF RICH AND POOR CHRISTIANS.

It is a glory pertaining to the Christian religion that it embraces in one community all ranks and degrees of men. It admits of civil distinctions, and honours every one to whom honour is due; but at the house of God all this is required to be laid aside. All are brethren, and no account is made of worldly superiority.

I have been led to these reflections by comparing the words of the apostle James (chap. i. 9, 10) with a passage which I have lately met with in an otherwise admired publication. "Let the brother of low degree," says the apostle, "rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away." We see here that joy is the common portion of all believers, whether rich or poor; and that the highest character which either can attain is that of a "brother." There is, however, some difference in the considerations which are presented for the purpose of inducing joy, according to their different situations in life. The poor brother is supposed to be most in danger of inordinate dejection; and therefore, as a proper antidote, he must rejoice in being "exalted." The rich, on the other hand, is most in danger of being lifted up with his situation; he must, therefore, rejoice in his being "made low." The adaptedness of the means to the end, in the former instance, is easily conceived; but there seems to be something a little paradoxical in the latter. Let us examine them.

The poor brother's part, by which he is taught to rejoice in adversity, is one in which every Christian heart will rejoice with him. A state of poverty, viewed by itself, is both chilling and cheerless. Nature revolts at it. A lowly habitation, a dry and scanty morsel, mean attire, hard labour, and the want of respect among men, are things which cannot be agreeable. If all were alike, it would be somewhat different; but the poor man is affected by the disparity between his condition and that of others. Plenty daily passes by his door; but he scarcely tastes it. If the fig-tree blossom, it is not for *him*; there is no fruit on *his* vine, nor flock in *his* fold, nor herd in *his* stall. But, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted." Come hither, poor man, says the gospel; art thou but withal a Christian? here is a feast for thee. ALTHOUGH thy fig-tree blossom not, and there be no fruit on thy vine, nor flock in thy fold, nor herd in thy stall; yet mayst thou rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of thy salvation! Say not, I am a dry tree; God hath given thee an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Art thou a servant? care not for it; thou art the Lord's free-man. To be an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ, a son or daughter of the Lord God Almighty, a fellow citizen with the saints, is an honour which princes might envy! Nor is it altogether in hope. As there is a meanness in sin which renders the character of the sinner, in spite of all his efforts and pretences, contemptible even in his own eyes; so there is a dignity in uprightness which ennobs the mind, whatever be its outward circumstances. This it was imboldened the prisoner, while the want of it caused the judge to tremble, Acts xxiv. 25.

That, on the other hand, which is addressed to the rich brother is no less appropriate. He is directed to rejoice, and we should think with good reason, inasmuch as his enjoyment lies in both worlds; but this is not the ground of it. And though he is, in common with his poor brother, interested in gospel privileges, yet they are not here introduced; but something more suited to counteract that spirit of high-mindedness of which the rich are especially in danger. He is directed to "rejoice in that he is made low." He must not value himself on any thing of a worldly nature, because "as the flower of the grass he shall," in that respect, 'pass away.' Rather let him rejoice that he has been humbled, and taught, like Moses, to prefer affliction with the people of God to the pleasures of sin for a season. It is true this is rejoicing in what the world accounts a disgrace; but such was the joy of all who gloried in the cross of Christ. Whatever the world may think, there is a solid reason for the opulent Christian to rejoice in his being made low; for it is a being led to think justly and soberly of himself as he ought to think, and enabled to withdraw his dependence from those deceitful enjoy-

ments which will quickly "fade like the grass before the scorching sun." It will tend also to heighten his joy, if he compare his case with that of the generality of rich men, who are put off with the present world as their only portion. "Not many" of this description "are called." It is therefore matter of thankfulness to any who are singled out by Divine grace from their companions.

Christianity is far from promoting a *levelling spirit* in one sense of the term; but it is its professed object in another. "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low." In all that Christ and his apostles have done to propagate it, they have made no account of those things which men are apt to set a value upon. Had human wisdom been consulted, the first object would have been to convert those who, on account of office, rank, fortune, or talents, had the greatest influence upon others; and who, by throwing their weight into the Christian scale, would have easily caused it to preponderate. But though some of this description are to be found among the primitive Christians, yet they appear to have taken no leading part among them; nor is the success of the gospel ever ascribed to their influence. But, descending from their former heights, they took their place among the *brethren*, rejoicing that they were made low.

You are ready to ask, What of this? And what is the passage you have been comparing with it? It is as follows:—"Greatly as I wish the reform of principles, and the suppression of vice, I am not sanguine in my expectations of either event, while rank, and station, and wealth throw their mighty influence into the opposite scale. Then, *and not till then*, will Christianity obtain the dominion she deserves, when the makers of our manners shall submit to her authority, and THE PEOPLE OF FASHION become THE PEOPLE OF GOD."

Christianity, to be sure, will never obtain the dominion she *deserves* while any class of society continues to set her at nought; but if its scale should be made at last to preponderate by the mighty influence of rank, and station, and wealth being thrown into it, things must proceed on very different principles from what they have done. If I had no hope of Christianity obtaining the dominion "*till then*," I should have little or no hope at all; for though God is able to turn them, as well as others, to himself, yet it is not his usual way of working in order to promote his own cause. Is it not much too great a compliment to pay to men of rank and fashion, to suppose that Christianity will never prevail till it receives "*their* mighty influence?" Ought they not rather to be told that, if they decline to engage on her side, the consequence will only affect themselves? "Deliverance will arise" from another quarter, and God will cause his name to triumph without them! According to all that has hitherto appeared, and all that we are taught in the Scriptures to expect, the people of fashion will be the *last* that shall enter into Christ's kingdom; and, when they do enter, it will not be to take the lead, but as rejoicing that they are made low.

THE DANGEROUS TENDENCY OF THE DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSAL SALVATION.

As the Scriptures abound in representations of Divine truth, and of its influence in sanctifying and saving the souls of men, so they are no less explicit in declaring the unholy and destructive influence of error. It is said to "increase unto more ungodliness," and to "eat as doth a gangrene." The

same Divine writer speaks of "strong delusion;" or the energy, mighty working, or effectual operation of error. It is often alleged, in behalf of the advocates of certain doctrines, that, allowing them to be in an error, yet there is no reason to question their sincerity; and, if so, it may be only an innocent mistake. If by sincerity be meant no more than that they really believe what they teach, there is no reason to doubt their being possessed of it; but the same was true of the persons described by Paul. Their doctrine was a *lie*, yet they *believed* it. Paul, however, was far from reckoning their error on this account an innocent mistake. On the contrary, he represents it as leading to *damnation*; and its abettors as righteously given up of God on account of their not having received "the love of the truth," even while professing to embrace it.

Without taking upon us to decide how far, and for how long, a real Christian may be drawn aside from the simplicity of the gospel, or what degree of error may be found after all to consist with being "of the truth,"—it is sufficient that the natural tendency of these things is destructive. Every man who sets a proper value on his soul will beware of coming within the sweep of that by which multitudes, in all ages of the church, have been carried into perdition.

Under the fullest conviction that what has been said of error in general is applicable to the doctrine of universal salvation, or the restoration of men and devils from the abodes of misery to final happiness, we wish, in the most serious and affectionate manner, to caution our readers against it. To this end, we shall point out a few of its dangerous consequences, which, if clearly ascertained, will be so many presumptive proofs of the falsehood of the principle.

First, The violence which requires to be done to the plain language of Scripture, ere this doctrine can be embraced, goes to introduce a habit of treating the sacred oracles with levity, and of perverting them in support of a preconceived system. If he who offendeth in one point of the law is guilty of all, in that he admits a principle which sets aside the authority of the Lawgiver; he who perverts a part of the Scriptures to maintain a favourite doctrine, in the same way perverts the whole, and thus renders the word of God of none effect. Hence it is that Universalism leads to Socinianism, as that does to deism. One of the leading advocates of this system was warned of this at his outset; and by his late publications, and those of his party, they appear to have given full proof of the propriety of the warning.

Secondly, To explain away the Scripture threatenings of eternal damnation is intimately connected with light thoughts of sin; and these will lead on to a rejection of the gospel. The whole doctrine of redemption by the Son of God rests upon "the exceeding sinfulness of sin," and the lost condition of sinners; for "the whole need not a physician." If these, therefore, be given up, the other will follow; and this is another reason why Universalism will be almost certain to end in Socinianism. The benevolence which is ascribed to God by the advocates of both is in reality connivance; it is that which must induce him to pardon the penitent without a vicarious sacrifice, and to punish the impenitent only for a time, and that for their ultimate advantage. The Socinians openly renounce the atonement; and though some of the Universalists may at present retain the name, yet they have abandoned the thing.* The corruption of Christian doctrine among the Galatians went to introduce "another gospel," and to make "Christ to

* See *Letters on the Atonement*, by the Rev. C. Jerram; a piece in which the real opinions of the Universalists, concerning this all-important doctrine, are clearly developed and answered.

have died in vain." But what would Paul have said of this? Let those who have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil judge.

Thirdly, If the Scripture threatenings of eternal damnation be set aside, and light thoughts of sin admitted, sinners will be more and more hardened in their impenitence. The greatest object of desire to a wicked man is, doubtless, a heaven suited to his inclinations: but if this cannot be, his next object is to be exempted from punishment; on which principle he would gladly be annihilated; but if this cannot be, he would next prefer a punishment of short duration; and if God be supposed, notwithstanding what has been said of *eternal damnation*, and of sinners being *never forgiven*, to intend nothing more than this, he will naturally conclude that the degree of it will be abated, as well as the duration shortened. The same kind of reasoning from the Divine benevolence which brings him to believe the one will bring him to believe the other. It cannot be a very *fearful thing*, he will suppose, to fall into the hands of a Being who will inflict nothing upon him but for his good; and therefore he will indulge for the present, and abide the consequence. This is not an imaginary process: it is a fact that these are the principles by which profligate characters, in great numbers, comfort themselves in their sins. When Rousseau was impressed with the doctrine of eternal punishment, he could scarcely endure his existence; but a lady, with whom he says he was very familiar, used to tranquillize his soul by persuading him that "the Supreme Being would not be strictly just, if he were just to us." If all such characters were as free in their confessions as this debauchee has been in his, there is no doubt but the same tale, in substance, would be told by millions. It is the hope that they shall not *surely* die—or, if they die, that the second death will consist of annihilation, or at most of only a temporary and tolerable punishment, that makes them comparatively easy. So Universalists and Socinians preach, and so profligates believe, or at least are very willing to believe if their consciences would suffer them.

Fourthly, It is a principle that will universally hold good, that there is no ultimate risk in adhering to truth, but the utmost danger attends a departure from it. It is thus that we reason with unbelievers: It is possible at least that Christianity may be true; and, if it be, we have infinitely the advantage. But, allowing that it may be false, yet what risk do we run by embracing it? While we are taught by it to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world," neither your principles nor your consciences will allow you to deny that we are safe. But if that Saviour whom you have despised be indeed the Son of God, if that name which you have blasphemed be the only one under heaven given among men by which a sinner can be saved, what a situation is yours! Apply this reasoning to the subject in hand. If Universalism should prove true, there are few if any dangers that can follow from disbelieving it; but if it should prove false, the mistake of its abettors will be inexcusable and fatal. If *we* be wrong, we can plead that we were misled by interpreting the terms by which the Scriptures ordinarily express the duration of future punishment in their literal or proper sense; that we found the same word which describes the duration of future life applied in the same passage to the duration of future punishment; and thence concluded it must mean the same; moreover, that, if any doubt had remained on this head, it must have been removed by *eternal damnation* being explained in the Scriptures by *never having forgiveness*, Mark iii. 29. But if *they* be wrong they can only allege, that observing the terms to be often applied to limited duration they concluded they *might* be so in this; and, this sense best comporting with their ideas of Divine benevolence, they adopted it. In the one case, our fears will

be disappointed; in the other, their hopes will be confounded. If the mistake be on our side, we alarm the ungodly more than need be; but if on theirs, they will be found to have flattered and deceived them to their eternal ruin, and so to have incurred the blood of souls! If we err, our error is much the same as that of Jeremiah, on supposition of the Babylonians having been repulsed, and Jerusalem delivered from the siege; but if they err, their error is that of the false prophets, who *belied the Lord*, and said, "It is not he, neither shall evil come upon us." Which of these paths, therefore, is wisdom's way, we leave our readers to judge.

THE MYSTERY OF PROVIDENCE,

ESPECIALLY IN RESPECT OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE
WORLD IN DIFFERENT AGES.

It has frequently been objected, that if the religion first taught among the posterity of Abraham, and afterwards among the Gentiles by the preaching of Jesus Christ, be of God, how is it that it has been so partial in its operations? The promulgation of a religion adapted to man, it is said, should be as extensive as the globe. The force of this objection has been felt; and Christian writers, in general, have acknowledged that there is a depth in this part of Divine providence which it is difficult, if not impossible, to fathom. There are hints to be found in the Scriptures, however, which may throw some glimmering of light upon the subject; and, when the mystery of God is finished, we shall perceive that he has done all things well.

In general, we are given to understand that God is an absolute Sovereign in the dispensation of his favours. He was under no obligation to any; and he will bestow his blessings in such a manner as shall cause this truth to be manifest to all. Man would fain put in a claim, and accuse the ways of Jehovah with being unequal; but this only proves the perverseness of his own way. The blessings of civilization are undoubtedly adapted to man; yet a large proportion of the human race are mere barbarians: even those countries which have, in past ages, ranked high in this respect, are now sunk far below mediocrity; while others, whom they were in the habit of treating with the greatest contempt, have been raised above them. It is thus that the valley is exalted, the mountain made low, and the glory of Jehovah revealed; but if God may act as a Sovereign in dispensing the bounties of providence, who shall call him to account for doing the same in the distribution of the blessings of grace? He has, in all ages, manifested his determination, however, to act in this manner, let sinful creatures think of it as they may. With respect to individuals, the things of God have been hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes; and the same principle has been carried into effect with nations and continents. When the adversaries of sovereign grace meet with this doctrine in the Scriptures, they endeavour to get rid of it by applying it in the latter sense only; but God's dealings with nations and continents are of a piece with his dealings with individuals; they are only a different part of the same whole.

It is observable, that, in the dispensations of mercy, God has in a wonderful manner, balanced the affairs of men, so as, upon the whole, to answer the most important ends in the great system of moral government. In the early ages, for instance, mercy was shown to the posterity of Abraham, and hereby the world was provoked to jealousy. On the coming of Christ, mercy was

shown to the world; and the posterity of Abraham, in their turn, were provoked to jealousy: and there is reason to believe that before the end of time, and perhaps before many years have passed over us, God will show mercy to both; and each will prove a blessing to the other. 'The conversion of the Gentiles shall in the end effectually provoke them to jealousy; and thus, "through our mercy, they shall obtain mercy." On the other hand, their return to God will be a kind of moral resurrection to the world. Probably, the conversion of the great body of pagans and Mahometans may be accomplished by means of this extraordinary event. Their fall has already proved our riches; how much more their fulness! "If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but *life from the dead*?" God's mercy towards them is, at present, righteously suspended, "till the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in." The Gentiles were as one behind in a race; let them first come up, and then "all Israel shall be saved," and become as life from the dead to the world.

The fifty-second chapter of Isaiah appears to contain a prophecy of the restoration and conversion of the Jews; but in the last three verses it is intimated that God's servant, the Messiah, by whom it should be effected, should deal prudently. Now much of prudence consists in the proper timing of things. This glorious work was not to take place immediately; there must ere this be a long and awful pause. "He must first come and suffer many things, and be rejected." The wrath of God must be poured on the Jews on this account to the uttermost; and the Gentile nations must be sprinkled with the showers of gospel grace. Such is the import of these last three verses, and the whole fifty-third chapter. Then in the fifty-fourth she that had been "a wife of youth," but of late "refused and forsaken," is called upon to *sing* for joy; and yet the mercy should not be confined to her; for the Redeemer should not only be called "the Holy One of Israel," but "the God of the whole earth."—"O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

If God had called the Gentiles without having first "concluded," or *shut them up as it were*, "under sin," their salvation would not have appeared to be the effect of free promise (Gal. iii. 22); and if he had not in like manner *shut up the Jews in their unbelief*, his mercy towards them had been far less conspicuous, Rom. xi. 32. As it is, we behold the goodness and severity of God, each blazing by turns in the most lovely and tremendous colours.

Something analogous to this is observable in the conduct of God towards the eastern and western parts of the earth. For more than two thousand years after the flood, learning, government, and the true religion were in a manner confined to the east; and our forefathers in the west were a horde of barbarians. For the last two thousand years, learning, government, and the true religion have travelled westward; they have been within the last few centuries extended even beyond the Atlantic Ocean. But before the end of time, and perhaps before many years have passed over us, both the east and the west shall unite and become one in Christ Jesus. Such an idea, I apprehend, is conveyed in Isa. lx. 6-9. The geographical descriptions of nations, as given in prophetic language, is commonly by way of *synecdoche*, putting those parts which are nearest the Holy Land for the whole, or all beyond them. Thus Europe is commonly called "the isles of the Gentiles," (Gen. x. 5; Isa. xlix. 1,) because those parts of it which lay nearest to Judea were the Archipelago, or the Grecian Islands. And those nations which lay next to Judea, eastward, include, in the prophetic language, all beyond them, or the whole of Asia. Thus "the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, all they from Sheba, the flocks of Kedar, and the rams of Ne-

baioth," denote the accession of the eastern world to the church of God. On the other hand, "the isles waiting for him, and the ships of Tarshish bringing the sons of Zion from far," denote the accession of the western world. Thus all shall be gathered together in Christ, and become one holy family. "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

One great cause of the mercy bestowed on the western part of the earth was the Roman conquests, which, whatever were the motives of the conquerors, were overruled for the introduction of the gospel among European nations. And who knows but the British conquests in the east, whatever be the motives of the conquerors, may be designed for a similar purpose? Even that iniquitous traffic which we and other nations have long been carrying on in the persons of men, I have no doubt, will eventually prove a blessing to those miserable people, though it may be a curse to their oppressors. At this day there are many thousands of negroes in the West India islands who have embraced the gospel, while their owners, basking in wealth, and rolling in debauchery, will neither enter into the kingdom of God themselves, nor suffer others who would enter in. God is gathering a people in spite of them. Behold the goodness and justice of God! Men, torn from their native shores and tenderest connexions, are in a manner driven into the gospel net; the most abject and cruel state of slavery is that by means of which they become the Lord's free-men. Their oppressors, on the other hand, who lead them captive, are themselves led captive by the devil at his will, and, under the name of Christians, are heaping up wrath against the day of wrath. "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

From the whole we are led to consider the sovereignty of God not as a capricious, but as a wise sovereignty. While those who are saved have nothing to boast of, those who perish, perish as the just reward of their own iniquity. Jacob will have to ascribe to distinguishing grace all he is more than Esau; while Esau, having lost the blessing, has to recollect that he first despised it.

THE CONNEXIONS IN WHICH THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION IS INTRODUCED IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

It is generally allowed that to understand the Scriptures it is necessary to enter into the connexion of what we read; and let it be considered whether it be not equally necessary to the understanding of any particular doctrine that we enter into the connexions in which it is introduced in the Scriptures. We have seen, in a former essay, that Divine truths are not taught us in a systematical form, and also the wisdom of God in scattering them throughout his word in a variety of practical relations. What these relations are it becomes us to ascertain; otherwise we may admit the leading truths of revelation as articles of belief, and yet, for want of a close attention to these, may possess but very little Scripture knowledge; and the doctrine which we think we hold may be of very little use to us. "When I was a youth," said a minister lately in conversation, "I *admitted* many doctrines, but did not *feel* their importance and practical efficacy."

It would be a good work for a serious, thinking mind carefully to inquire

into the various connexions in which acknowledged truths are introduced in the Scriptures, and the practical purposes to which they are there actually applied. I shall take the liberty of offering a brief specimen with respect to the doctrine of *election*. The truth of the doctrine I may in this place take for granted as a matter clearly revealed in the word of God, observing only a few of its principal connexions.

First, It is introduced *to declare the source of salvation to be mere grace, or undeserved favour, and to cut off all hopes of acceptance with God by works of any kind.*—In this connexion we find it in Rom. xi. 5, 6, “Even so then, at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace; and if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace: but if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work.” All compromise is here for ever excluded, and the cause of salvation decidedly and fully ascribed to electing grace. With this end the doctrine requires to be preached to saints and sinners. To the former, that they may be at no loss to what they shall ascribe their conversion and salvation, but may know and own with the apostle that it is by the grace of God they are what they are; to the latter, that they may be warned against relying upon their own righteousness, and taught that the only hope of life which remains for them is in repairing as lost and perishing sinners to the Saviour, casting themselves at the feet of sovereign mercy.

Secondly, It is introduced *in order to account for the unbelief of the greater part of the Jewish nation, without excusing them in it.*—This appears to be its connexion in the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. To show that the wide-spreading unbelief of that people was not a matter of surprise, and did not affect the veracity of God in his promises, the apostle distinguishes between those who *were* Israel and those who were merely of Israel (ver. 6); evincing that from the beginning God had drawn a line between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau; the former being merely “children of the flesh,” and the latter “children of the promise,” to whom God had an eye in all he had said, and who were “counted for the seed.” The same argument is pursued and confirmed from the declaration of God to Moses: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and compassion on whom I will have compassion;” intimating not only that a sinner had no natural claim of mercy on God, but that even among the Israelites, who were a people in covenant with him, he ever preserved the right of sovereignty in the forgiveness of sin, and every dispensation of saving grace. The result is, that in God’s leaving great numbers of Abraham’s posterity to perish in unbelief, and calling a people for himself, partly of Jews and partly of Gentiles, (ver. 24, 27,) he proceeded on the same principle as that on which he had proceeded from the beginning.

Paul saw, indeed, that the corrupt mind of man would allege that, if things were so, the agency and accountableness of man were destroyed; and therefore introduces the objection, ver. 19, “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault; for who hath resisted his will?” This objection affords irrefragable proof that the doctrine maintained by the apostle was that of the absolute sovereignty of God, in having mercy on whom he would, and giving up whom he would to hardness of heart; for against no other doctrine could such an objection have been made with any appearance of plausibility. This objection is the same for substance as has been made ever since, and that by two sorts of people; namely, those who disown the doctrine, as being destructive of human agency; and those who contend for the doctrine for that very purpose. The language of those who disown the doctrine is this: If it be so, that the state of every one is determined by the will of God, why are men blamed for not believing in Christ? God has his

will, and what would he have more? The language of those who contend for the doctrine, with the intent of destroying human agency, is, It is true that the state of every man is determined by the will of God; but then it is not right that he should find fault with sinners for their unbelief; for his will is not resisted. It is easy to see that both these positions are at variance with the gospel. With respect to the former, if we follow the example of the apostle, we shall think it enough to prove that God *actually exercises* an absolute sovereignty in saving whom he will, and yet *finds fault* with unbelievers as much as if no such sovereignty were exercised; leaving him to justify his own conduct, and them who reply against him to answer it at his tribunal. With respect to the latter, if we keep to the principle laid down by the apostle, we shall not deny the truth because they abuse it; but avow it, and at the same time *find fault* with unbelievers, ascribing their failure, as he did in the same chapter, to their "seeking righteousness as it were by the works of the law, stumbling at the stumbling-stone." If on this account we be accused of "self-contradiction," "saying and unsaying," "preaching half grace and half works," "beginning with truth and ending with falsehood," &c. &c., we have this comfort, that the same things might have been objected with equal justice to the writings of the apostle, as appears from the above remarks, and were in substance actually objected to them.

Thirdly, It is introduced to *show the certain success of Christ's undertaking, as it were in defiance of unbelievers, who set at nought his gracious invitations.* When Esther seemed to hesitate on going in unto the king in behalf of her people, she was answered by Mordecai's order, thus: "If thou hold thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed!" Such, in effect, is the language of the doctrine of election to sinners of mankind, and that on various occasions. It is not designed to supersede universal invitations; but to provide against those invitations being universally unsuccessful. Thus, our Lord having upbraided Chorazin and Bethsaida for their impenitence under his ministry, it is immediately added by the evangelist, "*At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.*" This was like saying, Though Chorazin and Bethsaida have not repented, yet shall I not be wanting of subjects; deliverance shall arise from another place! Again, When addressing the unbelieving Pharisees, he applied those words in the cxviii Psalm to them, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner;" his words convey the same idea:—Ye builders may set me at nought; but God will exalt me in defiance of you. God will have a temple, and I shall be the foundation of it, though you should persist in your unbelief and perish! Matt. xxi. 42. Again, Those very remarkable words in John vi. 37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me," &c., are introduced in the same manner. Addressing himself to those Jews who followed him because they had eaten of the loaves and were filled, he saith, "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." As if he should say, You have no regard to me in my true character, but merely for yourselves, and for the meat that perisheth; but I shall not lose my reward, however you may stand affected towards me.

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE.

ALLOWING all due honour to the English translation of the Bible, it must be granted to be a human performance, and, as such, subject to imperfection. Where any passage appears to be mistranslated, it is doubtless proper for those who are well acquainted with the original languages to point it out, and to offer, according to the best of their judgment, the true meaning of the Holy Spirit. Criticisms of this kind, made with modesty and judgment, and not in consequence of a preconceived system, are worthy of encouragement.

But, besides these, there is a species of criticism which offers itself from a more familiar source, and of the propriety of which the mere English reader is competent to judge; namely, the division of chapters, the use of supplementary terms, &c.

If the following example of the former kind be thought worthy of a place in the Biblical Magazine, it is probable I may on a future occasion send you more of the same nature.

The seventh chapter of John ends with these words: "And every man went unto his own house." The eighth begins with these: "Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives." Here, I conceive, the former chapter ought to have ended; for here ends the labour of the day, and each party is described as withdrawing to his place of retirement.

The whole passage contains a beautiful representation of the breaking up of a fierce dispute between the chief priests, the Pharisees, the officers whom they sent to arrest our Saviour, and Nicodemus. In the picture which is here drawn of it, we see at one view the very hearts of the different parties; and if the subject were made to end with the retirement of Jesus to the Mount of Olives, it would appear to still greater advantage.

The Pharisees and chief priests having sent officers to take Jesus, they return without him.

Pharisees. Why have ye not brought him?

Officers. Never man spake like this man!

Pharisees. Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But this people, who know not the law are cursed.

Nicodemus. Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?

Pharisees. Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.

Historian. And every man went unto his own house: Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.

What an exhibition is here given, in a few simple words, of the workings of mind in the different parties! Follow them respectively to their places of retirement, and judge of their feelings. The officers, stunned with conviction and stung with the reproaches of their employers, retire in disgust. The Pharisees, transported with rage and disappointment, go murmuring to their houses.—Nicodemus having ventured, though mildly, to repel their outrage, feels himself suspected of a secret adherence to the Galilean, and is full of thought about the issue of things. Jesus, with the most perfect calmness and satisfaction, retires to the place whither he was wont to resort for prayer and communion with God!

COMMENDATION.

It has been observed that sinful propensities are commonly, if not always, the original propensities of human nature, perverted or abused. Emulation, scorn, anger, the desire of property, and all the animal appetites, are not in themselves evil. If directed to right objects, and governed by the will of God, they are important and useful principles; but, perverted, they degenerate into pride, haughtiness, bitterness, avarice, and sensibility.

By this remark we may be enabled to judge of the propriety and impropriety of bestowing commendation. There are some who for fear of making others proud, as they say, forbear the practice altogether. But this is contrary to the Scriptures. We have only to hear what the Spirit saith unto the seven churches in Asia to perceive the usefulness of commending the good for encouragement, as well as of censuring the evil for correction. Paul, in his Epistles, seldom deals in reproof without applauding at the same time what was praiseworthy. This, doubtless, ought to be a model for us. Those who withhold such commendation for fear of making others proud, little think of the latent vanity in their own minds which this conduct betrays. If they did not attach a considerable degree of consequence to their own opinion, they would not be so ready to suspect the danger of another's being elated by it. A minister, fifty or sixty years ago, after delivering a sermon and descending from the pulpit, was accosted in rather a singular manner by another minister who had been his hearer. Shaking him by the hand, and looking him in the face, with a smile, "I could," said he, "say something I could say something, but, perhaps, it is not safe; it might make you proud of yourself."—"No danger, my friend," replied the other, "I do not take you to be a man of judgment."

Yet there is real danger of our becoming tempters to one another, by untimely and improper commendation. Man has too much nitre about him to render it safe to play with fire. Whatever may be said by worldly men, who have adopted Lord Chesterfield's maxims, and whose only study is to *please*, it is not only injurious, but by men of sense considered as inconsistent with good manners to load a person with praises to his face. Such characters are *flatterers* by profession, and their conduct is as mean as it is offensive to a modest mind; but what is flattery, but insult in disguise? Its language, if truly interpreted, is this: "I know you to be so weak and so vain a creature that nothing but praise will please you; and as I have an end to answer by obtaining your favour, I will take this measure to accomplish it."

The love of praise has been called "the universal passion," and true it is that no man is free from it. There are some, however, who are much more vain than others. It is the study of a flatterer to find out this weak side of a man, and to avail himself of it; but good men are incapable of such conduct. If they see another covetous of praise, they will commonly withhold it, and that for the good of the party. It is true, I have seen the vanity of a man reproved by a compliance with his wishes, giving him what he was desirous of, and that in full measure, as it were, pressed down. He did not seem to be aware that he had thirsted for the delicious draught till the cup was handed to him; the appearance of which covered him with confusion. But this kind of ironical praise is a delicate weapon, and requires a quick sensibility in the person who receives the address as well as in him who gives it. It is, however, hardly consistent with the modesty, gentleness, and benevolence of Christianity.

When two or more persons of a vain mind become acquainted, it may be expected they will deal largely in compliments; playing into each other's

hands: where this is the case, there is great danger of the blind leading the blind till both fall into the ditch.

To a wise and humble man, just commendation is encouraging; but praise beyond desert is an affliction. His mind, sanctified by the grace of God, serves as a refiner to separate the one from the other; justly appreciating what is said to him, he receives what is proper, and repels what is improper. Thus, it may be, we are to understand the words of Solomon: "As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise."

The Scriptures never address themselves to the corrupt propensities of the mind, but to its original powers; or, to use the language of the ingenious Bunyan, they have "nothing to say to the Diabolians, but to the *ancient inhabitants of the town of Mansoul*." Men address themselves to our vanity; God to our emulation. If we follow this example we are safe.

The occasion of all these reflections was my finding the other day, among a number of old loose papers, the following tale, which carries in it the marks of being a true one; and with which I shall conclude this paper:—"A young minister (whom I shall call Eutychus) was possessed of talents somewhat above mediocrity; his delivery also was reckoned agreeable. He was told by one of his admirers, in an evening's conversation, how much his sermons excelled those of the generality of preachers. Alas, the same thought had occurred to himself! Hence he easily assented to it, and entered freely into conversation on the subject. On retiring to rest, he endeavoured first to commit himself to the Divine protection. It was *there*, while on his knees, that he first felt his folly. Overwhelmed with shame and confusion before God, he was silent; seeming to himself a beast before him. At the same time, a passage in the Acts of the Apostles flashed like lightning in his mind: And they shouted and said, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man And he was eaten of worms, because he gave not God the glory." There seemed to him a considerable analogy between his case and that of Herod. Herod was flattered and idolized—his heart was in unison with the flattery—he consented to be an idol, and gave not God the glory—for this he was smitten by an angel of God, his glory blasted, and his life terminated by a humiliating disease. "I also have been flattered," said Eutychus, "and have inhaled the incense. I have consented to be an idol, and have not given God the glory. God, I am afraid, will blast my future life and ministry, as he justly may, and cause me to end my days in degradation and disgrace!" About the same time, those words also occurred to him, "Woe to the idol shepherd! his arm shall be dried up, and his right eye shall be darkened!" He could not pray!—Groaning over the words of David, "O Lord, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sin is not hid from thee," he retired to rest. The next morning the same subject awoke with him. He confessed, and again bemoaned his sin; entreated forgiveness for Christ's sake, and that his future spirituality might not be blasted. "Cast me not away from thy presence," said he, "take not thy Holy Spirit from me!" But he could not recover any thing like freedom with God. The thought occurred to him of requesting one of his most intimate friends to pray for him; but this only occasioned a comparison of himself with Simon the sorcerer, who importuned Peter, saying, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of these things come upon me."

In short, the temptation into which he had fallen not only polluted his mind, and marred his peace, but rendered him for some time wretched in the exercise of his ministry.

Let hearers take heed, while they give due honour and encouragement to ministers, not to idolize them; and let ministers take heed that they do not receive, and still more that they do not court, applause.

ORATION DELIVERED AT THE GRAVE OF THE REV. ROBERT HALL, OF ARNSBY.

[March, 1791.]

DEAR FRIENDS,

YOU have often assembled with pleasure in company with your beloved friend and faithful pastor; but that pleasure is over, and you are now met together with very different feelings, to take your last farewell of his remains!

What can I say to you, or wherewith shall I comfort you? The dissolving of the union between near relations, and the breaking up of long and intimate connexions, are matters that must needs affect us. That providence which at one stroke separates a husband from his wife, a father from his children, a pastor from his people, and a great and greatly beloved man of God from all his connexions, cannot do other than make us feel. Indeed we are allowed to feel on such occasions in moderation; at the grave of his friend, Lazarus, "Jesus wept."

But should we exceed the bounds of moderation, should our mourning under the hand of God border upon murmuring against it or thinking hard of it, there are many considerations that might be urged to alleviate our grief; so many, indeed, that under the heaviest afflictions of the present state we may well weep as though we wept not.

In this instance, we may not only comfort ourselves with the consideration that it is the common lot of men, the greatest and the best as well as others, and therefore no more than might be expected; but with what affords infinitely greater satisfaction—that this lot is a real and substantial advantage to our deceased brother. There is a pleasure even in the very pain that we feel for those who die in the Lord. Our Redeemer has walked the road before us; and, by so doing, has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light. Where the sting of death is extracted, there is little else but the name, the shadow of death to encounter; and the prospect of a glorious resurrection to eternal life more than annihilates even that. Your husband, your father, your pastor, is not dead, but sleepeth, and his Redeemer will come ere long that he may awake him.

Nor is this all; he lives already among the spirits of the just made perfect. Though the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, yet the inhabitant is not turned out, as it were, naked and destitute; but has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It was that which reduced the apostle to "a strait betwixt two," having a desire on the one hand to be profitable to the church of God, and on the other to depart and be with Christ, which, so far as concerned himself, was far better. Could we but be governed by faith instead of sense, we should rejoice even while we mourned. What our Lord said to his apostles might be said by his faithful followers to their surviving friends, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go to the Father;" and the reason which he alleged, "for my Father is greater than I"—that is, the glory and happiness which my Father possesses, and which I go to possess with him, is greater than any thing I can here enjoy—would also apply to them. To be with our Father above is much greater and better than to be here.

Such considerations as these may moderate our grief, and reconcile us to the will of God: but this is not all; there are other things that require our attention. As the aged and the honourable are called off the stage, there is the more to be done by us who are left behind. God has said to this his

servant, as he said to the prophet Daniel, "Go thou thy way;" let another, as if he had said, come and take thy place, and acquit himself as well as thou hast done! Our venerable deceased father had embarked for life, and so have we; he has finished his course, but we have yet to finish ours. We are apt to feel discouraged at the loss of eminent men, and to think the interests of religion, in their particular connexions, must needs suffer, and it may be so; but it may be of use to consider that when Moses died the Israelites were not to stand still, but were commanded to go forward; and it is no small consolation that God's cause is still in his own hands, "The government is upon his shoulder."

One thing more deserves our serious attention.—Though the relations before-mentioned are now extinct, yet what has taken place *in* those relations is not. A great part of the actions of the present life are either those of parents to their children or children to their parents, of husbands to their wives or wives to their husbands, of pastors to their people or people to their pastors, and these are matters that must all come over again. In this point of view, relationship, though of but a few years' duration, is of the utmost importance; it sows, as I may say, the seeds of eternity, and stamps an impression that will never be effaced!

Consider, dear friends, the events of that relationship which is now dissolved. The various labours of your worthy pastor will not be lost, not even his more private instructions, prayers, and counsels in your families, or his own; they will not return void, but accomplish the end whereunto they were sent. The great question with you is, Does that end include your salvation? Can you look back and bless God for the life which is now finished, as having been a blessing to you? Can you remember the sermon, the visit, the reproof, the warning, the counsel, the free conversation, from whence you began to cry, "My father, thou art the guide of my youth?" Or has this valuable life, which thousands have acknowledged as a public blessing, been nothing to you? You have heard him, and have talked with him, and have witnessed the general tenor of his life, how holily, how justly, and how unblamably he behaved himself among you; and is all of no account? Is the harvest past, and the summer ended, and are you not saved? Alas! if this should be the case with any of you in this congregation, (and it is well if it is not,) you may never have such opportunities again; and, if you should perish at last, the loss of your souls will be greater, and attended with more aggravating circumstances, than that of many others. Those of Bethsaida and Chorazin, who rejected or neglected the gospel, were in a worse situation than even the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. When the *books* come to be opened, at the great day, they will contain a long dark list of slighted opportunities, abused mercies, despised counsels, and forgotten warnings!

Dear friends, call to remembrance the labours of your minister, and pray to the Lord that none of these things may come upon you. If any of you have been deaf to the various calls of God during his life, yet hear this one which is addressed to you by his death! If the seed which this dear servant of God has been sowing for nearly forty years among you should yet spring up—if to a future and happy pastor of this church it should be said, in the language of Christ to his apostles, "Another has laboured, and you have entered into his labours"—it would afford us no small pleasure, that would serve to counterbalance the painful providence with which at this time we are afflicted.

TO THE MEMORY OF MY DEAR AND VENERABLE FRIEND,
THE REV. ROBERT HALL,

Who died in the sixty-third year of his age, on March 13th, 1791.

AND is my much-respected friend no more ?
How painful are the tidings to my heart !
And is that light extinguished which so long
Has burned with brightest lustre, and diffused,
Through all his loved connexions round about,
Pure rays of evangelic light and joy ?
Is all that stock of true substantial worth
Become as water spilt upon the ground ?—
That *universal knowledge*, which embraced
A compass wide and large, of men and things ?—
That well-known solid *wisdom*, which, improved
By long experience, made his face to shine ?—
That *uprightness of character*, by which
He lived down slander, and of foes made friends ?—
That ardent and *affectionate concern*
For truth, for righteousness, for Zion's good,
Which, with a *social kindness*, long endeared
His name, and renders him a public loss ?—
That *grace* that ruled and seasoned all his soul,
And as with sacred unction filled his lips,
In which as life declined he ripened fast,
And shone still more and more to perfect day ?—
That tender *sympathy* that often soothed
The sorrowing heart, and wiped the mourner's tear,
That sweet *humility*, and *self-abasement*,
With which we heard him oft invoke his God ;
Which ne'er assumed, though first in counsel skilled,
The lordly look, or proud dictator's chair ?—
That guiltless *pleasantry* that brightened up
Each countenance, and cheered the social hour ?
(If he were there, it seemed that all were there :
If he were missing, none could fill his place.)
That *store of excellence*, in short, to which
(As to a ship well fraught) one might repair,
And be enriched with treasures new and old ?—
Is ALL, as by a kind of fatal wreck,
Destroyed, and sunk at once to rise no more ?

Dear friend, (for still I fain would talk to thee !)
Shall I discern thy cheering face no more ?
And must thy gladdening voice no more be heard ?
And, when I visit thy much-loved abode,
Shall I not find thee there as heretofore !
Nor sit, nor walk, as erst with pleasure wont,
Nor mingle souls beneath the friendly bower ?
No . . . this is past . . . nor aught seems left for me,
Except to walk, and sigh upon thy stone !

Dear friend ! I saw thee burdened years ago
With heavy loads of complicated grief ;
And grief more complicate, though less intense,
I'm told thou didst in earlier days endure ;
But tribulation patience in thee wrought,
And such a stock of rich experience *this*,
That few like thee could reach the mourner's case,
Or ease the burdens of the labouring heart.

We saw thee ripen in thy later years,
As when rich-laden autumn droops her head :

That theme on which thy thoughts of late were penned,*
 None knew like thee, nor could have touched so well;
 It seemed thy element, the native air
 Thy holy soul had long been used to breathe.
 Such things we saw with sacred pleasure; ye
 'Twas pleasure tinged with painful fear, lest these
 (As fruit when ripe is quickly gathered in)
 Should only prove portentous of thy end.

O thou great Arbiter of life and death!

Thy ways are just, and true, and wise, and good;
 Though clouds and darkness compass thee around,
 Justice and judgment still support thy throne.
 Had it been left to us, he still had lived,
 And lived for years to come, and blessed us still;
 But thus 'tis not; thy thoughts are not as ours.
 Had poor short-sighted mortals had their will,
 The great Redeemer had not bled, or died.
 Teach us to say, "Thy will, not ours, be done,"
 To drink the cup thou givest us to drink.

Dear relatives and friends, his special charge!
 Bereaved at once of him whose life was spent
 In unremitted labours for your good,
 We must not call on you to mourn, but try
 To stem the tide, or wipe the o'erflowing tear.
 'Tis true his course is finished, and your ears
 Shall hear no more the long-accustomed sound;
 But 'tis as he desired, when late we heard
 Drop from his lips, what seemed his last farewell.†
 The prize for which he counted life not dear
 Is fully gained; his course *with joy* he closed.

What did I say? the ship was wrecked and lost!
 No, it is not; 'tis safe arrived in port,
 And all the precious cargo too is safe;
 His knowledge, wisdom, love, and every grace,
 Are not extinct, but gloriously matured,
 Beyond whate'er he grasped in this frail state.
 A fit companion *now* for purer minds,—
 For patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, and for those
 Whom once he knew, and loved, who went before;
 For HIM whose name was dear to him on earth,
 And whose sweet presence now creates his heaven.

Nor is all lost to those who yet survive:
 Though he is gone, his mantle's left behind.—
 Kind *memory* may recall his words, and deeds,
 And prayers, and counsels; and conviction aid
 Or cheer the heart, or guide the doubtful feet,
 Or prompt to imitate his holy life.
 Nor memory alone, the *faithful page*
 Is charged with some remains, in which the man
 And his communications yet are seen;
 In these, though he be dead, he speaketh still.‡

Yes, here's Elijah's mantle: may there too
 A double portion of his spirit rest
 Upon us all; and, might I be indulged

* *Communion with God*, the subject of the Circular Letter for 1789, which was Mr. Hall's last printed performance.

† It has been observed that Mr. Hall's last *public* sermon, in his own connexion, was preached at Olney Association, June 2, 1790, from Acts xx. 24, "Neither count I my life dear, that I may finish my course with joy," &c.

‡ Mr. Hall wrote many of the *Circular Letters* to the churches of the Northamptonshire and Leicestershire Association, most of which have been noticed already, as well as his *Help to Zion's Travellers*. He also printed *A Charge to Mr. Moreton*, delivered at his ordination at Kettering, 1771. And a *Funeral Sermon for Mrs. Evans, of Foxton*, 1775.

In one more special wish, that wish should be,
That he who fills his father's sacred trust
Might share the blessings of his father's God,
And tread his steps; that all may see and say,
"Elijah's spirit on Elisha rests."

NATURE OF TRUE VIRTUE.

MR. HALL, in his justly admired Sermon on modern Infidelity, has brought forward some very plausible objections to President Edwards's definition of virtue, but which appear to be founded in misapprehension. The definition itself is fairly stated—that "virtue consists in a passion for the general good, or love to being in general." Mr. Hall observes that "the order of nature is, evermore, from particulars to generals: we advance from private to public affections; from the love of parents, brothers, and sisters, to those more expanded regards which embrace the immense society of human kind,"—p. 51. And afterwards, in a note, pp. 57, 58, he maintains that, on the President's principles, "virtue is an utter impossibility; because that the human mind is not capable of such *different degrees* of attachment as are due to the infinitely various objects of the intelligent system; also because that *our vices* of the system being capable of perpetual enlargement, our attachments are liable to undue proportion, so that those regards which appeared virtuous may afterwards become vicious. And, lastly, that if virtue consists in the love of being in general, or attachment to the general good, the particular affections are to every purpose of virtue useless, and even pernicious; for their necessary tendency is to attract to their objects a proportion of attention which far exceeds their comparative value in the general scale."

"The question is," as Mr. Hall observes, "what is *virtue*?" Answer, *love*. But love to whom, or what? To being, says Edwards; and as the Supreme Being is the first and best of beings, it is to love him supremely, and our fellow creatures in subordination to him. It is objected that we cannot comprehend the Supreme Being, and therefore cannot love him in proportion to what he is in the scale of being. True; and we cannot fully comprehend ourselves; yet we may love ourselves supremely.

"The order of nature," says Mr. Hall, "is evermore from particulars to generals; we advance from private to public affections; from the love of parents, brothers, and sisters, to those more expanded regards which embrace the immense society of human kind." But to this it may be replied—

1. Virtuous affection does not consist in natural attachment; if it did, birds and beasts would be virtuous, as well as men. Nor does genuine benevolence arise from those instinctive feelings as their root; if it did, all men who are not "without natural affection" would be virtuous, benevolent characters. It may imply a high degree of depravity to have obliterated natural affection, though the thing itself have no moral good in it. Natural affection, however, if exercised in subserviency to the Divine glory, becomes virtuous; as are eating and drinking, and all other natural actions that are capable of being performed to a higher end.

2. The question does not relate to the order in which the human mind comes to the knowledge of objects, and so to the actual exercise of affection towards them; but to the order in which love operates when the objects are known. If we were free from every taint of original sin, yet we should not love God before we loved our parents; and that because we should not know

him first. We cannot love an object before we know it; but it does not follow from hence that, when we know both God and our parents, we must continue to love them first, and God for their sake. That which this writer calls "the order of nature" may indeed be so called, as it is the order established for our being brought to the actual exercise of our powers; but, with regard to the argument, it is rather the order of *time* than of nature.

"The welfare of the whole system of being must be allowed," says Mr. Hall, "to be *in itself* the object of all others the most worthy to be pursued; so that, could the mind distinctly embrace it, and discern at every step what *action* would infallibly promote it, we should be furnished with a sure criterion of right and wrong; an unerring guide, which would supersede the use and necessity of all inferior rules, laws, and principles,"—p. 55.

But it is not necessary to true virtue that it should comprehend all being, or "distinctly embrace the welfare of the whole system." It is sufficient that it be of an expansive *tendency*; and this appears to be Edwards's view of the subject. A child may love God by loving godliness, or godly people, though it has yet scarcely any ideas of God himself. It may also possess a disposition the *tendency* of which is to embrace in the arms of good-will "the immense society of human kind;" though at the time it may be acquainted with but few people in the world. Such a disposition will come into actual exercise, "from particulars to generals," as fast as knowledge extends. This, however, is not "private affection," or self-love, ripening into an "extended benevolence, as its last and most perfect fruit;" but benevolence itself, expanding in proportion as the natural powers expand, and afford it opportunity.

MORALITY NOT FOUNDED IN UTILITY.

In a late excellent sermon* the author combats, with great success, the notion of morality being founded in utility. On looking over some loose papers the other day, I found a short conversation on this subject which took place a few years since between two friends, and which was taken down immediately after they had parted. It will occupy but a small space; and, if you think it worthy of insertion, it is at your service.

C. I have been thinking of the reason why we are required to love God and one another; and why the contrary is forbidden.

F. And what do you conceive it to be?

C. Would there be any such thing as sin in the universe, if it were unproductive of evil consequences?

F. You mean, would there be moral evil, if there were no natural evil arising out of it?

C. I do.

F. I allow that all moral evil tends to natural evil, as disorder in the animal frame tends to pain and misery; but we do not usually consider the effect of a thing as the reason of its existence. Instead of saying it is wrong because it tends to misery; I should say, it tends to misery because it is wrong.

C. What idea do you affix to right and wrong distinct from that of its good or evil tendency?

* "*Sentiments proper to the Present Crisis*," by the Rev. R. Hall, delivered on occasion of the general fast in 1803.

F. That which is in itself *fit* or *unfit*, or which agrees or disagrees with the relations we sustain to other beings, whether Creator or creatures. Thus it is commanded: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is *right*."

C. Yes, it is "right;" but its being so, I conceive, arises from its tendency to render the universe happy.

F. Then it has no excellency *in itself*, but merely a *relative* one. Will you say that, because moral good tends to general happiness, therefore it must needs be what it is on that account?

C. What if I were to affirm this?

F. By the same mode of reasoning I might affirm that truth would not be true if it were not an object of utility; and, as the first of all truths is the existence of God, that God would not exist, if it were not for the advantage of the creation that he should exist.

C. This consequence is certainly inadmissible; but I can hardly see how you make it out.

F. Try it again. If moral good be moral good because it tends to general happiness, why is not truth true because it is of utility?

But further, An action may tend to natural good, though it be performed from the worst of motives, as the relieving of the needy, from ambition; yet with such a motive there is no moral good in it. If therefore you will maintain your present position, you must give up all purity of motive as essential to morality; and maintain, with Volney, that *intention* is nothing. You will also find your opinion largely defended by Hume, who has written a treatise to prove that all virtue arises from its *utility*; and that, as "broad shoulders and taper legs are useful, they are to be reckoned among the virtues!" I hope you will not be elated with your company.

THE GREAT AIM OF LIFE.

TRUE religion is a narrow way. We are in danger of missing it, not only in *what* we do, but in the end for which, or *why* we do it. The apostle had been dissuading the Corinthians, in the tenth chapter of his first epistle to them, from eating things sacrificed to idols, lest it should hurt the consciences of others, and concludes his discourse in striking language: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;" as though he would lay down the principle, *In our most simple and ordinary concerns we must never lose sight of God, but do whatsoever we do to his glory*. This important truth I shall endeavour to illustrate and enforce.

The glory of God is either essential or declarative; either what he is in himself, or what he is in the account of others. Nothing we do can have any influence on the former, but much on the latter. "Our iniquity cannot injure, nor our righteousness profit him." Job xxxv. 8. To do what we do to his glory, therefore, is to act with a view of raising his character, and promoting his cause in the esteem of all around us. The love of God will naturally lead us to promote his declarative glory in the whole tenor of our lives. Love towards a needy object will prompt us to communicate to his wants; but towards an object incapable of being benefited by us, it will lead us to ascribe to him his native excellences and glory, and to raise his reputation in the esteem of those around us.

The most ordinary actions of our lives require to be done to the glory of God. Every action in a rational being must have an end; and this end is

either good or evil. If there were any actions which might be considered as absolutely, indifferent, and in which it were allowed to leave out God, they must be such as eating, drinking, &c.; but these have an end, which is either God, or self as his rival. Some may say, "We eat and drink for *refreshment*, no doubt." True, this is, and may be your immediate object; but wherefore do you wish to be refreshed? If for any other ultimate end than that you may serve the Lord and do good in your generation, you in so doing live to yourself, rather than to him who died for us and rose again. If we eat and drink for *mere* self-indulgence, our table will prove our snare. *Labour*, too, and all kinds of *business*, must be pursued to the same end with eating and drinking. The acquisition of property is very natural, and if desired for the sake of serving the Lord, and doing good in our generation, it is lawful; but if that we may consume it upon our lusts, it is sinful. Jas. iv. 3; Deut. xxxi. 21. It is natural, too, for parents to lay up for their children, and if it be accompanied with a desire that our children and all they possess may be devoted to the Lord, it appears to me lawful. I am aware that some do not consider it so, but Paul's allusion to it in his second epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xii. 14, seems sufficient to justify it; and our Lord's prohibition in his sermon on the mount, Matt. vi. 19, regards *selfish* laying up only; and if we do so that our children may be great in the world, it is sinful.

If the most ordinary actions require this reference to the glory of God, much more do those of a religious nature. Jer. iv. 1-3. Prayer, praise, preaching, hearing the gospel, alms-giving—all, if done to a right end, are acceptable to God; but if God be left out of them, instead of being pleasing, they must be offensive to him.

If the foregoing observations are just, two things will follow: *first*, that the nature and boundaries of good and evil are determined by the *intention or end*, at which we aim. It has been said, that "the difference between good and evil consists in *degree*; or that the same things which in one degree are lawful, in another degree are sinful; as eating and drinking in moderation are lawful, but in excess sinful; the acquisition of property in one degree is commendable industry, in another covetousness; the love of praise in one degree is commendable emulation, in another pride." This is plausible, but in my apprehension not just. It is incredible that good and evil, with which salvation and damnation stand connected, should be alike in nature, and differ only in degree; and that the difference between them should be of such a kind, that it is impossible to say with certainty where the one ends and the other begins. It is not the *degree*, but the *end*, that determines the good or evil of the action. Neither emulation, in this sense, nor the desire of property, if to consume it upon our lusts, are lawful *in any degree*; and if we eat and drink, even in moderation, without regard to the glory of God, it becomes sinful. *Secondly*, the end we have habitually in view, not only determines the nature of our actions, but the state and *character* which we sustain in the sight of God. Here is often the main difference between good and bad men. There may be so many defects in the one, and so much apparent good in the other, that to human judgment they may be nearly alike. Yet the one may be serving God, the other himself. It is an important thing that our end or intentions be pure. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil," or diseased, "thy whole body shall be full of darkness."

The subject may be enforced by weighty considerations. Such, as to pursue this end, is fit and right. God's glory is worthy of being our ultimate end. Rev. v. 13, 14. He is worthy in himself, and for what he has done for us. It is the only return, too, that he asks for all his love and

mercy. 1 Cor. vi. 20. "Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God;" and again, 2 Cor. v. 15, "He died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them." To pursue this end is to pursue the general good, and to promote universal happiness. Wherefore is the world so full of misery? Because all seek their own; therefore all are at variance. If all loved God supremely, they would love each other for his sake, and be happy. To pursue this end is to pursue our own good, which is not only included in the general good, but hath a special promise; "them that honour me I will honour." To pursue this end is the most effectual preservative from the abuse of mercies. If we eat and drink that we may be strengthened to serve the Lord, and to do good in our generation, such an object in view would be sure to preserve us from intemperance, immoderation, and excess. And if we keep this end in view we shall not be hindered in religion, but rather assisted by the necessary cares and avocations of life. Let us but serve the Lord *in* them, and we shall never be out of the path of duty. Worldly business, and stated and occasional devotions, instead of clashing with each other, would then form one beautiful whole. Why is it that prayer and other religious duties are driven into a corner by worldly business? Because in that business we lose sight of God, and serve ourselves. It is the service of *God and mammon*, and not the different parts of God's service, which are at variance.

Some persons will object, "How can we be always thinking of God in our worldly pursuits?" It is not necessary in glorifying God, that God should always be the *direct* and *immediate* object of your thoughts; but if you LOVE him supremely, this love will have an influence, whether you perceive it or not, upon the whole tenor of your life. A virtuous woman who loves her husband may not always be directly thinking of pleasing and honouring him; but such love, like the blood in the human body, which runs through every vein, will influence every action. If she reflect on the operations of her mind, she will perceive that not only in her daily business, she has his accommodation in view, but even in all the little ornaments of dress, and in all the turns of conversation and deportment, her habitual study and delight is to render herself agreeable to him. Nothing but love, supreme love, is necessary, "that whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we do all to the glory of God."

CREDULITY AND DISINGENUOUSNESS OF UNBELIEF.

AN old man who travelled the country as a philosophical lecturer was one evening entertaining his audience, which consisted chiefly of young people, by attempting to account for that famous pile of stones near Salisbury, commonly called Stonehenge. He supposed it might have been a temple; whether Saxon, Roman, or British, he did not say. Indeed his ideas seem to have gone far beyond every period of history with which we are acquainted. The principal thing on which he insisted was its being used for viewing the heavenly bodies; and from this part of his hypothesis he drew some very singular conclusions. The structure, he supposed, originally faced the south; but that the points themselves, in a great number of years, change their positions; and as Stonehenge did not now face the south, he concluded it was owing to this cause, and that from hence we might calculate how long it had been erected. By the mode of calculation which he adopted, it was easy to perceive that in his account it must have existed 270,000 years! It

is true, he did not proceed so far as to draw the conclusion, as that might have excited prejudices against what he had further to advance; but the thing itself was plainly understood by the company.

In his course of lectures he also made mention of some very ancient writings, found in the Sanscrit language, and brought to light by Sir William Jones, in which mention was made of *this country*, as a kind of sacred place, to which pilgrimages were made in those very early ages; and, if I am accurate in my recollection, he supposed Stonehenge might be a place of such resort.

Lately, looking into Vol. III. of the Asiatic Dissertations, I found something which reminded me of the old lecturer's assertion. It was a dissertation of Lieut. Wilford's, "On Egypt and the Nile, from the ancient books of the Hindoos." I here found that the Puranas, or historic poems of the Hindoos, made mention of "the sacred western islands," as a place to which pilgrims in those early ages had been used to resort. "Many brahmins indeed assert," adds Lieut. Wilford, "that a great intercourse anciently subsisted between India and countries in the west; and, as far as I have examined their sacred books, to which they appeal as their evidence, I strongly incline to believe their assertion."

Thus far the supposition of our philosopher seems to be confirmed. The reader may suppose that I now felt a desire to ascertain, if possible, the *antiquity* of the Puranas. Surely, thought I, they are not 270,000 years old! On inquiry, I soon perceived that they must have been written *since* the time of the flood, by the manifest reference which they make to Noah and his three sons. The following translation by Sir William Jones, and which he declares to be minutely exact, though in the hands of the readers of the Asiatic Dissertations, may be new to many others, and will serve to show that Indian literature, instead of weakening the authority of Scripture, tends rather to confirm it.

FROM THE PADMA PURAN.

"To *Satyavarman*, that sovereign of the *whole* earth, were born three sons: the eldest *Sherma*, then *C'harma*, and thirdly *Jyapeti* by name. They were all men of good morals, excellent in virtue and virtuous deeds; skilled in the use of weapons to strike with, or to be thrown; brave men, eager for victory in battle. But *Satyavarman* being continually delighted with devout meditation, and seeing his sons fit for dominion, laid upon them the burden of government. Whilst he remained honouring and satisfying the gods, and priests, and kine, one day, by the act of destiny, the king having drunk mead became senseless, and lay asleep naked. Then was he seen by *C'harma*, and by him were his two brothers called—To whom he said, What has now befallen? In what state is this our sire? By those two was he hidden with clothes, and called to his senses again and again.

"Having recovered his intellect, and perfectly knowing what had passed, he cursed *C'harma*, saying, Thou shalt be the servant of servants. And since thou wast a laugher in their presence, from laughter shalt thou acquire a name.* Then he gave to *Sherma* the wide domain on the south of the snowy mountains. And to *Jyapeti* he gave all the north of the snowy mountains; but he by the power of religious contemplation attained supreme bliss.†

I will only add a part of the eulogium on the life and writings of Sir

* They say he was nicknamed *Hasyasila*, or the Laugher; and his descendants were called, from him, *Hasyasilas*. By the descendants of *C'harma*, they understood, says Lieut. Wilford, the *African Negroes*.—Asiatic Diss. Vol. III. pp. 90, 91.

† Asiatic Dissertations, Vol. III. p. 262.

William Jones, by the Right Hon. Lord Teignmouth, in his address to the Asiatic Society.

"He professed his conviction of the truth of the Christian religion, and justly deemed it no inconsiderable advantage that his researches had corroborated and multiplied evidences of revelation, by confirming the Mosaic account of the primitive world. We all recollect, and can refer to the following sentiments in his eighth anniversary discourse:—'Theological inquiries are no part of my present subject; but I cannot refrain from adding that the collection of tracts which we call, from their excellence, the Scriptures, contain, independently of a Divine origin, more true sublimity, more important history, and finer strains both of poetry and eloquence, than could be collected within the same compass from all other books that were ever composed in any age, or in any language. The two parts of which the Scriptures consist are connected by a chain of compositions which bear no resemblance in form or style to any that can be produced from the stores of Grecian, Italian, Persian, or even Arabic learning. The antiquity of those compositions no man doubts, and the unrestrained application of them to events long subsequent to their publication is a solid ground of belief that they were genuine predictions, and consequently inspired.'"

The old lecturer's desire of introducing the Asiatic Researches, in a way unfriendly to the Scriptures, reminds us of the wish of a certain jealous king, and of his dealing with "the wise men of the east" in order to obtain it. The wise men of the east, it seems, are not to be drawn into such measures. Their business is to *do homage to the Messiah*, and not to join with his murderers.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GLASGOW MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

[A letter to Mr. H. Muir, Glasgow.]

DEAR SIR,

I greatly rejoice in the establishment of your Society. If many were formed, there would be no need of any apology to those which are formed already. There is work enough for us all. The harvest truly is great, and I heartily wish you success.

If the exertions of our Society have contributed to excite the public spirit which now prevails through the kingdom, it is no small reward. We have found the undertaking particularly useful in uniting and quickening us in religion; and I trust it will produce similar effects among Christians in general. Where no object of magnitude attracts our regard, we are apt to pore on our own miseries; and where nothing exists as an object in which we may all unite, we are apt to turn our attention chiefly to those things in which we differ. It is well for ourselves, therefore, to be engaged in some arduous undertaking which shall interest our hearts, bring us into contact with one another, and cause us to feel that we are brethren.

As to your questions, our experience you know is but small. It is little more than three years since we began, and only two missions have yet been undertaken; what I have observed, however, I shall with the utmost freedom communicate. You ask—

First, "What are the requisite talents and character of a missionary?" As to *talents*, there is a considerable difference to be made betwixt a principal and an assistant in any mission. In every mission I conceive there should

be one person at least of a clear head, calm, cool, enterprising, prudent, and persevering; and as it will be an object of the first importance in due time to translate the Scriptures, it would be well for him to have some knowledge of languages. But as to others who may accompany him, no great talents are necessary; a warm heart for Christ, an ardent love to the souls of poor heathens, an upright character, and a decent share of common sense, are sufficient. No man is fit to be sent, in my judgment, either as a principal or an assistant, who does not possess a peculiar desire after the work; such a desire as would render him unhappy in any other employment. I do not mean to plead for enthusiastical impressions; yet an impression there must be, and an abiding one too, that all the fatigues, disappointments, non-success, and discouragements of such an undertaking shall not be able to efface. When God has had any extraordinary work to perform, it has been his practice to raise up suitable instruments, and to impress their minds with suitable views and desires. The wall of Jerusalem needed rebuilding, and God put it into the heart of Nehemiah to go and build it. It was this particular desire which God put into his heart which enabled him to encounter difficulties and surmount obstructions at which ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have fainted. When the second temple was to be built, God stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel and of Joshua. It is not every person however who may possess a desire to be a missionary who ought to be accepted. You will probably find many during this great stir who will offer themselves to go, but whose desire upon examination will be found to have originated in a dissatisfaction with something at home. They dislike the politics of their country, and therefore wish to leave it; or they have been chagrined by disappointment in civil and worldly affairs; or they are vain, and conceive it to be a fine thing to attract the attention and bear a commission from thousands; or they are idle, and wish to ramble up and down the world; or inconsiderate, and have not properly counted the cost. Even ministers will be found who are unacceptable at home, and therefore desire to change their situation. But none of these motives will bear. It is true, every one who was discontented, distressed, or in debt, gathered themselves to David; and they might answer his purpose, but not ours. A pure, disinterested, ardent desire to serve the Lord in this work is the one thing needful. When we perceive such desire in a candidate, and he voluntarily offers, or in some way discovers his inclination, we then make inquiry what is his general Christian character. Is he upright, modest, benevolent, prudent, patient? if so, we are satisfied.—You ask—

Secondly, "What is the best mode of introducing him and the subject of his mission to the heathen?"

We at present think it best not to send them in large *companies*, but *two and two*, unless they have wives and children, who, of course, would go with them; partly because we wish to make no *parade*, but to go on in a course of silent activity, that in case of disappointments and disasters, which we ought to lay our account with, the work may not sink in the general estimation; and partly because we wish them to be convinced at the outset that we have no hostile intentions towards them; and this cannot be done so effectually as by going and throwing ourselves upon their generosity. A large company might excite alarm; but two or three people going into the midst of them, putting their lives into their hand, would ordinarily have a contrary effect. The extent of the British trade is such that we cannot fail of a passage, by merchant ships, to almost any part of the world. Carey and Thomas, and their families, kept up worship in the ship, though surrounded with infidels and profane people; and an infidel who went with them, and is since returned, has said, "If ever there was a good man in the world,

Carey was one." As to the mode of introducing the subject of their mission, that must be according to circumstances. In Hindostan they have an advantage in Mr. Thomas having been first. His method was to go into a town or village. The sight of a European, walking up and down, would excite as much attention among them as a Turk would among us. He would single out some intelligent looking person, and begin to ask him questions. This would draw others round them; he would then, having the whole village of 400 or 500 people, talk to them, ask them questions, show the evil of idolatry, convict them of sin, and introduce the Saviour. In Africa, all round the Sierra Leone colony, the natives want English people to teach their children to read, write, &c. We therefore direct our missionaries to that country to go to the colony, and get recommended to the natives, first as schoolmasters; and while they taught the children to read, write, &c., to teach the parents, as well as the children, Christianity.

Were I to go into a country where no Europeans were to be found, I would go immediately among the natives, and, by signs, convince them that I wished to cast in my lot with them. I would watch the names they gave to things, and write them down as they occurred. Thus a vocabulary would rapidly advance: while thus learning their language, I would live as they lived, and conform to their manners in all lawful things: when they revelled, or sacrificed to their idols, I would stand aloof, and, by my nonconformity, silently reprove them. When I sufficiently understood their language, I would tell them there was a God in heaven—that I was a worshipper and servant of him—that idolatry, and all iniquity, was hateful in his sight—that there was an hereafter, when these things would be brought into account—that, from the love I bore to him and them, I had come amongst them to tell them of these things—that God, in love to sinners, had sent his Son to die, &c., and now commanded all men, every where, to repent; that he was able and willing to save all that returned to God by him; and that all others would everlastingly perish, &c.

And now, dear sir, I must conclude. As I am going out to-morrow, for some days, I thought I would answer your letter now, and that of your friend when it arrives. Whether my answer be in point, so as to meet your difficulties, I cannot tell; but I have suggested what appeared best to me.

Remember me affectionately to your Society. I shall be happy at any time to hear from you, and to communicate any thing in my power. I lately received a letter and a handsome donation from a Mr. David Dale of your city. Remember me affectionately to him. I am, dear sir, with cordial esteem, yours in our common Lord.

A. F.

IMPORTANCE OF A LIVELY FAITH,

ESPECIALLY IN MISSIONARY UNDERTAKINGS.

[Written in 1799.]

I HAVE been a good deal impressed with a persuasion that in our missionary undertakings, both at home and abroad, we shall not be remarkably successful, unless we enter deeply into the spirit of the primitive Christians; particularly with respect to faith in the Divine promises. I am apprehensive that we are all deficient in this grace, and therefore presume that a few hints on the subject may not be unseasonable.

When Israel went out of Egypt, they greatly rejoiced on the shores of the Red Sea; but the greater part of them entered not into the Promised Land, and that on account of their unbelief. The resemblance between their case and ours has struck my mind with considerable force. The grand *object* of their undertaking was to root out idolatry, and to establish the knowledge and worship of the one living and true God; and such also is ours. The *authority* on which they acted was the sovereign command of Heaven; and ours is the same. "Go preach the gospel to every creature." The *ground* on which they were to rest their hope of success was the Divine promise. It was by relying on this alone that they were enabled to surmount difficulties, and to encounter their gigantic enemies. Those among them who believed, like Joshua and Caleb, felt themselves well able to go up; but they that distrusted the promise turned their backs in the hour of danger. Such also is the ground of our hope. He who hath commissioned us to "teach all nations" hath added, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." The heathen nations are given to our Redeemer for an inheritance, as much as Canaan was given to the seed of Abraham; and it is our business, as it was theirs, to go up and possess the land. We should lay our account with difficulties as well as they; but, according to our faith in the Divine promises, we may expect these mountains to become a plain. If the Lord delight in us, he will bring us into the land; but if, like the unbelieving Israelites, we make light of the promised good, or magnify the difficulties in the way of obtaining it, and so relax our efforts, we may expect to die as it were in the wilderness.

It is true, there are some differences between their case and ours; but they are wholly in our favour. We are not, like them, going to possess countries for ourselves, but for Christ. They went armed with the temporal sword, we with the sword of the Spirit; they were commissioned in justice to destroy men's lives, we in mercy to save their souls; they sought not them but theirs, we seek not theirs but them. Now by how much our cause exceeds theirs in the magnitude and beneficence of its object, by so much the more shall we incur the frowns of Heaven, if we fail of accomplishing it through unbelief.

On a certain occasion "the disciples said unto the Lord, Increase our faith;" and it is worth while to consider what that occasion was, Luke xvii. 3-6. There was a hard duty enjoined, to forgive lamented injuries, even though committed seven times a day. The apostles very properly turn the injunction into a petition, praying for great grace to enable them to discharge so difficult a duty. They said unto the Lord, "Increase our faith." But why ask for an increase of faith? Possibly *we* might have said, Lord, increase our love, our self-denial, our patience. Asking for an increase of faith was asking for an increase of every other grace; this being a kind of first wheel that sets the rest in motion. Our Lord's answer intimates that they had chosen a right petition; for faith, even in a small degree, will enable us to surmount great difficulties—difficulties the surmounting of which is as the removal of mountains. The passage, taken in its connexion, teaches us *the efficacy of faith in discharging duties, and surmounting difficulties.*

Where there is no faith in the truths and promises of the gospel, there is no heart for duty; and where it is very low and defective in its exercises, there is but little spiritual activity. If a good man be entangled in sceptical doubts respecting the truth of the gospel, or any of its leading doctrines, he will, during that time, be not only unhappy in his own mind, but of little use to others. He admits that God used in former ages to hear the prayers and succeed the labours of his servants, and that there will be times in which

great things will again be wrought for the church. But of late, and especially in the present age, he imagines we are not to expect any thing remarkable. This is no other than a spice of that atheistical spirit which said, "The Lord hath forsaken the earth, he regardeth not man;" the effect of which is an indifference to every exercise and enterprise of a religious nature. Faith operates as a stimulus, unbelief as a palsy.

If faith in Divine truths and promises be low, though we should be drawn in with others to engage in religious enterprises, yet we shall not follow them up with ardent prayer, or look for the blessing of God with that earnest expectation which generally precedes the bestowment of it. Instead of forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, we shall be in danger of resting satisfied in present attainments, and so of losing the things which we have wrought, for want of following up the work to which we have set our hands.

All the great things that have been wrought in the church of God have been accomplished by this principle. It was by *faith* that the worthies "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and put to flight the armies of the aliens." It was by *faith* that the apostles and primitive Christians went forth as sheep among wolves, and, at the expense of all that was dear to them on earth, carried the gospel into all nations. Wherever they went they were previously persuaded that they should go in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ; and it was so. God always caused them to triumph in Christ, and made manifest the savour of his knowledge by them in every place. Could we but imbibe this spirit, surely we should be able, in some good degree, to say so too. "Believe in the Lord our God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper."

But why is it that God should thus honour the exercise of faith? Is it not because faith is a grace that peculiarly honours him? We cannot do greater dishonour to a person of kind and generous intentions than by thinking very ill of him, and acting towards him on the ground of such evil thoughts. It was thus that the slothful servant thought and acted towards his lord. On the other hand, we cannot do greater honour to a character of the above description than by thinking well of him, and placing the most unreserved confidence in all he says. Any man who had a just regard to honour would in such a case feel a strong inducement to answer the expectations which were entertained of him. And God himself hath condescended to intimate something like the same thing. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." In believing his word we think well of him, and he takes pleasure in answering such expectations; proving thereby that we have thought justly concerning him. It was on this principle that our Lord usually conferred the blessings of miraculous healing, in answer to the faith of the patient, or of those that accompanied him. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. According to your faith be it unto you."

INFINITE EVIL OF SIN.

1. Is not the whole that is meant by the infinite evil of sin, that, on account of the Object against whom it is committed, it is so great an evil as to involve consequences without end?—2. Is not the whole that is meant by the infinite value of Christ's sufferings, that, on account of the dignity of the sufferer, they also involve in them consequences without end?—3. Is not the former of these questions consistent with different degrees of guilt, and consequently of punishment in the sinner; and the latter with a finite degree of suffering in the Saviour?—4. Does not the merit of obedience sink, and the demerit of disobedience rise, according to the excellency of the Object?

THE LEPER.

[A Memorandum, June 30, 1798.]

WE sinners in this world are as lepers in a "several house." The great High Priest from above has deigned, and still deigns, to visit us. Happy will it be for us if, during his visitations, we are purified from our uncleanness. If so, we shall be reunited to the society of the blessed; but if otherwise, if we die in impenitence and unbelief, what is said of the confirmed leper will be true of us,—without the camp must our habitation be!

THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

[An original letter.]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Kettering, Aug. 25, 1805.

I RECEIVED yours yesterday, and, though my hands are full, I must write you a few thoughts on the Lord's day. Your views on that subject, I am persuaded, are injurious to your soul, and to the souls of many more in ——. It is one of those consequences which arise from an extreme attention to *instituted* worship, to the neglect of what is *moral*. If the keeping of a *sabbath* to God were not in all ages binding, why is it introduced in the moral law, and founded upon God's resting from his works. If it were merely a Jewish ceremonial, why do we read of time being divided by *weeks* before the law? There was a day in the time of John the apostle which the Lord called *his own*; and as you do not suppose this to be the seventh, (for, if it were, we ought still to keep it,) you must allow it to be the first. The first day then ought to be kept as the *Lord's own* day, and we ought not to think our own thoughts, converse on our own affairs, nor follow our own business on it. To say, as you do, that we must not eat our own supper on that day is requiring what never was required on the Jewish sabbath. *Necessary* things were always allowed. Nor did my argument from 1 Cor. xi. suppose this. The argument was—the ordinance of breaking bread being called the *Lord's* supper proved that they ought not to eat their own supper *while eating that* supper; therefore the first day being called the *Lord's* day proves we ought not to follow our own unnecessary concerns *while that continues*, but to

devote it to the Lord, and this is a moral duty—that, whatever day we keep, we keep it *to the Lord*.

Your notions of instituted worship, to the overlooking of what is moral, I am persuaded have injured you as to family worship and family government. It is not said of Abraham that God gave him a special precept about commanding “his household after him,” but knew him that he would do it. It was one of those things, and so is the other, of which it might be said, “Ye need not that I write this unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to do these.”

But allowing your argument, that there is no sin in attending to worldly things on the Lord’s day, yet, according to Paul’s reasoning in 1 Cor. viii., you ought to refrain. You cause others to offend God by breaking what they consider a divine commandment. And the reasoning of Paul in chap. viii. 8, applies to you: If you do these things you are not the better, and if you abstained you would not be the worse. Do you not hereby sin against Christ, and wound those whom you account your weaker brethren? You must also have done harm to your son, and to the waiters at the inn. Reckon me if you please a weak brother. But so fully convinced am I of the inviolable obligation of keeping a day *to the Lord*, that if I had seen what I did on the Lord’s day morning, it would have marred all my comfort at the Lord’s supper, and I know not that I could have there united with you. I write not because I love you not, but the reverse . . . but alas! the taint of your old principles I fear will remain . . . Oh that they did not!

My dear friend, I see in you so much to love that I cannot but long to see more; and particularly to see that *old leaven* purged out. “The knowledge of the *holy* is understanding.” It is this sort of leaven that makes those few Baptists at —— afraid to unite with many of your Baptists; and I cannot but approve of their conduct. They would unite with any individual who comes to them and gives satisfactory evidence of his Christianity, and of his Christian walk; but if they unite with Baptists by whole companies, they are ruined. I was told at —— that the way in which the Baptists in Mr. ——’s connexion take in members was by merely requiring an account of their faith, that is, a creed, and not of the influence of truth upon their own mind. The consequence is, as might be expected, great numbers of them are men of no personal godliness, but mere speculatists. Churches formed on such principles must (like what I have heard of many —— societies) sink into nothing, or worse than nothing, mere worldly communities, a sort of free-masons’ lodges. My dear friend, flee from the remains of such religion! I mean no reflection upon individuals. I trust Mr. —— is a good man; and I have been told his church is in the main one of the best: but, on such a principle, it cannot stand. Affectionately yours, A. F.

PICTURE OF AN ANTINOMIAN.

UNDERSTANDING that a certain preacher, who was reported to be more than ordinarily evangelical, was to deliver a sermon in the town where I reside, and hearing some of my neighbours talk of going to hear “the gospel,” I resolved to go too. I thought that I loved the gospel, and felt a concern for my neighbours’ welfare: I wished therefore to observe, and form the best judgment I could of what it was to which they applied with such an emphasis that revered name.

I arrived, I believe unobserved, just after the naming of the text; and

staid, though with some difficulty, till the discourse was ended. I pass over what relates to manner, and also much whimsical interpretation of Scripture; and shall now confine my remarks to the substance and drift of the discourse.

There were a few good things delivered, which, as they are stated in the Bible, are the support and joy of pious minds. I thought I could see how these things might please the *real* Christian, though, on account of the confused manner of their being introduced, not the *judicious* Christian. Pious people enjoy the good things they hear, and, being thus employed, they attend not to what is erroneous; or, if they hear the words, let them go as points which they do not understand, but which they think the wiser preacher and hearers do.

I cannot give you the plan of the sermon, for the preacher appeared not to have had one. I recollect however, in the course of his harangue, the following things.—“Some men will tell you,” said he, “that it is the duty of men to believe in Christ. These men say that you must get Christ, get grace, and that of yourselves; convert yourselves, make yourselves new creatures, get the Holy Spirit yourselves,” &c. Here he went on with an abundance of misrepresentation and slander, too foul to be repeated.

He asserted with the highest tone of confidence I ever heard in any place, much less in a pulpit, his own *saintship*; loudly and repeatedly declaiming to this effect—“I must go to glory—I cannot be lost—I am as safe as Christ—all devils, all sins cannot hurt me!” In short, he preached himself, not Christ Jesus the Lord. He was his own theme, I believe, throughout one half at least of his sermon. He went over what he called his *experience*, but seemed to shun the dark part of it; and the whole tended to proclaim what a wonderful man he was. Little of Christ could be seen: he himself stood before him: and when his name did occur, I was shocked at the dishonour which appeared to be cast upon him.

All accurate distinction of character, such as is constantly maintained in the Scriptures, vanished before his vociferation. The audience was harangued in a way which left each one to suppose himself included among the blessed. This confusion of character was the ground on which he stood exclaiming, “I am saved—I am in Christ—I cannot be lost—sins and devils may surround me, but, though I fall and sin, I am safe—Christ cannot let me go—lusts and corruptions may overwhelm me in filth and pollution, as a sea rolling over my head; but all this does not, cannot affect the new man—the new nature is not touched or sullied by this: it cannot sin, because it is born of God—I stand amidst this overwhelming sea unhurt.” All this the hearers were told in substance, and persuaded to adopt; and it was sin and unbelief not to do so!

The whole was interspersed with levity, low wit, and great irreverence. On the most solemn subjects of “hell, devils, and damnation,” he raved like a Billingsgate or blasphemer. On the adorable and amazing names of the ever-blessed God, he rallied and sported with such lightness and rant as was truly shocking. This was especially the case in his repeating the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light; let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” The manner in which the sacred name was here used was highly profane and impious.

On returning from the place, I was affected with the delusion by which some of my neighbours were borne away, crying up the preacher as an oracle, “a bold defender of the gospel.” To me his words appear to answer with great exactness to what is called, by the apostle to Timothy, “profane and vain babbling;” and which, from an accurate observation, Paul declared

"would increase unto more ungodliness; and would eat as doth a canker," or gangrene.

Need I ask, Can this be true religion? The effects which it produces, both on individuals and on societies, sufficiently ascertain its nature. It was and is affecting to me to think what a state the world is in; so few making any profession of serious religion, and so few of those that do who have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil. To think of Christian congregations who have heard the word of truth for a number of years being carried away with such preaching as this, is humiliating and distressing to a reflecting mind. Alas, how easily men are imposed upon in their eternal concerns! It is not so with them in other things; but here the grossest imposture will go down with applause. Yet why do I thus speak? "There must needs be heresies, that they who are approved may be made manifest."

SERMONS.*

THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL.

[Preached at the Tabernacle, Norwich, June 28, 1810.]

“But the word of God grew and multiplied.”—Acts xii. 24.

WE, who live in times in which we are protected by wholesome laws, cannot form an adequate idea of the church in times of persecution. From the earliest period when the Gospel began to be published, the wrath of man was kindled against it. Peter had not commenced his attack on Satan's kingdom many days, before the members of that kingdom began to be stirred up to oppose him. You presently find Peter and John cast into prison; James is killed with the sword; and Saul of Tarsus receives a commission from the chief priests to go hither and thither, persecuting that way unto the death. Yet amidst all this opposition we see the word of God prospering. We find the wall of Zion is built in troublous times. The Lord prospers his word, and that by the very means that the enemies make use of in order to impede the work. For we read that those who were scattered abroad by the persecution of Stephen, went everywhere preaching the gospel. Satan therefore seems to have overrated the business. He resembled one who should have put out a fire, but who in doing it, scattered it over the city, and thereby set the city itself on fire. The very method he took to crush the Saviour's cause, only tended to spread it the wider, both in the Jewish and the heathen world.

Herod, because he saw that his opposition pleased the Jews, stretched forth his hand, and thought to have slain Peter. But God overruled all his opposition for good. The next news you hear is, that Herod, in the height of blasphemy, is smitten by the anger of God, and dies. But—mark the connexion of the passage I have read—“but the word of God grew and multiplied.” This connexion suggests to us at least these two ideas:—

First, that the word of God *lives*, and will *outlive* all its enemies. Herod is dead, and is eaten of worms; but the word of the Lord will grow and multiply. Were we to take a view of the various enemies who have set themselves against the Lord and against his Christ, what has become of them—the great body of them? They have been eaten of worms, and have died. Where are the ancient persecutors? Dioclesian, and others, who murdered the saints and servants of God by myriads? Where are they? dead, and eaten of worms. But that word of God which they opposed, grows and multiplies. And where are the Bonners and men of kindred spirit of later ages? Where are those who have set themselves against the Gospel? The Bolingbrokes, the Humes, and the Voltaires,—where are they? Dead, and eaten of worms. But the word of God, against which

* The two Sermons here introduced, neither of which have yet been included in Mr. Fuller's Works, have come from England into my possession, since the first volume was printed off. I am sure that the reader will pardon the slight irregularity of their appearing in this volume, rather than that they should be altogether omitted.—B.

they set themselves, yet grows and multiplies. Each in his day thought he had done a great deal against the cause of Christ. But that cause goes on, while its enemies have perished. There may be no enemies rise up perhaps so full of venom as those that have gone before: but all shall come to the same end. Each, in his turn shall die and rot, and his memory shall perish. But the word of the Lord shall grow and multiply.

The *second* remark which is afforded by the connexion of the passage, respects the means which God takes to carry on his cause and kingdom in the world. We see in this example, and in the history of these chapters, the various methods God takes in order to accomplish his designs. Here is one man, whose heart is like a boiling caldron, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Lord and his people. God visits him, touches and turns his heart to himself, and instead of being an enemy, he becomes a friend, and preaches the very gospel he had persecuted. See how easy it is for God to turn the tide of events, and thus disconcert the enemy. Well; here is another—Herod. He is busily employed in destroying the cause of God, and he is cut off. The Lord knows how, either by cutting men off, or by turning them to himself, to accomplish his designs, and to cause his word to grow and multiply.

But passing these remarks, I shall inquire first, what is denoted by the word of God, and why it is so called; and secondly observe the description that is given of its progress—that it grows and multiplies.

I. WHAT IS DENOTED BY THE WORD OF GOD, AND WHY IT IS SO CALLED. The holy Scriptures are frequently denominated the word of God, particularly in the Psalms of David. But I apprehend the term is here used in a more specific sense; and that it is expressive strictly of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; that gospel which the apostles were commissioned to go and preach to every creature; that word which had begun to be published at Jerusalem, and was making its progress through the earth, and which Paul and Herod and the chief priests set themselves against. That is the word which is here said to grow and multiply.

But why is the gospel called the word? It is sometimes denominated the word of the truth of the gospel; sometimes the word of reconciliation; sometimes the word of life. It is here emphatically called the word of God. Why, I ask, is the gospel called the word of God? Here we can be at no loss in giving an answer. It is because it is expressive of *the mind or heart of God*. Words are, or should be, expressive of the heart. This word is expressive of God's heart. There is not any expression of his heart equal to it. There are many things pertaining to the works of God which manifest his perfections. The heavens declare his power and goodness; and the firmament sheweth his handy works. The providence of God, and the judgments of God, which have been abroad in all ages, have been expressive of his faithfulness and righteousness. In fact, there are many things which show a part of the Divine character. *Here* all the rays of Divinity meet together, and concentrate in a focus. Here they form one general blaze. There is not an attribute in the Divine nature, or a feature in his character, but what is expressed in the gospel of salvation, in the gospel of the Son of God. This is, in a peculiar sense, called his word, because it is expressive of his whole heart. And I might say it is expressive of his *final decision*. It is God's *last* mind. There are many things expressive of the mind of God, but not of his final decision. For instance, the holy law of God is expressive of his holiness, and of his mind in part; and the curses of that law are expressive of his displeasure against sin, and so far they are expressive of the mind or heart of God. But they do not express his final decision; because a sinner may be under the curse of the

law, and yet that curse, by his fleeing to the Hope set before him in the gospel, may be removed, and turned into a blessing. The curse of God's law is not irrevocable. But the curse of the Saviour on him that persists in unbelief is, seeing he rejects the only name given under heaven among men whereby he can be saved. The gospel, therefore, runs in this language,—“Go ye and preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” There is no more hope, no other way, no other name. It is God's last decision. It is the final resolve of the eternal Jehovah. So that he who rejects it, rejects the only way of salvation, and shall inevitably perish. Considering these things, you feel, I trust, the peculiar propriety of denominating it the word of God. We proceed

II. TO NOTICE WHAT IS SAID RESPECTING ITS PROGRESS.—It is said to grow and multiply. These terms may be said to be near akin, and indeed they are so; yet they do not convey precisely the same ideas. They both denote increase; but the *first* is increase in size; the *last* in number. For instance—a corn of wheat, or of any other grain, cast into the earth, springs up and grows. You perceive first the blade, then the stem, then the ear, and at last the full corn in the ear. This is growth. But when it is arrived at maturity, it scatters its seeds around; and instead of *one*, a hundred spring up. This is multiplying. In short, growth is expressive of the progress of the gospel in the *minds* of believers, multiplying of an increase of the *number* of believers. The first is expressive of the kingdom of God in the mind of an individual, the last of its spreading in the world. In both senses it might be truly said, the word of the Lord grew and multiplied. It grew in the minds of those who had imbibed it, and was received by thousands who had lived before in unbelief.

When may it be said that the word of the Lord *grows* in us? That is a serious question, and a question which deeply concerns you and me, and all that have professedly embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. Well; I may say then, that the word of the Lord may be said to grow in us, when there is an increasing evidence in the mind of its truth—increasing attachment to its excellence—and increasing conformity to its spirit. The word of the Lord in itself is immutable; it is the same as it always was, and cannot be said to grow. The gospel is, like its divine Author, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. But viewed as taking root in the mind of a believer, it is capable of growth, and must continue to grow. The word that Jesus Christ imparts must be in us as a well of living water, springing up to everlasting life.

There is such a thing as *increasing evidence of the truth of it*. I need only appeal to the experience of every advanced Christian; of every one that has walked in the ways of God for a series of years. Perhaps you believe the same truths you did thirty years ago; but you believe them on very different grounds. You feel the ground on which you stand much more solid. You little more than said you believed at the outset; but now you feel a variety of different evidences; so that you can truly say the more you read, and the more you think, the more you feel the ground on which you stand, and are enabled to say, O my God, my heart is fixed! The Christian gets more acquainted with the depravity of human nature, as he advances in the divine life. He might years ago believe in the depravity of human nature; but though he may now utter the same words he did then, he will mean very differently. It may mean seven times more than it did. This is the growth of the word in the mind.

It may, moreover, be said to grow, when there is a *growing attachment to its excellence*. There is an excellency in the gospel that is to be found

in nothing else; and the more a Christian drinks into it, the more will he be of the apostle's mind, who says, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Paul was a man of extensive knowledge. The words would have had but little meaning from a man who knew but little else; but Paul knew much in every department, and yet says, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Now this is for the word of the Lord to grow. Is it not thus, Christians, that the more you know of Christ, the better you love him? that the more you know of the gospel, the better you love it, and the more it appears to excel all other knowledge? He that believeth it not, the more he knows of it, the more he hates it. It was so among the Jews: "But now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." An unbeliever, who by Providence is called under the preaching of the gospel, the more he knows of it, the more he feels his heart rising against it: the more he is obliged to have to do with it, the more he feels his enmity excited. But he that believes the gospel, the more he knows of it, the more he loves it, and counts all things but loss for the excellency of that knowledge.

Finally, the word of the Lord may be said to grow in us, when we are gradually *conformed to the spirit of it*. What is true religion? It is to be of God's mind. It is for our thoughts to be as God's thoughts; our mind to be as God's mind; our heart to be as God's heart. If God's heart is manifested by the gospel of his Son, it is for us to embrace that gospel, and to be of that mind; and in proportion as our minds are assimilated into the mind of God, to love what he loves, to hate what he hates, to pursue what he pursues, and the more we become of this spirit, the more the word of the Lord may be said to grow in us. Judge ye whether the word of the Lord has grown in you.

And this is the way God generally causes it to *multiply*. We do not expect wheat, or any other grain, to multiply, till it is grown to individual maturity. We do not expect the word of God to multiply, till Christians are brought in a great degree into a likeness with God. There is an important connexion, I apprehend, between the *growth* and the *multiplying* of the word of God. I do not mean to say that every minister is successful in proportion to his own spirituality. No; there is sovereignty enough in the success, to keep any of us from boasting, and from saying, I am holier than he who is less successful. And yet there is such a connexion between the progress of true religion in the soul and in the world, as to furnish abundant encouragement for us to promote religion in the heart, as the means of promoting public religion. Whenever God has been determined to bless any part of mankind, and to succeed the gospel in any remarkable way, it has always been by raising up men of distinguished personal godliness. When he was pleased to accomplish a great work in the Jewish church, it was by raising up Nehemiah, a man that laboured for the public good without receiving any reward for it. When God had a mind to extend his gospel among the heathen, it was by raising up a Paul; a man so disinterested, that though he was qualified to fill one of the first stations in his day, and might have raised himself to the highest pitch of worldly honour and eminence, as we may conclude from the zeal and ability which he displayed, and his feeling so much at home when pleading before Agrippa, yet he said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord;" and so far from repenting, "I do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in him." Would you see a man that God had raised up in order to spread the gospel in the earth, you would see a man that had his heart full of spirituality. The word grows

in the mind, before it can be expected to grow much in the world. Similar remarks might be made of all the great revivals that have taken place in the world. Witness Luther, and a number of the reformers, to say nothing of characters that are now living. The greatest works of God are carried on by men in whom the word of God first grows: nor is it confined to ministers; but when the Lord was pleased to spread the gospel in the Jewish and heathen world, it was by men among whom the grace of God grew. There is, my brethren, but little expectation of the gospel's spreading, unless there be a spirit of prayer, of holy zeal, of disinterestedness; a willingness in us to lay ourselves out to the uttermost. Whenever we see this, we may hope that the word of the Lord will grow and multiply.

It is remarkable that David viewed things in this order. Personating the church, he says, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; that thy way may be known upon the earth." So that God's ordinary way of blessing the word, of diffusing the gospel, is, by beginning to bless the church that now is; by beginning, as it were, at home: and we have no reason to expect the progress of the gospel among us, or in foreign nations, but as it grows in our own minds. Considering things in this connexion, what encouragement is there to be conversant with the Scriptures; to make religion a business; to be convinced that the word of God may not only have *place* in us, but grow in us, that there may be growing attachment to its excellence, and increasing conformity to its spirit! It was thus that the word of God grew and multiplied in that day; and it will be thus that it will grow through the earth in our days, or in the days of our posterity.

I will close with only one word. It must be planted there, before it can either grow or multiply. Brethren, this is the origin; this is the root!—The word of God must have place in our hearts, else it can neither grow nor multiply. Be it your concern, then, if you have hitherto treated it with levity, to repent, and believe the gospel.

A RIGHT SPIRIT.

[Preached at Ipswich, Sept. 14, 1798.]

"Renew a right spirit within me."—Psalm li. 10.

THERE was no period in David's life, in which he manifested more of the sinner, than in the case of Uriah; nor any in which he manifested more of the saint, than when he penned this psalm.

This was confirmed by the ardent desire he had to be cleansed from his sin. He strongly expresses this desire in the second and seventh verses of this psalm, where he says—"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin:—purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Though David here first alludes to the Jewish rites, no doubt he looked also to the antitype of these, from whom alone such virtues could flow.

There are two other evidences of David's genuine piety. The first is, he was not more desirous of pardon than to be purified and made holy, for he again prays in the tenth verse, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

Another evidence of his genuine contrition was, that while he was so anxious to feel this disposition of mind for his sin, he lost sight of this grace

in himself, though he possessed it; hence he continues his request to God in the following part of this psalm, for the enjoyment of this right spirit. This we may consider as one of the greatest evidences of this grace, that while others can see it, we are insensible to it ourselves. Having made these general observations on the case of David, let us attend to the text. And,

I. It contains a description of genuine religion;

II. It teaches us that we are in danger of losing it; and,

III. It implies the necessity for its being renewed.

I. THE TEXT CONTAINS A DESCRIPTION OF GENUINE RELIGION.—“A right spirit.” A right spirit is a spirit of love to God, and love to our neighbour, and a right disposition to ourselves. A right spirit towards God is a spirit of love to him, a spirit of faith in God, a spirit of gratitude to God, a spirit of submission to God, a spirit of obedience to God, and so of every grace of the Spirit of God. A right spirit is not that of him who has experienced right feelings at a distant period only, but of one who habitually lives in the exercise of them: a *constant* spirit, as expressed in the margin. The term *right* has respect to some rule; this rule is the law of God, which is a right rule—the rule by which the Spirit of God works in the conversion of a sinner: hence he has said, “I will write the law in their hearts;” and as this is the rule by which God works, so it is the rule by which Christians ought to walk.

It may be called a right spirit, for it leads directly or straight to God; it directs us to exercise the same disposition in every dispensation of his providence through which we pass. The same in adversity as in prosperity, in sickness as in health; to bear all the changes in life with submission to the will of God, without murmuring. There are affections in some men which have the appearance of this spirit, and which seem to be exercised by them in prosperity, but are lost in adversity. This was evidently the case with Saul. When God prospered him, and he was successful in all his undertakings, he seemed to go on joyfully in the ways of God; but as soon as it was made known to him, that for his sin in disobeying God, he would lose his kingdom, he manifested a spirit of sullen rebellion against the Most High, and instead of seeking the forgiveness of his sin from him, he went to the witch of Endor to inquire of his situation, and what would be his end.

The conduct of David was happily the reverse of all this. He had also sinned against God, who declared the sword should not depart from his house; he was also in danger of losing his crown. An unnatural rebellion drove him from his house and kingdom, and to escape he was obliged to pass over Jordan. As he passed along he beheld one carrying the Ark, and said to him, “Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again and show me it, and his habitation; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.”

This was the right spirit that was in blessed Job, who could bless God in taking away, as well as when he had given.

Here we may distinguish between legal and evangelical repentance; while the first leads to rebellious despair, the latter leads to a holy submission to God. The reverse of prosperity will sometimes occasion the like affections. Men who live in daily violation of God’s commands, while in health and strength, will, when he afflicts them, pretend to love and fear him. They will then send for his ministers and people, and lament to them the evil of their former conduct; will shed tears over their sins, and promise to amend their lives if God will but spare them, and raise them up again. Thus they excite a hope respecting them in the minds of the pious, who begin to conclude favourably concerning them. But as soon as they are raised, and their

health is renewed, with fresh vigour they return again to their former practices. By affliction God lays his hand upon them as a spring, which obstructs their course for a time; but as soon as he takes his afflictive hand from them, their sins spring up afresh, and they run in their former course. This is not a right spirit; where that is found, there is perseverance in the ways of God.

II. THERE IS DANGER OF LOSING THIS RIGHT SPIRIT MENTIONED IN THE TEXT.—David once enjoyed it, but he had lost it; hence he prayed to have it renewed. The dangers of losing it may be distinguished into common and extraordinary. *Common danger* is that which arises from the depravity of our hearts. There is nothing in them that is suitable for the growth of such a plant; both the soil and climate are unfavourable to it. God is not in all the thoughts of an unregenerate man. He thinks not of his Maker as he ought. There is no love to God, no delight in Him, his people, his ways, or his word. Nor has he any confidence in God in any changes of circumstances, or threatening appearances in the world. His heart is like a barren soil to all that is good. There is nothing in it that tends to nourish and support this principle of spirituality. It consists of lusts, carnality, aversion from God and all that is good; so that without fresh grace from God, in such a soil religion, even in good men, withers and dies. The human heart is not only an unfavourable soil for the growth of religion, there being nothing here to support it, but it has almost every thing of a contrary nature to oppose it. An unsanctified mind has in it all the seeds of wicked works, which spring up and impede the growth of piety; yea, entirely destroy it. The love of the world, of pleasure, of honour, and of riches, occupy the attention and thoughts, and exclude piety from the mind. Through their influence the mind is led to neglect the duties of religion; to be remiss in the discharge of the duties it owes to God, to mankind at large, and particularly to its brethren in Christ. Hence social, public, and private duties become a burden, and by degrees, in the end, are almost entirely given up. From the omission of duties (having lost the savour of religion), he is led by the same influence to the commission of small sins, which bring guilt on his mind, and separate him from God. In this state he is quite unfit for the service of God, and in danger of losing the spirit of true devotion. The climate we dwell in is also unfavourable to a right spirit. The air of conversation and commerce as breathed by the men of this world, in connexion with their scorching rays of scorn, contempt, and persecution, are pernicious to the plant of grace. Their noxious influence, wherever it prevails, destroys in a great measure the vital principle of spirituality, and brings it into a declining state. Thus it frequently happens; the genuineness of our religion is severely tried, and were we left to ourselves, without constant supplies of grace, in the use of divinely appointed means, it would soon wither and fail. The danger of losing a right spirit under these circumstances is very great, for nature chooses an easy condition.

There is also an *extraordinary danger*. Such is the time of great temptation, when a man in a day, an hour, yea, even in a minute, does that which spoils his usefulness through life, and renders him afterwards more the object of pity than esteem. But this commonly begins in the mind. There is some mental withdrawment from God. Sin is first conceived in the mind; it is there planned and afterwards put in practice. This was the case with David; he first lusted in the mind, then planned, and after that executed the plan which led him on from step to step, till he fully executed that diabolical design. In this way sin has always wrought, and still works, beginning in the mind, and ending in external acts of disgrace. We first cast off, as it were, the fear of God; then withdraw our affections from him, and place them on something below; make that the source of our joy, pursue it without con-

sidering the nature of it, and the end to which it tends, till it is too late, and we are made to know its dreadful nature by its effects. Thus there is great danger of imperceptibly losing a right spirit.

III. THE TEXT IMPLIES THAT THERE IS A GREAT NECESSITY FOR THIS RIGHT SPIRIT TO BE RENEWED.—This appears from the directions given in Scripture to that end: hence we read of being daily renewed in our inner man; and our Lord has taught us, that when we ask our daily bread, we should also ask for keeping grace. Hence also are the ordinances and appointments of God's house and word; that by attendance on these, we may be renewed. It is an unspeakable mercy that these means are provided to renew us; that as we leave God, he does not leave us. It is a cheering and comfortable truth, that where he has begun a good work, he will carry it on; that he will perfect his own work. But it is much to be lamented that this is so much abused; though, thanks be to God, it is not the less true.

It is to be feared that some have attained tolerably consistent ideas of this truth, who never experienced a true conversion to God. From some severe stings of conscience they felt in times past, they conclude he has begun the good work in them; and adding to this, that it is God's work to carry it on, they live contentedly without the use of the means of grace, and in the commission of many secret, and some small external sins, and yet think they are in a safe way to heaven. And though now they have no disposition for the enjoyment of God in his ordinances, yet they think they shall enjoy him hereafter in heaven. This is an awful delusion! Some reasons may be offered to prove the necessity for the renewal of a right spirit within us. Without it we can,

1. *Do no good wherever we go.* We can do no good in our families. When a person has lost his right spirit, he commonly lives in the neglect of his duties, and too often in the commission of some small sins, neither of which seem to affect his conscience, so that religion appears of little consequence in the eyes of those around him. As he has not a savour of religion in his own mind, he cannot communicate it to others. As he has no love to God, no zeal for God, he cannot enkindle the flame of them in others. And it is mostly found when a person is in such a state, when he attempts to perform duties, he does it in such a manner, that, instead of exciting lively emotions in the lives of others, makes them burdensome, and so become disgustful. Sin unrepented of will spoil our usefulness. Guilt will chain our minds, and keep us from the discharge of what we know to be our duty. In this state we cannot with freedom or pleasure engage in it, and so give it up. Thus it appears we can do no good during this state of mind in our families.

As in our families we can do no good, for the same reasons we can do none in the church. We may take our place among the saints in public worship, and occasionally in their social services, but are perfect novices with respect to the good we do; there being nothing in ourselves, it is impossible we can impart it to others. Admit that our moral character stands fair in the world, without this right spirit in the church, we are as salt that has lost its savour, and good for nothing. Too often, where the want of this spirit is experienced, there is something unpleasant in the moral character which causes an indifference between them and their brethren, and prevents their mutual benefits. And when it is not so, the apparent jealousy on one side, and conscious deficiency on the other, prevent an union of souls which is necessary to profit each other. Thus no good can be done in the church, any more than in our families, without a right spirit. The same may be said of our conduct in the world. When we have lost this right spirit, we cannot infuse a savoury idea of piety into men. Whatever opportunities

may offer, conscious that we do not possess it ourselves, we must leave the world as we found it, without diffusing into it a savour of that which is good.

2. *In this state we can no more get good than do good*, which proves the necessity of being renewed. It is essentially necessary that we should possess this right spirit, rightly to enjoy what is good in this life. There is no good to be enjoyed in our families, nor good done, without it. The domestic comforts of life are no comforts without it; nor are our relatives a support to us. We may rove among our connexions from object to object, seeking relief, but all will be in vain. The great defect is in ourselves; wanting the right spirit which gives a relish to our comforts, we want the great essential of all.

As the consequence of this, instead of the cheerfulness which infuses a savour into the comforts of social life, and which ought to be seen on our countenances by our domestics, there is nothing but gloom and sullen despair. Nor can any good be obtained in the church while this spirit is wanting. Without this we shall soon become remiss in some of our duties, and an omission of duty is a commission of sin. Hence guilt attaches to our minds when we live in the non-observance of God's commands, and sin unrepented of will spoil both our usefulness and comfort in every department here. We may go to the house of God, may take our seat there, may externally join in the worship, and repeat it again and again, and if no appearance of disquietude appear in our countenances, guilt will single us out from all around us; and when any thing awful is declared against the sinner, a consciousness of unrepented sin will say to each in this state, "Thou art the man." Such a conviction will oblige us to withdraw with shame and confusion, and tell us that we have no right there. And were it not to tell us so, we could not join with the saints in a manner that would do us good. We want the very spirit which would enable us to mingle our souls with them in their devotions, so as to enjoy true fellowship in the household of God. Our passions may in some degree be affected when something of a striking nature is delivered from the pulpit; yet the want of spirituality of mind, and an unction of spirit in the service of God will leave a vacuity in the soul, which nothing beside can fill, or compensate the loss of. Our souls have thus lost the very tone of devotion which is necessary to join in unison with them in their devotional exercises on earth. During this state of mind, we may take the Bible, and turn it here and there, but nothing can be found in it that can do us good. Unrepented sin will banish all comfort from our minds. We cannot draw near to a throne of grace, while we are thus, with any pleasure; for sin still separates between us and God in every duty.

3. *In this state we are in great danger of falling into great sins.* Indifference enervates the mind, and leads us to lay down our guard. Carnality makes us incautious how we mingle with the men of the world, and of the manner in which we engage in the things of life, till we become regardless of ourselves. Then we are like the inhabitants of a besieged city, who, through weakness, fatigue, and sickness, are almost worn out; and are not only unable to repel the attacks of the enemy, but are ready to invite them in, and to embrace them. We are directed to resist the devil, and he will flee from us; but thus we invite him to come. This state is awful in the extreme. For if we are the children of God, and are thus regardless of his honour, he will not care for our honour. If we have no care for ourselves, nor for the honour of his cause, he will not care for us. If we slight his glory, he will roll us in the mire of reproach, confusion, and disgrace.

4. *There can be no comfortable evidence of our being in a safe state.* The work is God's; but the evidence must be in ourselves. God will carry on

his work, but he has appointed means to this end, and it is our duty to use them; yet some will sit down easy in neglecting them, and yet think they are safe. They are in a dull state, and say they cannot help it,—that they can do nothing of themselves—and that it is the work of God to revive them. From some conviction they felt, some ten or twenty years since, or more, they conclude they were then converted to God, and as they were once converted, he will not leave, but will yet renew them.

Fully persuaded of this, they set themselves contentedly down, and defer attention to it from time to time, till at last we fear they die without it; they go down to the pit in an awful state, and their iniquity will be found on their heads at the last great day. Is true religion an abiding work? Is it like a well of water springing up to everlasting life? Then it must flow somewhere. Its effects must be seen. Causes and effects must be united. Where true religion is begun, there will be a suitable disposition and conduct. Without these we can have no scriptural evidence of being in a safe state, which is necessary for our comfort here, and a good ground on which to hope for heaven hereafter.

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